

Introduction

Social Movements: Ritual, Space and Media

By Madeleine Hurd

Social movements studies: Examining and understanding the mobilization, life and effects of sets of loosely organized networks that share a solidaristic identity based on counter-hegemonic narratives and values, launching public protests on behalf of “alternative imaginaries”.
(Paraphrase Leitner et al. 2008:157)

This collection of articles explores seven very different contemporary social movements, ranging from ostracized Waffen-SS veterans through environmentalist activists to Arab Spring protesters. These disparate case-studies are united in their attention to three central social-movement concerns: rituals and emotions; spatialities; and, related to both of these, communication and media. In this introduction, I would like to introduce these themes, drawing – so as not to anticipate the seven authors – on historical instances of social protest to give substance to my discussion.

I should begin by noting that most of our contributions are interested in micro-histories of what might be termed New Social Movement-type phenomena: urban gardening, animal rights, IVF-users', university students' and employees' movements; and that all of the essays use methods inspired by both NSM analysis and symbolic interactionism. These approaches, originally part of the “cultural turn” of the 1970s, moved social-movement analysis away from its early concentration on how shifts in economic-political structures produced marginalized and disadvantaged groups, who then mobilized – according to resources and opportunities – in different types of instrumental-rational protest (Goodwin 2012; classics are Tilly 1978; Skocpol 1979; Kitschelt 1986; Kriesi 1995). After 1970, greater attention to cultural and linguistic factors combined with the challenge posed by “post-modern” NSMs to encourage scholars to look more closely at the actors’ varying world-views. Economic and political structures do not in themselves create collective identities, it was now argued; on the contrary, we must look at how class, gender and ethno-nationalist identities are “made”. People, further, do not only mobilize to their own political and/or economic advantage, even in non-post-modern times. Many powerful collective movements (temperance, neo-Nazis) had seemingly non-instrumental objectives. Scholars turned, accordingly, to micro- and mid-level analyses of, for instance, the discourses, collective frames and “social imaginaries” of counter-hegemonic mobilization. Focus shifted from causa-

tion and efficacy to the study of – among other things – the role of collective emotions and rituals, spatial frames and discourses, representation and communication. Let us take each of these in turn.

Rituals

What causes individuals to join protest collectives? Information and opportunities are important; but equally important (as in all thinking and action) are emotions. Scholars have emphasized the importance of the outrage that spurs involvement, group members' mutual affection, the excitement, pride, joys and sorrows of communal action (cf. Collins 2001; Eyerman 2005; Gould 2009; Doetsch-Kidder 2012). Emotions are strengthened when shared; they underpin collective identities. Group solidarity and emotional engagement are often increased, in turn, by the moving solemnity of collective rituals (e.g., Pàez et al. 1997; Manning 1998; Berstain et al. 2000). Erika Summers-Effler (2002: 54) describes the long, up-hill battle faced by those who combat repressive forces, a struggle demanding both an intense feeling of solidarity and an abundance of emotional energy. They are much benefited by the face-to-face interaction, mutual focus of attention and emotional contagion inherent in group rituals. Some of these can be very every-day. The rituals of coffee-klatches, of doing the movement's work together, for instance, help the group maintain day-to-day solidarity. Some rituals, however, can be deeply central to group identities. James Jasper's classic 1997 study of grass-roots mobilization includes a chapter entitled "Rituals and Emotions /.../ Sustaining Activist Identities". He cites Emile Durkheim's statement that the "collective effervescence" that rituals create is important, in that it transports "participants onto another plane". Rituals

are affirmations of participants' identities and beliefs, as well as of their power. As Durkheim sensed, collective rituals and gatherings suggest that you are participating in something bigger than you: you are part of history, or you are morally sanctioned, or you truly belong to a group. The emotions of rituals reinforce cognitive and moral visions as well. (Jasper 1997: 192, 194).

Such rituals can range from the every-day, through the innovative and playful, to the achingly solemn (often, in the last case, borrowing the forms but subverting the meanings of hegemonic rituals).

Rituals do more than sharpen collective solidarity. They also (as argued by Maurice Halbwachs 1992), provide the movement with narratives. They constitute an "embodied" form of collective remembering which is based on an intensely moral definition of self and collectivity. This moral-social identity implies both a shared past and a hopeful future. This is, Summers-Effler (2002) argues, particularly important to social movements, which depend so highly on the emotional energy of hope. She cites David Snow's and Robert Benford's (1992) term "frame alignment": the ritual helps frame narratives of past experiences so as to confirm

the movement's hope for ultimate success. Feelings of anticipation and hope can then be supported with regular interaction rituals, creating a feedback loop of high emotional energy.

Protest-movement rituals, of course, are not randomly concocted. Many of these happen in public spaces; and these, in particular, tend to reflect important rituals in the dominant society. But reflection can be part of subversion; indeed, reflection might be necessary for subversion. As Fredric Jameson (1981) pointed out, oppositional politics is about the destabilization of shared meanings. There has to be a language overlap, the ability to communicate: two opposing discourses fight it out within the general unity of a shared code. Rituals, as a type of embodied discourse, can do the same.

Historians, indeed, have spent a good deal of time looking at rituals in terms of maintaining and challenging power. It is a truism to note how well power-holders – ranging from medieval kings to fascist leaders – have understood the value of ritual in conferring political legitimacy. What Jürgen Habermas (1962/1989) termed “representational” public culture – the Ancien Régime’s public display of symbols, bodies, rituals – has remained an important part of the public political sphere. Ritual, ceremony, festival and monuments, performed in public places or, more recently, on television, remain useful to governmental authority. They help collectives transcend internal differences, give emotional and aesthetic power to solidarities, mark collective pasts and futures, and denote sacred space for national liturgies. The most powerful can easily survive political upheaval. As Cheles & Sponza (2001: 101) note, the “durability of ritual amidst political change means that ritual itself becomes a political prize, a kind of holy grail. Political competitors, then, not only fight through ritual, they also fight over ritual, that is, over their right to identify with powerful rites.” Oppositional movements can, of course, ridicule, parody or (attempt to) demystify existing rituals. More commonly, however, they seek to hijack (so to speak) elements of already-existing rituals, giving old forms new (but related) meanings as a short-cut to appropriating political or social legitimacy. The latter tactic can be seen in minority flag- and folk-tradition celebrations, in social-democracy’s orderly marches and in fascism’s quasi-religious forms (Warneken 1991; Griffin 1996). The rituals thus become what “floating signifiers” are for texts: powerful symbols, subject to a tug-of-war between two sides, each wishing to appropriate a specific ritual’s potency for their own purposes (for the term, Laclau & Mouffe 1985).

Let me illustrate this with the example of the early Nazis’ “street theatre”. In 1933, Sturmabteilung leader Heinz Lohmann published a memoir on his “Time of Struggle” with the nascent Nazi Storm Troopers. Most of Lohmann’s prose is, predictably enough, given over to descriptions of public meetings, marches and battles: the “political soldiers” used public space to perform rituals that imitated, and thereby contested, those claimed as legitimizing Germany’s democratic regime.

Lohmann, the patriotic hooligan from the small town of Schwelm, first tells how he and his comrades spent Sunday after Sunday training military marching: “as one’s bones learnt to stand upright, so did the soul!”. Lohmann then describes his group’s first proper march. It was performed in front of the Schwelm church, together with visiting Berlin “brown-shirts”. A dozen Schwelm SA members had (he writes)

marched, in closed ranks; the song of good comrades rang out. The small troop assembled before the grave-yard. The square was black with people. SA stand forward! Right turn – March! We twenty Schwelmer Nazis joined the group column. Kommando! Sing!

This, Lohmann continues, “was already too much” for their opponents, the social-democrats and the (Jewish) communists. “A roar of fury! The first stone! The SA went over to the attack”. A lusty account of a battle ensues. A discussion followed the fight. ““This fury against us! /.../ it was because of our brown shirts. They have the effect, it seems, of dynamite.”” (Lohmann 1933: 50-2.)

Why the “fury”, indeed? Lohmann is seeking to show the efficacy of the SA’s challenge to a central establishment symbol: the national army. He and his fellow-demonstrators were exploiting the army’s own ritualistic spatial displays: the closed-ranks, sharply-commanded, uniformed and singing march – in a way that subverted the military march’s dominant meanings. The result was immediate and violent protest, not least from their establishment enemies. It is on events such as this that Lohmann and other SA “comrades” wrote endlessly: it is evident that the experiences and narratives of such public rituals, whose meanings sat, so to speak, in “one’s bones”, was a key emotional and framing resource.

The memory of this counter-hegemonic ritual is, in Lohmann’s book, anchored in both body and space. Paul Connerton (1989: 36-7) notes that social memory always happens in a “socially specific spatial framework”, for images of space “are relatively stable”; references thereto give the illusion of “rediscovering the past in the present”. Space, and descriptions of space, then, may – along with emotions, rituals and bodies - be integral to both collective memory and collective belonging.

Space

The *place* of protest adds to its import. Lohmann was in a symbolically laden place – the square before the town church. Historically, as Vincent Robert (1991) has shown, mass city-street protest – even spontaneous, stone-throwing, lynch-mob protests – were formed within the compass of symbolically-laden nodes of urban geography. As protest became increasingly formalized during the nineteenth-century, “rioters” turned into “demonstrators”; but their routes remained conditioned by urban power structures. It was important to invade, and challenge, symbolically significant places – indeed, contesting shared meanings leant

demonstrations (like rituals) significance. As Alberto Melucci (1994) emphasizes, public spaces are still used, above all, to make questions raised by movements both visible and collective. Jameson's point about rhetoric holds also for the public symbolism of such spaces. They must be invaded, and, if possible, their symbols challenged and changed – only then will the revolution have conquered the sacred centers of the old order.

Religious studies' Paul-Francois Tremlett (2012) has termed this the “production of territorialities”. He cites Occupy London's attempt to “re-enchant” an otherwise strongly Stock Exchange-encoded “place of power”. Their campsite, next to St. Paul Cathedral, linked a symbol of a “securitized nowhere” and “mobile, dis-embedded capital” with a “moral and territorially defined somewhere or relational community”. The camp symbolized an attempt to challenge ruling spatial meanings with what, campers maintained, were practices and discourses that imbued the place with new moral meaning. The result, Tremlett concludes, was a performance which served to “imagine a world without capitalism”. As with rituals, so also – as Leitner et al. (2008) point out – do many social movements seek to strategically manipulate, subvert and resignify places, particularly those that symbolise the priorities and imaginaries they are contesting.

Let us take a more prosaic (but classic) example: November 1918, Berlin. Our newspaper-article source (*DanzigerZeitung*12:11:1918) describes how an enormous demonstration, starting “in the outer suburbs, in the North, in the Brunnenstrasse, then in Moabit”, is convening on Berlin's city center. Demonstrators have been joined by cars and trucks, “people armed with rifles, the red flag swiveling”. The demonstrators have gathered at the Imperial Palace, standing expectantly in front of the cannons which flank its front portals.

On the balustrade of the second-floor balcony a piece of red flag material glows darkly through the twilight. Suddenly there is movement, shoving, calls among the mass; a carriage comes, drawn less by horses than pushed forward by the crowding people. A white head: *Lebedour*. /.../ rousingly greeted /.../ there appears, sharply delineated against the gray sky, the silhouette of a man on the roof of the palace, who tries to attach a red flag to one of the sculptures of the balustrade /.../ shortly thereafter the small *red flag* flew, high, from the palace flag pole. (Italics in the original.)

The palace guards “go over to the people”; the palace is now “national property”. Historians, knowing that the November Revolution will now spread from Berlin through the country – borne by socialists and mutinous soldiers via trains and trucks, but also through twice-daily and special editions of thick-headlined newspapers (our Danzig source is evidence of this) – note the significance of the recodification of the nation's central public-space symbol.

Places can lend those who participate in collective rituals extra passion. This is true, not least, when social imaginaries define *that* particular place as a nodal point in members' own moral order. Pilgrimages to and performances at “sacralized” places – monuments, gravesites – are important to many movements, and

many focus on creating and defending specific places that “stand for” their moral order (usually, places where key rituals are performed).

One's home neighborhood can also be given near-sacral import. Most people, cultural geographers argue, do not mobilize for things in the abstract. It is “passionate attachments to *particular* places, things and non-humans that move people, and motivate people to defend them” (Curry 2006: 79). As Yi-Fu Tuan (2008) observes, emotional life is invested in clothing, home, and neighborhood. One's physical environment has become precious as symbol and carrier for emotionally charged events and practices. Outside this area, the person can feel unclothed, displaced, dislocated.

This sense of belonging derives not only from familiarity with a built and natural environment. It is co-created by bodily movement and interaction. Particular practices make places what they are. It is “the dialectical relationship between the body and a structured organization of space and time that common practice and representations are determined” (Cresswell 1996: 11). Spaces become connected to one's characteristic bodily movements.

The consequent urge to protect the space around one's home helps explain the violent, sometimes murderous tendencies that are spurred by city streets; for power inheres in street-names and post-boxes, flags and statues, squares and public buildings. Demonstrations in these public spaces can become doubly charged, as space is claimed not only for “production of morally defined territorialities”, but as essential to the existence of the community. How does a protest movement lay claim to its preeminent right to be in such significant places – to establish its practices, its bodies, as the most legitimate for those streets?

Let us return to inter-war Germany. The date is December 1918. The Germans of the city of Posen – formerly the dominant minority, now a protesting minority – are attempting to maintain their claim that their home-city as intrinsically “German”. The German-language *Posener Tageblatt* (14:12:1918) tells of the intense passion this inspired. On the day of a planned mass meeting,

from early morning on, soldiers, civilians and burghers, women, girls and youths, held a demonstration over which the free and great German flags fluttered /../ during which the old German fatherland songs rang out /../ developed a momentous impact, to which no German could remain distant and which powerfully expressed that [German essence] which moves the heart of all us Germans, that which lives in us, undeniably and unbreakably.

The report details the squares and streets (giving, of course, only their German names) through which demonstrators moved. The “decoration of the houses with German flags and wimples” had made the German areas of the city “very lovely, and there were, in some streets, scarcely a house, from whose windows and gables the German flag did not wave”. They had stopped in front of Hindenburg's childhood home to cheer with “thunderous” and “exultant” enthusiasm. A meeting was held, whereupon an additional “several-thousand-strong demonstration” marched

to the Bismarck memorial, decorated it with a German flag, and then marched through the town; long into the night, the report happily concludes, one heard *Deutschland, Deutschland über alles* sung throughout the city streets.

According to Cresswell (1996, a familiar landscape transmits ideas about what is right, just, and appropriate: spatial structures influence the collective's representation of the world and thereby the group itself. This is done, not least, by spatialized performance – that is, movement through and action in the landscape in question. German Posenites give an excellent example of protesters struggling to claim – with, the newspaper maintains, tremendous emotional impact – a space defined as central to the collective's moral essence. They visit and pay homage to what *they* hold to be the city's nodal points of symbolic meaning, sacralizing an alternative city map, so to speak, while filling (the newspaper claims) the city with their bodies, their emotions, their public symbols, and their collective song. This is an extreme example of what Deborah Martin (2003), discussing neighborhood-based protest movements, terms “place-framing”. For these movements, identities are fostered by the motivating discourse of a “neighborhood” which both promotes passion and obscures residents' social differences. Wilson & Grammenos (2000: 367, cited in Martin 2003), indeed, go further: protests against urban redevelopment use specifically spatial “alternative imaginaries” to frame their resistance. They postulate alternative “terrains of civility” within ideal-type communities, ranging from “gentrified aesthetic, ‘stable’ blue-collar orderliness, the suburban ideal, and the city beautiful ethic”. In Posen, 1918, the supposed incommensurability of two competitive “terrains of civility” – German and Polish – would, a few weeks later, lead to open violence.

Attachment to place, thus, can be incendiary. Today, debate rages over the advantages and dangers of “place framing”, that is, the mobilizational strength of local, neighborhood protest. Those scholars who point to the passions and commitment that arise from collective identification with particular places are met by those who warn sharply against the dangers of selfish, exclusionary boundary-drawing. In debating pro-environmental mobilization, for instance, David Harvey (1996: 303) writes with alarm of “a rather touching and abiding faith” in a revived “sense of place” as promoting what is necessarily an international cause. On the contrary, he warns: deep knowledge of and love for *one* place may actively hinder appreciation of broader, global “socio-ecological processes”. After all, many environmentalist activists see global forces as their enemies, not their allies. Local movements may react to penetration by global powers with increasing insularity, even exclusionary nationalism. The dangers of place-based, exclusionary, even nationalist environmentalism are, indeed, shown not only by environmentalist Not-In-My-Backyard movements, but the ease with which the US and European far-right has adopted ecological planks (Olsen 1999; Hurd & Werther 2013). Or, as Germany's neo-Nazi Nationaldemokratische Partei writes, protection of the environment is protection of the *Heimat*.

An intact nature is the foundation of our future! National politics is environmental politics. The lack of ecologically responsible politics threatens every *Volk* in its substance! Economic interests must come second to protection of nature. The human is part of nature. Nature, therefore, is not simply the ‘*Umwelt*’ of humans, but the *Mitwelt*. (Bavarian NPD Party Program 2013, quoted in Hurd & Werther 2013).

Cultural geographer Doreen Massey (1995) agrees. The assumed right to speak for a territory is often based on a collective memory of inhabitancy, that is, shared experience and usage. But this means that one group defines *its* practices, and those of its forebears, as definitional for a given place. These practices, when enshrined as *the* history of the place, exclude alternative histories and groups, resulting in what Massey calls “space-time envelopes” (1995: 188). Sharma (2012) shows how the greater the elaboration of a specific history of human-nature interaction, the stronger the exclusionary claims made concerning that place’s proper present and future. Collective care for a local place leads, by this argument, not to the international cooperation needed to save the environment but to its opposite – insular, even exclusionary spatial protectionism (Barnett 2001; King 2007).

Media

How, then, to generalize local, spatial and collective attachment – how to lift the social-movement passions engendered by “place framing” beyond the local, face-to-face, and material? This problem can be examined historically. In *A Nation of Provincials*, Celia Applegate (1990) asks how a country as aggressively regional as Germany could ever become a nation. The answer, Jonathan Sperber (1997) postulates, lies in the mid-nineteenth-century interaction between *local* national-liberal movements, these locals’ *neighborhood public-space* performances (ceremonies and rituals), and local and national *media*.

The 1850s saw a burgeoning middle-class civic associational culture, and a corresponding increase in middle-class public-space ritual performance (celebrations to raise statues to national heroes, nationalist parades, public dinners for Garibaldi and the like). These ceremonies were, in turn, both covered and promoted by a growing number of small but interlinked local newspapers. Mid-nineteenth century liberals re-used traditional forms of collective expression, now imbued with liberal-nationalist meaning. These (as Sperber puts it) “discursive formations” were then externalized, distributed, represented, and made accessible to larger audiences by detailed and interested coverage in liberal newspapers, a network of fairly amateurish political journals adept at reading each other for material to cut-and-paste – and so spread the news of national-liberal actions. Collectives active in local public space were fused into a national collective through the new media of newsprint.

Let me show how this might work, by tracing another national-liberal movement: that which underpinned Sweden’s Constitutional Reform of 1865. The older system of rule by the King and Four Estates (aristocracy, clergy, burghers and

farmers) had been declared obsolete by a large set of middle-class liberals. Claiming to represent “public opinion”, they used public meetings, petitions, delegations and festivals to mobilize what they termed “the nation” for a non-corporatist parliamentary system. The motions and resolutions passed at these meetings were conveyed to the capital by delegations, petitions, and – above all – detailed newspaper reports. Opponents, indeed, denounced the entire movement as consisting solely of editor agitators. Proponents did not agree. The newspapers, they pointed out, were publishing endless accounts of “Pro-Reform” meetings, from all parts of Sweden: how could this not represent the nation? Moreover, these lists of nationwide public convocations directly challenged the Four Estates as embodying the nation. The alternative they offered was of a Sweden represented, both geographically and personally, by those notables who held public meetings in all the country’s towns – meetings reported, first, in local newspapers, and then re-told in central Stockholm organs (see Hurd 2010).

Historian David Featherstone (2005), in analyzing eighteenth-century London protest, gives the media a similar central role in providing links between what always began as face-to-face, localized collectives. Political struggles in particular localities do not (he writes) exist merely as “discrete struggles waiting to be brought together by intellectuals or broader political movements”: they bring themselves together, with the help of local and national media (Featherstone 2005: 262). Modern social-movement analysts would refer, here, to “different spatialities”, working together to create new “social movement space” by connecting different-level networks over geographical divides (Nicholls 2009, 2013). As Law & Mol (2001) put it, topological spatiality, which spans rather than covers geographic space, allows ideas and practices to move far afield. Local movements inhere in geographic space. Media allows practices and ideas, narratives and visuals to create a “topology”, connecting one place to another (see summary in Van Aelst & Walgrave 2002).

During Sweden’s Constitutional Reform, the Reform Meetings were covered – “topographically” – by local and national liberal papers. But the papers did more than just list the meetings in question. They gave detailed reports of meetings which were, if the reports are to be believed, very similar, and very formal. All followed the same parliamentary rituals; all were underpinned by strong emotions, alternating between the attentive, the enthusiastic and the solemn. It was obvious that editors strongly sympathized with the meetings’ messages. Norrköping’s liberal editor had, indeed, openly called on locals to join “the great middle-class of Swedish people” in publicizing their “patriotic convictions” in the “great *votum*, to add to the many that have issued from Sweden’s towns”. The meeting, when it took place, was covered in detail. It resembled dozens of others of the same ilk. The audience assembled, was formally welcomed, a chairman elected, an “attentive audience” listened to introductory words, a Question was moved and answered with “joyful acclamation”, an address was read and “enthusiastically” ac-

cepted, cheers rang out and the meeting was closed (*Norrköpingstidningar* 21:11:1865, 23:11:1865, also summarized in the Stockholm newspaper *Post och Inrikes Tidningar* 30:11:1865).

To be sure, the ritual (and, if true, the emotions involved) would help knit together the local collective. Participants, reading about their solemn and orderly meeting the next day, might be impressed; this publicly-sanctioned narrative might standardize group memory. But more important, in this case, was the newspaper report's contribution to "topologies". This was, after all, almost exactly the same meeting as that which appeared in other newspapers' coverage of other meetings. Accordingly, readers could easily link it to those others taking place among the "Swedish people" throughout the nation. Not only did Sweden's middle-class readers participate in an Anderssonian nation-building newspaper-reading ritual; they were reading about how every notable in every town (it seemed) had solemnly performed the same set of public, pro-reform protest rituals. Such accounts linked liberal networks together, and, by giving them a standard form, made them seem both uniform and powerful. Shared ritual, emotion and memory – promoted by formulaic media narratives – combined to make up a new territorial nation.

Many have identified national mass media (along with maps, school-books, and traffic laws) as key in creating national consciousness. Similar hopes have been advanced for global media – that is, social media - in transcending national for global spatialities (Leitner et al. 2008; Castells 2012). The debate on the impact of modern, social media on social movements is extensive; so is that on space. Social movements work on different levels, ranging from local to transregional to national. On the most basic level, media can link protesting networks together, by telling them, for instance, where and when to meet. But the movement's own media (and movement-sympathetic mass media) also join in noticing, solemnifying, interpreting, narrating, providing visuals for and histories of the movement, repeating, reinforcing and standardizing the "frames" upon which the movement depends. Thus, media adds a "topographical" space to geographical mobilization. Media, finally, can be seen as a sort of space in itself. It does impose its own sets of movements, way-stations, aesthetic experiences, public symbols and participatory rituals – including rituals of boundary-drawing and exclusion.

Nicholls (2009: 3) examines the resulting interlinking of local and media networks in national and transnational networks. The linkage, he argues, results in complex topologies of contemporary social movement networks, connected by particular "relational dynamics" that, in turn, create a new sort of "social movement space" – one that encompasses the social movement as a whole. After all, spaces do not exist, so to speak; they are, rather, both defined and interlinked by practices – consisting of "polyvalent inter-connectivities" (Massey 2005: 141) rather than bounded segments of geography. Can each social movement, then,

transcend anchorage in local, material space, in the polyvalent topologies of global, social media?

Let me exemplify (and problematize) this point by a final historical example.. In December 1865, the Swedish Constitutional Reform had just passed; the country (again, according to the newspapers) was rejoicing. Again, reports of local (ritualized) public-space performances were published, first in local newspapers, and then in Stockholm, in, e.g., special columns on “Expressions of Joy”. In Stockholm’s *Nya Dagligt Allehanda* (30:12:65) we find, again, lists of notices on enthusiastic ceremony. “In Hernösand, the reform was celebrated with a banquet.” The King’s toast was followed by toasts to Sweden’s new parliamentary order, the Minister of State, the “brother kingdom of Norway”, a Court Justice, a Bishop, the Mayor, the local M.P., and the town’s Reform Delegation. Further, the town had been illuminated, the streets full of “life and movement”, while

the sharp-shooting association, led by its musicians, marched through the streets and paraded outside the City Hall. The town’s poor were given an extra meal at the expense of an anonymous donor. During the banquet, telegrams were sent off to the Minister of State, Bishop Beckman, the Mayors of Stockholm and Kristiana; an answer was received from the last of these.

We find, again, the combination of new and old rituals, brought together and given new meaning in the topographic space of a newspaper narrative. Like the Reform Meetings, national coverage of these festivals helped cement the new, liberal collective, creating an “imagined community” based on simultaneous ritualistic performance. One notes, further, the summary of the complex, if festive, interplay of different media, working on different scales and within multi-level spatialities: from the local banquet and speeches, parades and illuminated city streets, to the national and even international: Hernösand-Stockholm relations spanned by the bodies of delegations, M.P.s, and the public invocations of Court Justices, Mayors and Ministers, telegrams linking Norwegian and Swedish towns. All these different spatialities were, arguably, brought together in a common “social movement space”, whose dynamics then, in turn, strongly affected the local expressions of collective belonging.

Of all these media, however, I would like to postulate that the press had a leading part. The press was the authoritative, public witness who could confirm that the rituals, both local and topographical, had been simultaneous, significant and shared. I would like, here, to use Nick Couldry’s (2003) concept of “the myth of the mediated center”. This concerns a myth propagated by the media itself. First, the media present some place and aspect of government as the nation’s “natural symbolic center” (usually, the capital city). Second, the media constitutes itself that center’s main watchdog, observer and commentator. This center is (as Kristina Widestedt 2009: 48 paraphrases Couldry) “encircled” by news media, “like the walls of a medieval city”. Editors declare it their high duty to keep this center under surveillance, and claim, in return, a near-monopoly right to control communi-

cation between the “center” and the citizens. It is their voice that defines the important; it is their coverage that establishes the relevant in the public sphere.

Media, thus, disperses narratives. Media links people, topographically, in social space. But media also collects, selects, censors and re-tells. It creates the myth of a common focus, a center of concern. Traditional news media (as media analysts point out) may fail to change people’s values, but it tells them *what* public issues to examine and discuss according to those values. They identify the (mythical) symbolic center. By the 1860s, Sweden’s media had already, arguably, defined Stockholm’s Four Estates’ Parliament and the Court as the symbolic center. The liberal press maintained, indeed, that it was invaluable in giving citizens information and informed commentaries on the political doings of Estates and King.

In December of 1865, however, the nation was to be reconstituted. This did not happen in Stockholm; the Four Estates could only acquiesce in their own abolition. The new nation was, in fact, reconstituted not in Stockholm, but in provincial small towns – by local notables who had declared that they made up the Swedish nation, who would elect the new Parliament, and who were currently celebrating their successes in highly medialized political festivals. The press was there. Arguably, the Reform Meetings and the subsequent “Expressions of Joy”, all so carefully covered in the press, took the place of a Swedish Constituent Assembly. The press briefly dispersed the symbolic center, so to speak, and went a-traveling – to the provinces, where careful adumbration of local public meetings were used to reconstitute the basis of national representation. The press would return to Stockholm, of course, shortly thereafter, to celebrate the new, two-house parliament. But the journey outwards, to the provinces, and the long sets of descriptions of provincial symbols and rituals confirmed both the legitimacy of the protest movement, its right to re-found the nation, and the press’s authoritative right to define the location and nature of the nation’s symbolic center.

This historical example suggests that modern concerns on media as both a danger and a resource to social-movement mobilization have their roots in media traditions established centuries ago. Mass media has traditionally focused attention through a myth of symbolic center. The gate-keeping authority assumed by the news media shut out many voices. But, conversely, what happens to politics when the myth of the symbolic center is gone?

The splintering of such a center seems inherent in the communicative spaces staked out by social media. Unedited, democratically accessible media allows increasingly decentralized and representative politics. But, as BBC Media Action research warns (Schoemaker 2013: 1), the result might be a loss of common focus (including what Habermasian scholars might term the necessary adherence to rituals of rational-critical debate). Instead, one might see further (and increasingly mutually hostile, polarized) social fragmentation. Commentators are worried about the lack of an acknowledged central public forum where people meet to

discuss issues of supposed universal concern. Social media, they argue, fractures these gazes, allowing debate – often extremely polarized – to disperse in endless, mutually unrelated chains of sub-spatialities (a tendency worsened as various platforms impose mutually discriminatory filters in what used to be “open ecosystems”, see *Economist* 2012, Holmes 2013: 1). Social movement space may be much reduced in meaning and impact if there is, no longer, a (mythical, but potent) symbolic centre, able to coordinate stories of local-space, ritualized endeavor.

The reader may judge on this, and other issues, in the seven articles which follow, of which each, in its own way, engages with one or more of the central issues of ritual, place and media. The three often blur, coming together in the practices that, together, define social-movement space. Social-movement space spans that of local face-to-face experiences, members’ performances in public and pilgrimage space. It uses media to create topologies of communication and, finally, imposes additional rituals of communication inherent in each social-movement medium.

Rituals and local spaces, meanwhile, are interrelated; bodies remember both. Face-to-face interaction brings emotional bodies into play, giving strength to collective engagement. Performances and words, rituals and symbolic spaces are, further, re-represented through medialized forums. The media narratives of rituals affect local groups, complementing embodied ritual memory with standardized narrative memories, even liturgies, while confirming the public significance of the group’s experience and purpose.

Further, the events can be presented both locally and in different “mythical-center” spaces; the discourses and rituals of these centers then re-infect local practices and frames. Public narratives and discussion, indeed, allow special types group boundary-drawing. Their genre-specific narratives validate certain rituals and ridicule others. Following these interlinked rituals can intensify and legitimize the group’s message; while flaunting the ritualized frames and norms of media can pose challenges to hegemonic symbolic orders. How this is done, and how we can deepen our understanding of these processes, are the subjects of the following seven studies.

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