

VIRTUAL SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

by

Roberta T. Garner

#579

September 1999

CENTER FOR RESEARCH ON SOCIAL ORGANIZATION WORKING PAPER SERIES

This paper was presented at Zaldfest, a conference held to recognize the contributions of Mayer Zald to the sociology of organizations, social movements, and culture, on 17-18 September 1999. It is one of ten papers that were presented at the conference:

- ◇ Roberta T. Garner, "Virtual Social Movements"
- ◇ Charles Tilly, "Social Movements Here and Elsewhere, Now and Then"
- ◇ W. Richard Scott, "A Call for Two-Way Traffic: Improving the Connection Between Social Movement and Organizational/Institutional Theory"
- ◇ Elisabeth S. Clemens, "How Shall We Organize? Privatizers, Volunteers, and Policy Innovation in the 1990s"
- ◇ Charles Perrow, "The Rationalist Urge in Sociology and Social Movements: Zald as History"
- ◇ Gerald F. Davis and Doug McAdam, "Corporations, Classes, and Social Movements After Managerialism"
- ◇ Nicola Beisel, "Searching for the Lost Race: Culture in Texts and Images in the Abortion Debate"
- ◇ Yeheskel (Zeke) Hasenfeld, "Human Service Organizations and the Production of Moral Categories "
- ◇ John D. McCarthy, "Reinvigorating ZMRM: Zald/McCarthy Resource Mobilization"
- ◇ Doug McAdam, "Revisiting the U.S. Civil Rights Movement: Toward a More Synthetic Understanding of the Origins of Contention"

The Center for Research on Social Organization is a facility of the Department of Sociology at the University of Michigan. Its primary mission is to support the research of faculty and students working in the area of social organization. CRSO Working Papers report current research and reflection by affiliates of the Center. To request copies of working papers, or for further information about Center activities, write us at 4501 LS&A Building, Ann Arbor, Michigan, 48109, send e-mail to crso@umich.edu, call (734) 764-7487, or see our Web site: www.umich.edu/~crso.

Virtual Social Movements

**Roberta T. Garner
DePaul University**

A paper presented at Zaldfest: A conference in honor of Mayer Zald

**University of Michigan
Ann Arbor, MI**

Sept. 17, 1999

**Roberta T. Garner
Department of Sociology
DePaul University
2320 N. Kenmore
Chicago, IL 60614**

Phone: 773-325-4437

Fax: 773-325-7821

e-mail: rgamer@wppost.depaul.edu

A complete and correct citation is required for any quotation, reference to, and/or use of the ideas expressed in this paper._____

All that is solid melts into air.—Marx and Engels, *Communist Manifesto*.

The media always “hausses” [sic] up things that can be taken as racist. And who owns the media, we all know...don't we? But here on the net, there's a lot of us who dare to speak our belives [sic]. New pages are added every day. They can never silence us here!—Freja
Freja's homepage: a tribute to the white aryan movement on the net.

To pry an object from its shell, to destroy its aura, is the mark of a perception whose “sense of the universal equality of things” has increased to such a degree that it extracts it even from a unique object by means of reproduction.—Walter Benjamin. *Illuminations*, p. 223.

So I don't think of what I do on the MUD as masturbation. Although you might say I'm the only one who's touching me. But in netsex, I have to think of fantasies she will like too.—
16 yr. old male, quoted in Sherry Turkle, *Life on the Screen*, p.21.

Virtual Movements

Roberta Garner, DePaul University, Chicago, IL

August 9, 1999

My remarks about virtual movements concern the impact that the information age and the network society may have on collective action. I believe that this impact will be part of a major transition, comparable to the diffusion of print.

My remarks are divided into four sections: First, a reflection on the general theoretical topic of media and mentalities—though speculative, this reflection is essential to the argument, because I believe that the major effect of the net on movements is not a direct one, but an indirect one that works through transformation of “maps” we make of the world; second, a focused theoretical discussion of the relation between media and movements; third, a brief report on an empirical exploration of ideological postings on the web, informed by Mayer Zald’s recent work (1996); and fourth, an outline of a research agenda that scholars in the collective action field could pursue. The discussion opens a conversation with Manuel Castells’ *The Information Age* (1997) and Mayer Zald’s “Culture, Ideology, and Strategic Framing,” (1996) as well as Wellman (1997), Zook (1996), Tarrow (1992; 1998), and Calhoun (1998).

I. Media and Mentalities

I would like to begin with a discussion of media and mentalities because media can impact movement formation in two ways: directly and structurally, by creating new opportunities for association and offering a resource for collective action, and indirectly

and culturally, by forming new mentalities that in turn produce new expectations, new types of framing, and new modes of action.

For example, the extension of literacy and widespread diffusion of writing through print media made possible larger nationwide association, committees of correspondence, newspapers and pamphlets that called people to action, and all the other new structural and interactive patterning that contributed to the revolutions of the late 18th and 19th centuries. But print literacy also molded new mentalities, a new sense of self, action, time horizons, and causality—mentalities that we loosely associate with the Enlightenment. This cultural impact took longer to work itself out and left less obvious and measurable traces in the history of movements than the direct impact of print communication, but is undoubtedly a fundamental element of “bourgeois revolutions.”

A word about terminology. Here I am using “mentalities” exactly as Sid Tarrow suggests we revive it, stripped of its racialist and biologicistic connotations (1992). Others might prefer to use “culture” as Zald does in his essay, perhaps the most common current usage (1996) Another option is the concept of “mazeway” (suggested by Anthony Wallace in his article on revitalization movement (1956)) or “map” (which Fredric Jameson (1984) picks up from Kevin Lynch). These terms are not identical, but they all point to underlying patternings of how people understand the world in which they live—patternings that may be highly self-aware and politicized (ideologies) or primarily tacitly embedded in modes of action. I also would like to note that this revived interest in

culture, symbols, and framing may mark a return to more psychological ways of analyzing movements, a point I will take up later.

Plato and Writing: A Dubious Drug:

The question of how media impact mentalities and knowledge appeared at the dawn of writing. In *Phaedrus*, Plato wrote about Socrates retelling an Egyptian myth, an ironic twist since Socrates' point is to challenge the value of writing (1964). It is remarkable how much Plato (or Socrates, or Thamus) "got write" in this analysis and how valid these observations remain for us, as we try to understand how the electronic information age will change thoughts and actions beyond the mentalities of writing and print.

"The story is that in Egypt...there dwelt one of the old gods of the country, the god called Thoth, to whom the ibis is sacred. He invented numbers and calculation, geometry and astronomy, not to speak of draughts and dice, and above all writing...[Thoth comes to the god-king Thamus and explains writing.] "Here, O king, is a branch of learning that will make the people of Egypt wiser and improve their memories. My discovery provides a *pharmakon* for memory and wisdom." [The word *pharmakon* has multiple ambiguous meanings that include remedy, drug, potion, prescription, and even poison. (Derrida)]

But the king answered, saying, "O, man of arts, to one it is given to create things of art, and to another to judge what measures of harm and benefit they have for those who employ these arts. And so you, by reason of your tender regard for writing which is your offspring have declared the very opposite of its true effect. If men learn this, it will

implant forgetfulness in their souls, they will cease to exercise memory because they rely on that which is written, calling things to remembrance no longer from within themselves, but by means of external marks. ... [Written words] seem to talk to you as though they were intelligent but if you ask them anything about what they say, from a desire to be instructed, they go on telling you just the same thing forever. And once a thing is put in writing, the text, whatever it may be, drifts all over the place, getting into the hands not only of those who understand it, but equally of those who have no business with it; writing doesn't know how to address the right people and avoid addressing the wrong ones. And when it is ill-treated and unfairly abused, it always needs its parent [speech] to come to its help, being unable to defend or help itself."

Socrates goes on to ask, "is there another sort of discourse that is brother to written speech but of unquestioned legitimacy...the sort that goes with knowledge and is inscribed in the soul of the learner, that can defend itself, and knows to whom it should speak, and to whom it should say nothing?" Phaedrus is compelled to answer, "You mean no dead discourse, but living speech, of which written discourse is a kind of image."

Socrates then develops an analogy in which he says that writing creates an unrealistic sense of accelerated time; he compares the writer to a person for whom farming is a hobby, a recreational farmer who has a fantasy that he can get his crop to ripen in eight days. The person who is engaged in dialog is a serious farmer who knows that seeds must be planted in the right soil and will reach fruition in eight months, not eight days. In other

words, learning through dialog is a slower, time-consuming, organic process, which takes place only in a carefully selected soul who can defend these ideas with his/her own speech and stimulate them to grow further..

In Phaedrus, Plato outlined some key dimensions of change from one medium to another: the impact on memory and our relationship to the past; the nature of interaction and the relationship to the audience; the issue of legitimacy and accountability, and indirectly, hierarchy and respect; the extent to which a learner can incorporate a text into understanding, the degree to which a medium fosters realism or fantasy, and the time horizons that media create in the minds of their users. For Plato, the transition from an oral to a written culture meant the weakening of memory, a loss of interactivity that leaves the written text exposed, a decline in accountability, a shallowness of understanding, and a speeded up and hence unrealistic time frame for the development of understanding. We can add that oral culture is interactive, easy going and hierarchical at the same time; respect was due the elders. Memory and experience counted for something; in written and (eventually) print culture, respect for age disappeared. Elders were less respected when communities of talkers were absorbed into and subordinated to a more atomized collection of readers and writers.

On the other hand, many modern analysts questioned Plato's conclusions: From their perspectives, writing created new forms of legitimacy—the sacred text, the sacred book. Legitimacy and accountability seemed to harden rather than dissipate, and the past became congealed in the text. Of course, interpretation was still required, but some of the

fluidity of the oral tradition was lost. Hierarchy shifted from age, memory and experience to mastery of the written text. Print made access to these texts more universal and equal, diffusing a linear mentality to large populations. Some observers associated these changes with increased rationality; for example, Weber associated bureaucracy and rational-legal authority with written files and records. While Plato associated writing with unrealistic fantasies, historically print and the diffusion of writing on a mass basis was associated with a new rational, and empirical mentality that replaced fantastical modes of thought with scientific inquiry. As Carlo Levi claimed so poetically in *Christ Stopped at Eboli*, in the illiterate rural south of Italy in the 1930s the laws of cause and effect were unknown and the culture was steeped in magical thinking..

From Writing to Print:

These questions resurface in the analysis of print (writing in a new, mass-accessible form) and the transition from print to electronic media. Burke agreed with Plato; observing the highly writing/print oriented French Revolution, with its abstract blueprints for progress, attacks on traditional legitimacy, and speeded-up expectations for effecting change, he contrasted it unfavorably to the organic British mode of reform with its slow pace and complex communication patterns embedded in civil society. He believed that the apparent equality promoted by the French Revolution masked a deeper inequality of topdown intellectual planning, whereas the apparent inequality of British culture contained a more inclusive process of dialog.

The mass diffusion of writing through print created new cognitive maps and new forms of identity. Gellner (1983) suggests that print diffusion helped to break up self-enclosed village communities and the restricted codes of communication of these small communities; print brought more people into elaborated code thinking, that is, a more self-conscious grasp of social structure, a less personalistic patterning of relationships, a more abstract and less concrete way of thinking. The ability to picture or imagine a national community, not merely the ability to contact other people in it through print media, contributed to nationalist movements for both Gellner and Anderson (1991). For E. P. Thompson (1963), the small printing press was a key element of English radicalism, growing belief in radical democracy, and formation of working class consciousness.

Media Space: Beyond the Gutenberg Galaxy

The shift from print to electronic media has been more controversial, less well understood because it is still unfolding. Often it moves ahead with remarkable jumps of “combined development” as electronic media hit societies that have only partially undergone the writing/print transition.

McLuhan contrasted writing/print and radio, “hot” univocal media, with the “cool,” diffuse, multivocal character of TV. TV is associated neither with intense feeling (like radio) nor linear thought (like print) but a return to a global village—gossipy, interactive, present oriented, “easy going,” and communicating in a restricted code that is globally shared, an apparent paradox that we have all experienced: being hurt by Princess Di’s

death, thrilled by Michael Jordan's leaps, and moved by the sorrow of the Kennedys, as though we know all these people intimately.

Alvin Toffler, in his *Future Shock* (which I find has aged remarkably well since 1970), pointed to impermanence, novelty, and diversity as characteristics of the emerging culture.

Most marxist and critical school theorists were and are hostile to post-print media, Walter Benjamin (1969) offered a more ambiguous, even positive analysis. He saw media like film, photography, and radio setting off a shift from permanence, uniqueness, and authority to reproducibility, transitoriness, the shattering of tradition, and a sense of the "universal equality of things" as their aura is destroyed. These new media could be incorporated into capitalist commodity production, but they also contained revolutionary potential in their destruction of traditional authority. I particularly want to underline Benjamin's comments on the "**universal equality of things**" because we will see that the equalizing character of the network is a theme in ideological postings on the web and is commented on by Matthew Zook in his article on the militia movement and computers (1996), which I will summarize in the next section.

The Contradictory World of Computer Networks

As we move from radio and television to the far more flexible and sophisticated world of computer networks and computer-mediated communication (CMC), we encounter a host of contradictory hypotheses. Contradictions arise from reality itself (a new media system

necessarily contains a wide range of potentials), from problems in the definition of concepts (terms like “community,” “public space,” “identity,” “dominance” and so on may be defined differently, giving rise to diametrically opposed conclusions), and from the paucity and haphazard quality of empirical observation. Many observations of CMC, network communities, and network identities remain at the anecdotal level, permitting almost any possible conclusion. Thus we find the following diametrically opposite claims:

1. Computer networks allow for greater connectivity vs. computer networks are isolating.
2. Computer networks are controlled by large companies and the corporate media, both in terms of ownership and in terms of the impact of framing practices (Calhoun, 1998; Castells, 1997) vs. computer networks make possible alternative pathways of interaction and framing.
3. Computer networks foster categoric identities (race, religion, sexual orientation, gender, etc.) (Calhoun, 1998; Castells, 1997) vs. computer networks dissolve and weaken these categoric identities, allowing people playfully to develop multiple identities, to free themselves from the confines of ascribed identities, and to develop ties along lines of interests rather than attributes (Orr, 1997; Turkle, 1995; Haraway, 1990; Wellman, 1997).
4. The contents of global media systems and CMC are transformed and adapted to local audiences and cultures (Ang) and/or shaped by national media policies (Shields, 1996) vs. media systems and CMC are dominated by an emerging global media

culture and structure, which is largely Western, post-industrial, and American and dominates both directly through ownership and indirectly through imposition of framing practices (Castells, 1997; Nguyen and Alexander, 1996).

5. Computer networks form new public spaces vs. computer networks contribute to the shrinkage of public space.
6. Computer networks build new forms of community vs. computer networks weaken real communities and at best extend networks of weak ties.

Manuel Castells addresses these themes in his concept of “the culture of real virtuality” and gives us a sophisticated analysis of the inherent contradictions of this new multi-media culture. Through his analysis we can see more clearly why it seems possible to come to diametrically opposed conclusions about the direction inherent in the media of the information age.

1. The new media culture is both diversified and stratified, with an increasing split between the “interacting” and the “interacted [upon].”
2. It is diversified yet also mass-pre-packaged, so that the many consumer “choices” are mostly mass products that are only superficially differentiated and are all produced under the aegis of corporate media, even if nominally by independent producers.
3. The local and traditional are absorbed by the global media culture and incorporated into its framing structures; Castells provides the telling example of how karaoke restructures and standardizes group singing. This argument of Castells challenges Ien Ang’s hypothesis that the local “wins out” by incorporating the global, pushing it into local frames. It also disagrees with Shield’s view that the networks are structured

primarily at the level of the nation-state, or at any rate, suggests that this national-local determination is only a temporary state of affairs that will soon wane as part of the general process of weakening of national sovereignty.

4. The new multi-media are becoming an all-encompassing global environment; of course, all human culture is mediated experience, but now more and more culture is filtered through globalized and totalizing multi-media frames rather than local channels of personal interaction.
5. The diversity of appearances leads to an appearance of diversity; we are discovering “multiculturalism” and celebrating categoric identities at the very moment that genuine diversity is disappearing and replaced with a simulacrum of cultural diversity. This makes possible an integration of diverse ethnic/racial groups into a common culture of multi-media, commodity production, and mass consumption: (Think about Christmas, Hannukah, and Kwanzaa, for an example.) It explains some of the paradox that categoric identities seem to be both heightened and weakened.
6. Global interaction and connectivity co-exist with a high level of individual isolation; here we can add Calhoun’s insight that the network age is one of weakened and shrunken public space.

It may be useful to think of this transition also in terms of Habermas and Gramscian marxist analysis: Increasingly, the system is the life world; there is nothing beyond or outside system patterning of communication. Gitlin refers to hegemonic absorption. Castells does not go so far and refrains from gloomy value judgements; but for him as well, the space for resistance is narrow and shrinking.

II. Media and Movements

In this section, I would like to focus on how media shape movement framing practices, how movements use media as a resource, and how these processes may evolve in the new media culture. I will briefly review the work of a wide range of observers and then concentrate on Zald (1996), Zook (1996), and Castells (1997).

Print and Movements

To begin with the impact of print: I have already commented on the impact on identity discussed by Gellner, Anderson, and Thompson; there was also a more direct impact on movement formation and the repertoire of collective action, discussed by Tilly and Tarrow. Print was part of the process in which collective action in western Europe shifted from local, corporate-based, brief bursts of direct action to a repertoire that was modular, national, flexible, sustained, and autonomous. Print made possible national-level associations, turned local passions into coherent, self-conscious, and sustained ideologies, and created a sense of possibilities for redirecting the state (while the states themselves unintentionally accelerated this awareness by their own expanded activities). The process that began in western Europe diffused world wide.

Are the new media, especially computer networks, going to transform movements once again, and if so, in what directions?

The cautious approach: Multiple weak ties in partial communities:

One hypothesis is that networks will make relatively little difference, at least in the short and medium term; the differences will tend to be quantitative, not qualitative—a more effective and accelerated method of reaching potential supporters and mobilizing constituencies.. Wellman (1997), for example, suggests that network based ties will not be very different from “real life” ties, already structured in what Scott Greer called “communities of limited liability.” Network ties will also be intermittent, specialized, and often weak, in the sense of being secondary associations and directed to professional and instrumental ends. For example, Thomas and Young’s (1997) study of network activism among midwives in Ohio supports this characterization; yes, activism took place on the net, but it was specialized and pragmatic. The Internet was used as a resource to reach and mobilize movement constituents to oppose restrictive legislation.. The purpose and framing of the activism was not substantially different from what could have been done by direct mailing.

Wellman shares Castells’ view that computer networks may have contradictory effects, but he tends to believe that the transition will be relatively gradual: the network will offer the possibility of more multiple memberships in partial communities; it may be associated with some weakening of real-life solidarities and an accelerated shrinkage of public physical space; it will be more globalized than existing types of communities, but lead to yet more of a privatized, “home-centered” space; and it has a potential for building social capital and creating cross-cutting ties.

Masquerades: Fantasy identities:

But other writers challenge or move beyond these sober, cautious conclusions. Stone (1995) emphasizes a playful aspect of network activity, and the possibility of masquerades and the assumption of fantasy identities. Turkle (1995) reflects on “multiple identities” in network communication. Stone [in Wellman] comments, “on-line ties foster uninhibited discussion, non-conforming behavior and group polarization.” Masquerades and a carnival atmosphere are not a new element of the movement repertoire—witness the Indian costumes at the Boston Tea Party and men wearing women’s clothing in early 19th c. French protests against state encroachment on forests. Computer networks do not introduce these possibilities, but simply amplify them.

In a similar vein, Daria Ilunga (cited in Orr, 1997) comments: “One of the things that was interesting to me...was that I could engage in dialogues with people that would not happen if you met face-to-face. It freed me to say things that I, as a woman and a person of color, often didn’t feel comfortable to say.” Indeed, Wellman remarks that the net potentially empowers lower status people and shifts attention from attributes to interests.

Fantasy identities can be bizarre or sinister, as well as uninhibited and playful. The young killers at Columbine High had a racist fantasy website; and Benjamin Smith played with the ~~Erast~~^{Willy} Rommel identity (though not in an electronic medium). The sense of freedom from “real” identities does indeed free people to say things that can otherwise not be said comfortably. In this context, we might do well to open a conversation with an older, somewhat forgotten side of collective behavior research, its social-psychological insights

including the research of Adorno et al (1993) and the work of Morris Janowitz with Bruno Bettelheim (1950) and Edward Shils (1948).

I am reminded of Simmel's description of the compressed, iconic, and stylized self-presentation that city people adopt to express their identities as rapidly as possible, and how for Simmel this desire to express identity is absolutely consistent with the desire for anonymity. The network identities, like the urban identities, express a freeing from real-life communities. The network is not a global village, but a global metropolis.

III. Toward Empirical Analysis

Matthew Zook: An empirical study of the militias and computer networks:

A major contribution to understanding the relationship between the net and movements is Matthew Zook's systematic empirical study, "The Unorganized Militia Network: Conspiracies, Computers, and Community". (1996). Zook analyzed militia sites and came to the following conclusions about the way in which computer networks strengthen the movement:

1. They act as an alternative information source bypassing mainstream means of communication.
2. They equalize legitimacy; information on the Web is disconnected from traditionally legitimate information sources and hence there emerges an appearance of equal legitimacy of all sources; cyberspace "authorities" are used to verify conspiracy theories.

3. They create routes of access from the mainstream to the movement; links allow readers to move from single -issue (more or less) mainstream sites (for example about gun control or abortion) to more ideological sites about the Second Amendment to sites where militia post conspiracy-theory documents; links draw the browser from the mainstream to the more far-out sites.
4. They reduce the sense of isolation of individuals who hold non-mainstream ideas and make them feel part of a larger community.
5. They create communication links between decentralized groups and individuals so that debates can take place and alliances form without centralized structures.

Note how brilliantly Zook's empirical work connects to both Plato and Benjamin: the key features of network-based ideological communication is indeed in its transformation of legitimacy, its reconfiguration of interaction and community, and its creation of an illusion (or reality) of the "universal equality of things."

Using Mayer Zald's Conceptualization of Framing, Ideology, and Culture as the Basis for Empirical Analysis of Net-based Ideological Postings:

To conclude this section, I would like to return to Mayer Zald's article (1996) and summarize six areas that he considers crucial for research on movement framing—six key elements of the dynamics of framing. These can become the basis for hypotheses about the impact of computer networks on movements and movement framing.

1. The cultural stock, especially ways of defining injustices (and, one might add, desires and positive goals).
2. Cultural contradictions.
3. Strategic framing, the active process engaged in by moral entrepreneurs to identify iconic events, invent and display symbols, define ideologies, relate the nature of the world to the goals and grievances of the movement, and offer tactical solutions:
4. Competitive processes in which organizations claim frames, involving the establishment of frames and counterframes as well as competition between movements who share similar frames—in short, the relationship between framing practices and multiorganizational fields.
5. Framing and the media, since the production routines, organizational dynamics and class interests of the media allow movements to be seen only “through a glass, darkly” by most of their potential supporters; media technologies also present challenges to movements and impose patterns of media framing.
6. Movements’ impacts on culture.

Bringing together all of the above, I would like to offer hypotheses about movement and computer networks organized into the categories Mayer proposed.

Cultural Stock

The cultural stock that underlies netbased framing practices (NFP) will include:

- .extensive use of anarchist, libertarian and individualist appeals;

- anti-hierarchical, anti-authority values;
- faith in the “universal equality” of things, including people, media, and ideologies;
- a high proportion of private fantasies, partially overlapping collective dreams;
- a blurring of the modernist distinction between right and left;
- some degree of “political lunacy” encouraged by the apparent “universal equality of things”;
- a new, generally flattened time dimension, with little sense of progress and hence little attention to “prognosis” (the prognosis being more of the same, with the exception of rapture/apocalyptic sites).

Cultural Contradiction

The major cultural contradiction that generates network ideological postings (NIPs) is the contradiction between human experiences in life worlds and the multimedia culture (as described by Castells) in which these experiences cannot be recognized or articulated.

More specifically, there is a cultural contradiction between system and life world in which people experience an inability to articulate and bring into light their grievances and desires. The system is increasingly experienced as an impersonal set of processes without values, goals, interests or purposes; opposition is difficult to express as opposition to a bourgeoisie, a distinct, Eurocentric capitalist class, or even large corporations. This all pervasive and impersonal system carries with it a seamless and unbreachable media

culture which allows few means of oppositional framing and appears to colonize and replace all local and alternative cultures.

This central contradiction is addressed in NIP/NFP by the expressed belief, possibly illusory, that computer networks permit autonomous expression of “real experiences” and values of life worlds, because they offer the apparent “universal equality of things” in contrast to the concentrated structure of the mass media.

This central contradiction that generates NIP/NFPs brings us to yet another paradox of NIPs: the “hair of the dog that bit you” remedy of using network technology to combat the system; it is notable that almost all the movements Castells features in *The Power of Identity* are movements that are antisystemic yet technologically sophisticated: The global structure of Islamic and Christian fundamentalisms; the Patriot and militia movements; the Zapatistas; environmental movements; Aum Shinrikyo.

This central contradiction is a cultural one (of course it is also a material one having to do with capital, media technologies, and the means of production of things and ideas), with a psychological or personal dimension because individuals feel an intense sense of alienation from their own experiences. There is a sense of shrinkage of public spaces in which this alienation can be expressed. Thus there are two elements of contradiction: The sense that discourse is colonized by the media and that it is no longer possible to express ideas and experiences in the media environment; and the sense of a shrinkage of public space in which to discuss both issues of representation and substantive issues. This

contradiction is primarily at the level of culture, of symbols; it is therefore not just a matter of fashion that social movement theory is returning to an analysis of cultural/symbolic systems.

Forty years ago these issues would have been formulated in a more social-psychological language that used terms like alienation and even cultural pathology; in a postmodern era, we no longer use these metaphors of health and sickness, but rather speak of framing and discursive practices. In any case, the central cultural contradiction encourages the development of certain types of identities. One is the formation of a categoric identity (especially one based on race or religion) that blots out other identities, narrowing and rigidifying the scope of action and the sense of self. A second is the formation of multiple fantasy identities accompanied by a weakened sense of one's "real" situation. These two processes can be associated as we saw in the case of Benjamin Smith and the Columbine High students. This combination of categoric identity and fantasy modes of thought was already present in the authoritarian and ethnocentric respondents in the research of Adorno and Bettelheim and Janowitz; the electronic media have permitted the processes to be speeded up, and CMC, web sites, and home video allow a rapid, vivid, and diffusable externalization of these fantasies and identities, far beyond speaking, writing, and traditional art forms (Featherstone and Burrows, 1995; Stone, 1995; Turkle, 1995) A third process that I would label "alienated" is the complete colonization of the self by media framing, so that the person can only imitate the gestures, facial expressions, feelings, and word choices of the media, as in the more extreme forms of "teen talk"; this is associated more with the multimedia environment than with CMC and networks.

Strategic Framing Practices:

Many NFPs are still tied to the printed page, following the framing practices of print. For example, many web sites (especially what Zook calls “low tech” sites) still look like printed pages. But new practices are appearing—

- Increasing importance of visual symbols, icons, logos, and evidence of the visual imagination;
- Emphasis on visible categorical identities, especially race and gender, and a proportionately reduced emphasis on language (the hallmark of modernist-nationalisms); as Freja says “our skin is our uniform.”
- Self presentation as alternative information sources;
- The importance of links, in defining allies, defining a place in multiorganizational fields, in leading potential supporters from the system to anti-system sites (Zook), from the “safe” to the “scary”;
- An anti-media position;
- A flattened or shortened time frame;
- An emphasis on debunking, with energy devoted to counter-framing in opposition to media framing.
- Non-linearity, breaking with the linear patterning of print based ideology;
- An absence of both prognosis or action, associated with the flattened time dimension;
- Expression of both the highly isolated and atomized sense of identity and the use of interactive possibilities (a contradiction noted by Wellman, Castells, and Calhoun);

- A dreamlike quality corresponding closely to the psychoanalytic concept of primary process, involving jumps (via links), visual expression of thoughts, fantasy and masquerade, sensations of seduction and penetration as one moves further into a site, fantasy and masquerade expressions of self identity.

Competitive Framing:

Links, allies, and enemies define multiorganizational fields. Software like Third Voice (overlay that permits comments to appear on a website) support competitive framing practices.

Media and Framing:

NIP framing consistently emphasizes its counter-media character, defining itself as an effort to break out of the totalizing multimedia universe (Castells) or to breach media hegemony, but faces the dilemma that NIPs are forced to assume many of the characteristics of media framing and to enter into media-initiated discourses since these define what is worth discussing and viewing. For example, a site cannot have long stretches of "boring" text.

Outcomes:

We can look for outcomes in terms of discursive effects and micro-politics of power before larger, structural effects become visible .

Empirical Exploration:

An NIP (netbased ideological posting) includes any net-based expression of ideology, but my own exploration was confined to web sites.

Let me discuss briefly what I found in an exploration of NIPs. I asked a class of 20 students in a middle-level international studies course to explore movement web sites; they were involved in service learning and had been placed in “safe” movement, social service and NGO setting, mostly associated with progressive Catholic and Protestant mainline churches; many of these organizations functioned as social service agencies for immigrants and refugees..I wanted them to reflect on the contentious, dangerous, and frame-transforming nature of social movements and therefore encouraged them to explore sites that were “scary” or more radical than their real placements, for example directing them to patriot/militia sites, white racist sites, fundamentalist and apocalyptic sites (with search terms like rapture, revelation, etc.), and cult-related sites (with search terms like Waco). Some also looked at environmentalist and feminist sites, as well as nationalist ones. All in all, the students produced documents from 542 distinct websites. I am not going to discuss any numbers because this was a completely non-random sample in which I had pushed the explorations in certain directions.

[Presentation of material from 22 websites, collected by Amy Kipp, Matt Mohlenkamp, and Adnan Ovcina]

Looking at this material and beginning to do some systematic coding (see Appendix), I found some hypotheses supported:

- A strong anarchist, individualist cultural stock, as expected;
- Support for the hypothesis that the central contradiction is that between self-identity and network (Shields);
- Anti-system framing, on both left and right;
- Expressions of faith in the “universal equality of things” (as found also by Zook) and faith that the Web could be used to level the media playing field;
- Intense competition with a lot of attention to counter movements and efforts to position movements in multiorganizational fields through links;
- Detachment and disconnection from “real” places, people and organizations—“there is no there there.”
- The beginnings of a new symbolic structure of framing, but with many sites (often those with a low-tech rating in Zook’s terms) still resembling the printed page;
- A strong use of written defining documents, most notably the Bible and the Constitution; it was white racists, using symbolic elements from Norse mythology, that seemed most comfortable with breaking with written texts as the source of symbols;
- A flattened time dimension, apart from mention of iconic historical events and documents with a weak sense of progress or prognosis;
- Detachment from action, with few calls to “do” anything.
- Presence of several types of categoric identities, especially “white,” “Christian” and “gay/lesbian” as well as several nationalist ones, although perhaps not strikingly more so than in printed movement position papers.

A couple of hypotheses on the other hand received (as yet) little support: For example, there were fewer “personal” and fantasy websites than expected;

IV. Towards a Research Agenda:

I would suggest that a research agenda on virtual movements can be developed, perhaps one that addresses the following five issues, each of which represents both a theoretical and methodological challenge.

1. **Establishment of sampling frames and sampling procedures.** It is clear why this is a methodological challenge; it is also a theoretical and conceptual issue because establishing sampling frames will force us to clarify the definition and delimitation of the concept “net-based ideological posting.”
2. Further content analysis of **framing practices** along the lines begun in this paper. This set of findings will help us to explore the question whether CMC generates new types of mentalities and framing practices. Software for qualitative analysis will be of value.
3. **Tracing links.** This will enable the researcher to identify **multiorganizational fields** and to understand the positioning of the NIP in a larger field; it elucidates the cognitive maps that posters use to make sense of the network and the world. As my student Tiberiu Truta (1999) noted: Movements define themselves on the web by their choices of links.
4. Exploring the relationship between NIPs and “real” things—places, people, and organizations; this will enable the researcher to note the extent to which the posting is

purely virtual and the extent to which it is connected to **social movements and real communities.**

- 5. Tracing the relationship between cyberspace NIPs and contentious action.** This will take us more deeply into the relationship between NIPs and potential supporters, including extreme cases such as that of Matt Hale and Benjamin Smith, the role of websites in provoking murder of doctors who work at abortion clinics, and so on, as well as more routine and benign actions. Thus we revisit Plato's concern that writing may reach the "wrong" readers. There are many methodological problems in this part of the agenda, but also many conceptual issues including social-psychological approaches to explore systematically the relationship between ideas, fantasy, and action.

VARIABLES FOR THE ANALYSIS OF NET-BASED IDEOLOGICAL POSTINGS

(These variables allow a systematic analysis of underlying cultural stock, strategic framing practices, positioning in competitive multiorganizational fields, and the cognitive maps of the posters.)

1. Name of site as shown on home page.
2. Major category
3. Key concepts: key ideas and/or identifying logos and graphics
4. Left or right orientation
5. Presence (and level) or absence of hate statements and/or extreme hostility
6. Countermovements identified or identification of opposition and threats, in terms of specific organizations, social groups, currents of opinion, institutional actors, and other social forces
7. Level of paranoid or conspiracy framing
8. Graphics: level of technical sophistication and importance to site and ideological message
9. Heroes identified
10. Villains identified
11. Presence and contents of religious framing and imagery
12. Foundational or iconic documents identified
13. Foundational or iconic events identified
14. Presence and contents of categoric identities
15. Physical location: is there a "real" territorial location?
16. Visionary or pragmatic statement, including presence of fantasy elements
17. Presence and level of violence (from explicitly non-violent to no mention of violence to a "prepared" or threatened violence to explicit call for violent action)
18. Call for action—if so, what type of action
19. Allies identified, either organizations or social groups or institutional actors
20. Links—to what sites? Level of sophistication of the links
21. Identification of an organization that created or supported the NIP
22. Technical sophistication of the site (based on Zook)
 - 1) basic page, some text, 1-2 graphics
 - 2) basic html, background patterns, specified colors, scanned photographs
 - 3) multiple linked pages, multiple graphics
 - 4) cgi scripting, use of java, html frames
23. Are (possibly) real persons named in the posting?
24. Are real addresses or phone numbers provided ? e-mail address?
25. Is the positing highly personal and idiosyncratic or is the framing collective/impersonal?
26. Is a prognostic or predictive statement included?
27. Is there any evidence that the posting involves the creation of fantasy or multiple identities?
28. Is there an explicit orientation toward the mainstream media?
29. What is (are) the language(s) of the posting?

WORKS CITED

- Adorno, Theodor, E. Frenkel-Brunswick, D. Levinson, and R. Sanford. (1993). *The Authoritarian Personality*. New York: Norton. (originally published 1950).
- Anderson, Benedict. (1991). *Imagined Communities*. London: Verso.
- Benjamin, Walter. (1969). "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." *Illuminations*. New York: Schocken Books, 217-251.
- Calhoun, Craig. (1998). "Community Without Propinquity Revisited: Communications Technology and the Transformation of the Urban Public Sphere." *Sociological Inquiry*. Vol. 68, 3, Summer, 373-397.
- Castells, Manuel. (1997). *The Information Age*. Malden, MA: Blackwell. (Volume One: *The Network Society*; Volume Two: *The Power of Identity*).
- Derrida, Jacques.
- Featherstone, Mike, and Roger Burrows. (eds.). (1995). *Cyberspace, Cyberbodies, Cyberpunk: Cultures of Technological Embodiment*. London: Sage.
- Gellner, Ernest. (1983). *Nations and Nationalism*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Haraway, Donna. (1993) "A Manifesto for Cyborgs." In Linda J. Nicholson (ed.), *Feminism/Postmodernism*. New York and London: Routledge.
- Janowitz, Morris and Edward Shils. (1948). "Social Cohesion and Disintegration in the German Army in World War II." *Public Opinion Quarterly*, Summer, 280-315.
- Janowitz, Morris and Bruno Bettelheim. (1950). *The Dynamics of Prejudice*. New York: Harper and Row.
- Nguyen, Dan Thu, and Jon Alexander. (1996). "The Coming of Cyberspacetime." In Rob Shields, (ed.). *Cultures of the Internet*. London: Sage, 99-124.
- Orr, Catherine. (1997). "Third Wave Feminism." *Hypatia*, 12, 3 Summer, 29-45.
- Porter, David. (ed.). (1997) *Internet Culture*. New York: Routledge.
- Plato. (1964). "Phaedrus." R. Hackforth, trans. Bollingen Series LXXI. New York: Pantheon, 269-287.
- Stone, Allucquere Rosanne. (1995). *The War of Desire and Technology at the Close of the Mechanical Age*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

- Tarrow, Sidney . (1998). *Power in Movement*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- _____ (1992). "Mentalities, Political Cultures, and Collective Action Frames: Constructing Meanings Through action." In Aldon Morris and Carol Mueller (eds.). *Frontiers in Social Movement Theory*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Thomas, Jan E. and Sarah Young. (1997). "Midwives, Grassroots Activism and the Internet." American Sociological Association paper.
- Thompson, E.P. (1963). *The Making of the English Working Class*. New York: Vintage.
- Toffler, Alvin. (1970). *Future Shock*. New York: Random House.
- Truta, Tiberiu. (1999). "The Far Side of the Web." Unpublished paper, International Studies 203 (International Movements of the 20th Century), DePaul University.
- Turkle, Sherry. (1995). *Life on the Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- Wallace, Anthony. (1956). "Revitalization Movements." *American Anthropologist*, 58, April, 264-281.
- Wellman, Barry. (1997). "The Road to Utopia and Dystopia on the Information Highway." *Contemporary Sociology*. 26, 4, July, 445-449.
- Weinrich, James D. (1997). "Strange Bedfellows: Homosexuality, Gay Liberation, and the Internet." *Journal of Sex Education and Therapy*, 22, 1, June, 58-66.
- Zald, Mayer. (1996). "Culture, Ideology, and Strategic Framing." In Doug McAdam, John McCarthy, and Mayer Zald (eds.). *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 261-274.
- Zook, Matthew. (1996). "The Unorganized Militia Networks: Conspiracies, Computers, and Community." *Berkeley Planning Journal*. Volume 11.