Language, Power, and Politics: Revisiting the Symbolic Challenge of Movements[1]

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There certainly has been a sea change in social movement theory since McCarthy and Zald (1977) bluntly dismissed the symbolic dimension of movement activity from the establishment of the Resource Mobilization (RM) paradigm. Reducing movements' symbolic constructs to grievances and treating these as only marginal components of collective action has become indefensible today. 'Neo' resource mobilizationists, New Social Movement (NSM) theorists and political scientists all converge now to give greater weight to movements' subjective constructions in theorizing social movement activity. Internal controversies and debates spawned by an increased recognition of the limitations of the RM model[2] have led theorists to reappraise the role of solidarities, movement goals and cognitive frameworks in movement mobilization. The emergence of the New Social Movements approach as a contending paradigm in the field, granting a central status to the cultural and the symbolic (see Cohen, 1983, 1985; Laclau and Mouffe, 1985; Touraine, 1988; Melucci, 1989) has redirected attention toward the production by movements of 'alternative meanings,' such as new identities, cultural innovations, and oppositional discourses. Political scientists, for their part, have noticeably shifted their treatment of symbolic issues away from 'the history of ideas' and into the terms of representational, democratic, and identity politics (see for example Young, 1990; Jenson, 1989, 1993; Dalton and Kuechler, 1990). As questions previously subsumed under the

67

appellation of 'ideology' and relegated to a secondary plane of explanation have come to the forefront, scholars in social movements studies are insistently called on to pay more attention to the symbolic dimension of collective action.

Yet, for all the talk about discursive hegemonies and identities, interpretive frames and other "fightin' words" (Johnston, 1992), social movement theory has tended to by-pass the analysis of the specifics of movements meanings—or, paraphrasing Starn (1992:96), the social semiotics of protest. Also crucially lacking is a clear understanding of how these symbolic constructs operate within the social struggles in which movements are engaged. How are we to describe movements' symbolic constructions and how are we to trace the processes through which they are produced and changed historically (Escobar and Alvarez, 1992:6)? And maybe more importantly, how are we to analyse their workings and consequences in a field of power relations and struggles? These are all questions that ought to be asked if we are to understand, as is increasingly contended, 'the symbolic' as an intrinsic dimension of the exercise of power, and of struggle over power (Alvarez and Escobar, 1992; Slater, 1994; Jenson, 1989; Melucci, 1989).

Dissatisfaction with the sparse theoretical and methodological apparatuses available to pursue this inquiry has sent social movement scholars in search of more precise, or more adequate frameworks. Recent suggestions include drawing from ethnography and ethnosemiotics (Escobar, 1992; Starn, 1992), sociology of everyday life (Escobar, 1992), postmodern and poststructuralist analyses of discourses and subjectivities (Slater, 1994; Starn, 1992), ethnomethodology and American sociolinguistics (Johnston, 1991, 1992; Donati, 1992; Larana, 1994). The present article is part of this quest. It endeavors to contribute to the current re-evaluation of the role played by interpretations and representations in movement activity, strategy, and politics by bringing to bear on social movement theory some propositions developed within a European tradition[3] of language studies, and

in particular by scholars identified with critical perspectives on language and discourse.

If we are, as I will argue, to take the notion of the symbolic challenge of movements seriously, we have to revisit this challenge not only as a truly political struggle, but as a political struggle of a special sort. That is, as one which is fought, characteristically, over the modalities in which power relations are embedded and enacted through social systems of signs and meanings. To do so, we have to understand why the specifics of the language in which movement representations are couched should be considered, what exactly is at stake in the 'symbolic struggles,' in which movements are involved, and how this goes beyond contests over 'meanings,' 'naming,' and 'framing.'

Some of the answers to these questions can be found in social movement theory's attempts to deal with movements' symbolic activity. The most influential frameworks from a NSM perspective are those of Melucci (1989) and Laclau and Mouffe (1985). In RM theory, the 'collective action frames' approach prevails and is responsible for a fast growing body of literature. A critical assessment of these frameworks is the object of the first section of this article. The second section explores some of the avenues through which European approaches to language and discourse can help further our understanding of language as a distinct level of analysis. Language, it will be argued, operates as a power-laden mode of action that has direct consequences for social relations and for movement politics.

This article advocates the need for a more linguistically-sensitive, empirically-grounded, and politically-oriented analysis than has heretofore been the case in social movement studies. In doing so, it echoes the voices that currently call for a closer and rigorous scrutiny of the role of 'the symbolic' in movements' practices and struggles.

69

SYMBOLIC CHALLENGE AND SYMBOLIC POLITICS IN SOCIAL MOVEMENT THEORY

Challenging Codes, Challenging Power: Alberto Melucci

We owe to Melucci the first formulation of "the symbolic challenge" of movements. Melucci's notion of symbolic challenge is linked to his conception of power in today's societies. Melucci (1989:45) argues that we live in "complex societies" characterized by a heightened capacity to produce signs and social meanings. Complex societies are also characterized by a pronounced social differentiation that sets greater needs for integration and control. Integration and control are exerted through signs and meanings, as these are expressed, according to Melucci, in the form of societal norms, standardized codes, and of formal frameworks of administrative and technological knowledge. Indeed Melucci's argument (1989:76-77) goes further: power in complex societies *is* "signs," power is transformed and concealed within sets of signs that codify and regulate social relations.

Actors mobilize to regain hold of the meanings and conditions of their action against complex societies' always expanding and increasingly anonymous forms of power. Individuals and groups mount what is termed by Melucci a symbolic challenge to the dominant codes, norms, identities and other "sets of signs" that regulate social life. This symbolic challenge encompasses two main aspects. The first is the production of alternative frameworks of knowledge and meaning in the process of collective action. The second is the experimentation of new ways of living and new forms of relationships in the daily practice of movements' "submerged networks." Moreover, the very existence of the movements is considered a symbolic confrontation with the technological rationality of the system (Melucci, 1989:60). This because movements themselves become "signs": the living proof, so to speak, that social change and alternative interpreta-

70

tions of society are possible.

By throwing into light the arbitrariness of complex societies' cultural modes of regulation, movements' symbolic challenge renders visible the power inscribed in these (Melucci, 1989:76-77). Melucci's fundamental contribution lies precisely in this notion that signs and social meanings are part of the ways power is exerted and, consequently, are also part of the ways power can be, and is contested. Signs, meanings and power are, it is suggested, intimately intertwined. In Melucci's argument, the symbolic ceases to be merely a portrait, a mirror of the social order to become implicated in society's very ordering. Movements' attempts at reinterpreting and challenging dominant "codes" by proposing "a different way of perceiving and naming the world" (Melucci, 1989:75) are to be considered, in this sense, attempts at altering not only the "symbolic" order of society, but the social order itself.

Although very insightful, Melucci's conception of movements' symbolic challenge is problematic, however, regarding the interface of 'signs' and power, of the symbolic and the political. Three important problems can be underlined. Firstly, as Bartholomew and Mayer (1992) have remarked, Melucci's notion of power is too unspecified. Crucially missing is an understanding of the grounding of movements' symbolic challenge in the fractured field of unequal power relations between people and groups of people. How particular hierarchies and forms of power relations operate—and are contested—*via* signs and meanings lingers as the theoretical and empirical question to be answered. Secondly, the symbolic challenge of movements has to be reinstated within a broader vision of the political. Melucci's too narrow understanding of politics as state-based and his erroneous view of collective action as located mostly outside politics have been criticized as unduly bounding movements to cultural venues and to civil society issues. Finally, another important problem is that movements' symbolic challenges remain enacted in an essentially *expressive* manner. The existence of movements and the

71

experiential "practice [of] the alternative meanings of everyday life" (Melucci, 1989:71) are limited to *signal* ("announce," "publicize") an opposition which, within an immanent and disembodied version of power relations, is never otherwise played out.

In contrast, I contend that as a challenge to power relations, the symbolic dimension of movement activity should rather be analyzed as an intrinsic part of movement politics. That is, as part of the struggles over power in which concrete actors are engaged in the variety of social sites where unequal power relations are at play. In addition, I suggest that understanding movements' symbolic challenge as being—partly[4]—a 'politics of signs and meanings' directs us towards the semiotic[5] aspects of this challenge. One of the main avenues to reconceptualizing and to investigating 'the symbolic challenge of movements' is, I will argue, to analyse this challenge as a struggle whose domain is linguistic and discursive practices, and whose stake is the power relations built into them.

72

Laclau and Mouffe's Discursive Politics:
The Symbolic As Contingent

In this perspective, Laclau and Mouffe's (1985) conception of "struggles for hegemony" throws more light on the notion of movements' symbolic challenge in terms of discursive politics. The authors strongly assert the political character of symbolic struggles. Laclau and Mouffe draw on postmodern claims that place "discourse" at the origin of the constitution of the subjects, objects, and relationships of the social. Struggles over discourse, or more largely over the definition of the meanings we attach to lived social relations, thus occupy the very center of social conflictuality.

Laclau and Mouffe argue that social relations of power have no set meanings outside of the discourses that enable us to make sense of them. Social antagonisms, they contend, are polysemic. They can bear as many different significations (i.e., meanings) as there are discourses to constitute them. Whatever significations

do get fixed are so within discursive struggles for hegemony. That is, within struggles for the political imposition of constructed significations. The authors firmly state that neither the collective identities of the political subjects, nor their projects, issues or interests are pre-given. Rather, these are all contingent: they are not determined in advance by the social structure, but they vary as a result of the discursive struggles for the hegemonic fixation of social meanings.

This fixation is always partial and tentative. Concretely, the attempts to "effect closure" on significations is realized, according to Laclau and Mouffe, through a process of "articulation." In this process, dissimilar elements are linked through discursive strategies that establish among them what the authors call "chains of equivalence." Through these chains some discursive elements become substituable. They are also placed in a relation of difference or opposition with regard to other discursive chains. It is through such mechanisms, Laclau and Mouffe argue (1985:62-65), that identities such as "the people," or "the working-class" have become tentatively fixed among the various and intersecting subject positions that are occupied simultaneously by any individual. Similar sequencing operations offer the potential to transfer, or to "displace" meanings made historically available, they argue, by the liberal-democratic discourse to new areas which they re-signify and politicize (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985:154-171). The notions of hegemonic struggle, articulations and discursive "chains of equivalences" can be useful, as the authors suggest, in tracing the constitution of coalitional politics and the emergence of new issues.

More importantly maybe, Laclau and Mouffe's claim about the contingency of symbolic constructions should be taken on board by social movement studies. It is worth underlining that, despite its definitively poststructuralist flavor, the view that identities, interests, and political projects are contingent rather than ascribed is also compatible with more fluid versions of contemporary Marxism. In this case, the notion that there exist

structural limits to discursive constructions is to be retained. Such limits include the weight of the past, the balance of forces, and the nature of the unequal relations of power at play (Jenson, 1989:75). To these I would add: the availability of existing meanings to signify and re-signify, which is also constrained, and constraining. The combination of these factors have as a result that not all discursive constructions are possible.

Acknowledging the contingent character of the symbolic dimension of collective action has important implications. The definition of identities—the 'self-naming' of movements—is increasingly acquiring an explanatory status in social movement theory (see Melucci, 1989; McClurg-Mueller, 1992; Buechler, 1993; Jenson, 1993). Yet, if the lived experiences of the social subjects are criss-crossed by different types of power relations, the identity of a political actor—a movement—cannot be seen as following directly from the social structure. Heterogeneous, rather than unified subjects become politically assembled under the label of a movement's name. Peasant movements for example, Starn (1992:93) argues, are not a "cut-and-dried affair of class mobilization." Rather, who qualifies as "peasant" in a given peasant movement varies and shifts according to an internal process of political hegemony[6] where "negotiation, choice, and imposition" are intertwined (Starn, 1992:96).

Seemingly similar political identities—such as 'native peoples,' 'women,' or even 'workers'—are not defined the same way in different times and places, and within movements. Criterias for inclusion and exclusion differ. We need to know the more precise terms under which a movements' 'name' is defined and the meanings attached to it if identities are to be in any way explanatory of movements' goals, strategies, access to the political opportunity structure, and the like.

In this perspective, it also has to be stressed that the construction of interests and political projects cannot be seen as flowing directly from the choice of an identity, or a name. If movements indeed construct claims and interests "in accordance

with the logic of [their] name," as Jenson (1993:343) contends, this very "logic" is itself discursively and diversely constructed. Contemporary feminist works, for instance, have clearly asserted the diversity of 'women's' experiences. This diversity translates into diverse logics, thus giving rise to the political expression of widely diverse 'women's interests'[7] within largely heterogeneous, fragmented, and multi-form 'women's movements.'

Moreover, as Laclau and Mouffe (1985:168-169) point out, interests and projects are susceptible to being articulated within and to widely different discourses, with divergent or even contradictory implications in terms of the direction of struggles. As contingency and multiplicity of possible discursive articulations combine, movement politics acquire a more ambiguous outlook. Most movement initiatives, Starn (1992:95) aptly remarks, "defy neat categorization as hegemonic or counterhegemonic." The meaning of "democratic struggles" fluctuates in the context of complex, historically specific imaginaries and is contested amid contending discourses (Slater, 1994). Contingency means that movements' symbolic dimension bears no external guarantees. A closer examination of movements' discursive constructions is thus in order.

75

Yet, Laclau and Mouffe's framework is not readily applicable to the task. Relying heavily on some of the recent developments in postmodern and poststructuralist theory, Laclau and Mouffe's proposition suffers from similar ailments, in particular a too abstract approach to 'discourse' (Poynton, 1993). Consequently their work has been conducive only to an impressionistic view of the way different discourses and meanings jostle, merge, yield or win, in the "struggles for hegemony."

Unspecified and detached from the concrete modalities through which they are socially realized, discourses in this version appear utterly disembodied from the materiality of the linguistic means that express them. They are also delinked from the institutional locations and the social activity that permit their existence and that found their effectivity. Despite the acknowl-

edgment that discourses find their realization, in great part, through language, detailed accounts of actual processes of meaning-construction in linguistic forms are eschewed by Laclau and Mouffe. Therefore, they do not have much to offer, beyond "chains of equivalence" set at the level of the overarching themes of "equality," "difference," "justice" and "liberty," to probe into the specifics of the partial fixation of social meanings.

Furthermore, the notion that the positions, relations and other regularities of meanings constituting discourses need to be actively enacted to take effect is lost from sight. Discourses are not omnipotent nor agentless. Rather, they draw their authority and social efficacy only 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. The argument that the subjects are also 'constituted in/by discourses' should not detract from concerns for agency and its exercise. This involves analysing the level of the written and spoken symbolic production by and through which concrete agents reproduce, struggle over and alter the terms of discourses in specific institutional, political, and strategic contexts.

Resource Mobilization Theory and
The Framing of Collective Action

The reappraisal of the importance of social meanings under the labels of "social constructivism" or of a re-vamped "new social psychology" approach has led a whole body of RM scholars to stress the role of social movement organizations (SMOs) in appropriating cultural symbols and in constructing schematas of interpretation in a way that can be made relevant for the mobilization of people, opinion, and resources. Sparked by Snow et al.'s (1986) reformulation of Goffman's concept of "frame" the recent works on framing share the assumption that meanings are constructed (Tarrow, 1994:119). Not only do people behave in accordance with a perceived reality but these perceptions are the

locus of a variety of interpretations. Proposing selective interpretations of social reality and gaining support for these then becomes a crucial task for movement organizations (see also Klandermans, 1988, 1989).

Collective action frames are complex ensembles of constructed meanings assigned to events, individual and collective experiences, and social situations. They are generally seen to include problem identification and system attributions, the definition of solutions and strategies, as well as a rationale for participation (Benford, 1993:199). McCarthy's (1994) "Drunk Driving frame" and "Auto-Safety frame" are closer to the understanding of frames as ensembles of 'problem attribution/solution identification' templates. Other versions of 'frames' have more affinity with the loose utilisation of the term "discourse": either pointing to distinctive ways of using language (of saying things) from particular socio-enunciative positions (Radical Feminist frame and Student Left frame in McAdam, 1994), or to styles and rules for making claims appropriate to particular institutional sites (Equal Opportunity frame and Rights frame in Tarrow, 1994).

Making SMO's frames congruent with prospective participants' (or interlocutors') frames is the object of deliberate "frame alignment" efforts by movement organizations. These attempts may even go as far as transforming significantly the initial frame in the course of collective action (Snow and al., 1986). The relational character of framing activity has to be underscored here. The positionality of the actor (the frame producer) and of the target audience (be it supporters or state agencies) and the immediate context of their interaction all play a role in constraining or foregrounding specific elements of the symbolic repertoire of protest that can be drawn upon (see Tarrow, 1994). Although frames are constructed at the organizational level, they can also be diffused within and among movements, in the latter case constituting a "master frame" that makes sense of reality and organizes collective action for a whole generation of activists

(Tarrow, 1994; McAdam, 1994).

The main interest of the current work on 'frames' and 'framing' resides in its constructivist perspective, and more precisely on its concern for the *strategic* dimension of meaning-making practices at the meso-level of movement organizations. Deliberate and sometimes shrewd crafting of symbolic constructs to "resonate" with an audience is indeed an integral part of SMO's action (see Benford, 1993:202), as the case of Greenpeace's watery-eyed baby seals eloquently illustrates. The purposeful 'framing' of progressive projects within the—usually much less progressive—'language of funding agencies,' a familiar practice within Québec popular movement organizations, is another example of obvious manipulation of messages for strategic ends. These types of strategic issues in symbolic politics NSM-related works typically do not address.

Empirical studies of frames, however, are too often diverted towards, and reduced to a strictly rhetorical view of movement meanings. The focus rests on the "persuasive communication techniques" whereby coldly calculating movement "entrepreneurs" (Tarrow, 1994) design or manipulate (Donati, 1992; Benford, 1987) symbols, metaphors and interpretive frames as "tools for detaching people from their habitual passivity" and for "transforming quiescence into collective action" (Tarrow, 1992:191). Frames then appear as customized, highly negotiable products, launched on a free-market of ideas to attract reluctant individuals.

Yet, if frames indeed display rhetorical and negotiable aspects, framing practices are also shaped by the wider social processes, structures, and relations of power from which they participate. And this occurs in ways that more often than not remain opaque to movement activists. The hegemony of dominant ways of signifying social relations, for example, or the prevalence of certain institutional discourses (i.e., the discourse of rights—see Tarrow, 1994:129-130), or movements' symbolic constructions of a higher order such as movement identities (the

'logic of the name') should all be brought to bear in explaining why certain frames are adopted, why they 'resonate' or not, succeed or not, or why they are produced at all.

The framing literature also tends to focus on mobilizational imperatives to the detriment of movements' social attempts at socio-political change as these are fought for in the arenas of the state and civil society. The political success of the 'reframing,' within the Canadian women's movement, of the abortion issue in terms of "women's freedom of choice" rather than as "free abortion on demand" makes a case for the relevance of a strategic-instrumental analysis of protest meanings (see Brodie, Gavignan and Jenson, 1992). In this example as in others however, it must also be stressed that the institutionalization of particular claims and ways of framing claims has very real, material consequences, as Mayer suggests (1991:469).

The consequences of specific framings have to be assessed as part of a more politically-oriented analysis of frames. This would require furthering Tarrow's hint (1992:196) about "actionable symbols" and McAdam, McCarthy and Zald's acknowledgement (1988:727-728) that "meanings are acted upon" in ways that have implications for movement action, the political system, and the daily life of people. Also required would be a detailed, discursive analysis of the language of frames—and of "counterframes." Such an analysis is still an exception in the field (c.f., Johnston, 1991). RM scholars' treatment of frames too often limits itself to identifying 'frames' without exposing much of their content or the implication of their institutionalization.

LANGUAGE-AS-ACTION:
A SOCIOLINGUISTIC CONTRIBUTION

As we can appreciate from the previous section, the three main frameworks developed within social movement theory for grappling with the symbolic dimension of movement activity all take as their starting point the assumption that meanings are socially

constructed and the object of contention. They also all throw light, albeit differently, on the stakes of movements' struggles in the field of social significations.

At issue through movement actors' contests over "culture" and cultural symbols are, following Melucci's insight, the modalities and directions in which power is exercised, and the very constitution of the social order. Laclau and Mouffe's important contribution points more directly to the centrality of the discursive realm and of struggles over discursive articulations in constructing not only "social meanings," but social reality itself. Hegemonic and 'oppositional' definitions of social antagonisms, collective identities, and political projects, in particular, thus become problematized as highly contingent. Finally, Resource Mobilization's work on "framing" focuses on the strategic-instrumental use of meaning construction by movement organizations, and briefly hints at the link between 'meanings' and action.

80

Furthering these frameworks, I have argued in various ways, requires a closer examination of the specifics of the symbolic politics in which movements are involved. More specifically, I have suggested that such an endeavour calls for an inquiry into the language[8] in which particular forms of power are coded, inscribed—tentatively fixed—and contested in the variety of social sites where power relations are at play. This inquiry is imperative not only to account for the variability, ambiguity, and open-endedness of the ways movement politics develop and unfold, but because language itself possesses its own effectiveness within social relations and, thus, "merits its own level of analysis" (Weir, 1995:52).

The theoretical propositions on which are premissed critical approaches to discourse analysis, among which can be included the influential views of French social theorists Bourdieu (1991) and Foucault (1984)[9], stress the particular "effectiveness" of language. In this they can contribute, as I will try now to show, to ground more solidly and to advance some of the main theoreti-

cal issues raised so far, to a different extent, by social movement theorists. These issues can be summed up as: the link between language and power, the constitutive dimension of meaning construction, and the consequential character of language for movements' political action.

Drawing on critical approaches to discourse analysis, I will present a conception of language as a mode of action in its double dimension of linguistic practice (the practice of making meaning through 'texts'[10]) and of discursive practice (the enunciation of these texts as a social 'event'). First, I will propose that we see language as a material mediation, embedding and enacting social relations of power, and whereby what we call 'social reality' is— partially, at the very least[11]—constituted, reconstituted, and potentially altered. Second, I will suggest to further the notion of language-as-action as it can be brought to bear on movement politics, underlining some of the ways in which political actors' discursive practices "do things with language," in particular through the power of "performatives" and the "actionable" character of authorized language. Finally, building on Foucauldian insights, I will argue that language-as-action is bounded by social "effects of closure," limiting the possibilities to signify and to act on social reality. This closure is an important part of what is contested through movements' linguistic and discursive practices.

81

Language: From 'Representing' to 'Making' The World

Constructed meanings and interpretations do not hover above people in an ethereal world of ideas, as classical or idealistic versions would have it. Nor are they encapsulated in the cognitive structures of the mind (Lemke, 1990:192-194) as many RM theorists suggest. Rather, as critical discourse analysts claim, they exist in the material form of semiotic practices, one of these being language use in the form of written and spoken utterances. Language is not a clear window on the world, but a material mediation through which 'reality' is socially constituted and

enacted. Standing between human beings and the world, language mediates in two ways: it *refracts* and it *signifies*.

Meanings constructed in language *refract* social reality rather (or more) than they reflect or mirror it. Language is a complex and dynamic system of meaning-making resources. As a consequence, language is inherently polysemic (Volosinov, 1973; Bourdieu, 1991; Fairclough, 1992). Much like a prism refracts daylight in different colors and directions, language has the potential to deploy a diversity of significations about social situations, groups of people, or social relations. There is no one possible meaning for each and every of these but many—something which Laclau and Mouffe have also pointed out, as we have seen. Language is understood as "refracting" not only in the sense that it allows the production of a variety of significations, but also in the sense that this variety is linked to the existence of different enunciative positions—there is no view from no where. These positions are taken up by concrete actors within a field of conflictuality and unequal power relations.

Language is also conceived as a mediation because it *signifies* social reality. Language does not merely refer (Fairclough, 1992:42) to a world that would 'make sense' *de facto*, bearing significations that only have to be "dressed in signs" (paraphrasing Foucault, 1984:124) to be made intelligible. Rather, language is a social practice of constructing meaning for this world. Giving this assumption its full weight implies that in 'signifying the world' not only do people construct meaning, but construct social reality itself.[12] Both Melucci and Laclau and Mouffe have argued, albeit in different terms, such a symbolic constitution of the social order.

In the same vein, critical discourse analysts contend that constructing meaning for the world is also organizing and ordering this world (Mishler, 1991:105-106; Maingueneau, 1991:196). Text-internal forms and meanings assign and assert asymmetrical positions between language participants. They define categories and classifications schemes, identities and relationships, the

actions and processes that are under the control of the agents or that are done to/imposed on them, delimiting the fields and the objects to which their interaction conventionally applies (Fowler, 1991; Halliday, 1989; Fairclough, 1992). In so 'ordering the world,' actors actively build power structures and power relations through codes of signs (Fowler, 1991; Fairclough, 1992).

The profound heterogeneity and the power dynamics of social life imply that there are always different ways and possibilities to signify. Yet, the power to impose "what is to be counted as real and true" (Yeatman, 1990:155) is unequally distributed among people and groups of people, and only certain significations are given broad legitimacy, and accede to dominance. Language then appears as a meaning-making and reality-creating social practice that is intrinsically non-neutral, and laced with power relations. CD analysts argue that speaking and writing practices not only embed but also *enact* social relations of power.

It is the active *enactment* of linguistic practices—the frequent speaking and writing—that allows categories, identities, relations, processes, etc. constructed in language to be objectified, legitimated, and naturalized as part of the social world (Fowler, 1991:82, 94). The mundane, day-to-day, repetitive practice of language participates in the constant making and remaking of social 'reality' (Fairclough, 1993:139). Linguistic practices play an important role in organizing and sustaining social structure (Fairclough, 1992:58). Language then becomes site and stake in a struggle that aims to unmake and alter the symbolic constructions that embed, enact, and reproduce dominant power relations.

'Doing Things' With Language
Implicated in the making of social reality and its ordering, language is further conceptualized by critical discourse analysts as a mode of action on this reality. To advance our understanding of language-as-action, we need to refer to language use and to struggles involving language not only in terms of contention

among different sets of linguistic practices (of power-laden, text-internal meanings), but as *discursive practices*. Discursive practices—the actual saying or writing of texts by social agents—do not only 'speak of' (i.e., express) or enact particular sets of textual meanings. They 'speak from' (from a particular position) and they 'speak to' (to a particular audience), within institutional and social sites located in space and time: they are *acts of language*. They are events occurring in contexts and doing something in these contexts, with consequences for movement politics, wider socio-political processes, and power relations.

One the one hand, this entails analyzing movements' texts as strategically produced within specific relational contexts, that is: as attempts to realize certain ends. For example, as Resource Mobilization scholars have aptly noted, for mobilizing people's participation or institutional support around particular issues. On the other hand, besides the manifest intent, or the action immediately effected by the discursive practice itself, the analyst should consider more broadly what is being accomplished through a particular act of language. The notion of the *performativity* of political speech, as developed by Bourdieu, and a focus on the *actionability* of authorized language help to highlight some other important ways in which political actors "do things with language."

The conception of the *performativity* of language originates from Speech Acts Theory (Van Dijk, 1985a). In the founding work of Austin (1962), performatives are understood in linguistic terms as utterances that effect what they enunciate through the very act of enunciating (Fowler, 1991:87-88). Moving beyond Austin, French social theorist Bourdieu advocates the grounding of performativity in social and political struggles. Political performatives are "statements which seek to bring about what they state" (Bourdieu, 1991:225). They are utterances that aspire to bring into existence that which they enunciate. Performatives are central elements in the struggle to bring into existence, or force out of existence elements of social reality. These attempts to

institute social reality, or deinstitute what is instituted, are inseparable from struggles "to make and unmake groups," to impose as legitimate a vision or a revision of the divisions of the social world (Bourdieu, 1991:221).

The expression of collective identities by movements, in particular, can be analysed in this light as discursive practices that do a certain number of things. First, the enunciation of movement identities is a performative act that brings into existence the actor of politics—"that who represents." At the same time, these enunciations participate in the creation of the very subject who, it is claimed, "is supposed to be represented" (Hark, 1994:3), as the pronouncement of an identity performatively states the precedence of a specific subject position over many. The enunciation of collective identities by movement actors also works towards de-instituting already instituted categories and the social hierarchies they express and enact. Simultaneously, movements' representations operate to re-institute identity categories "under new terms" (those of a reappropriated, positive identity—Young, 1990:159-161), giving them new saliency. From 'indians' to 'First Nations,' from 'homosexuals' to 'lesbians and gays,' social groups are made and unmade through movement performatives and political actors are established. As a result, the balance of power of the social hierarchies these identities index is *de facto* altered.

By directly linking performatives to political struggle, Bourdieu more explicitly than most theorists of language, shifts the location of the "power of speech" from language to the agents of language. The constitutive properties of language, the effectiveness of performatives (or of any other linguistic feature) are not to be derived from linguistic constructions alone, nor from the sole communication skills of the speakers. Rather, the power of language is a form of delegated power. It is a power bestowed on speech either by the authority of a social institution, or the authority of the group ('those who are represented') which authorizes certain sets of linguistic practices by authorizing itself

85

to use them (Bourdieu, 1992:109,129).

Another way in which language functions as a mode of action is through its *actionability*. Linguistic practices are indexical of social action. Not only do they point to certain types of actions in given contexts (Lemke, 1990:189), but the social meanings encoded in language are acted upon. This actionability is not a property of language in itself, but a property "authorized" by institutions and groups.

The way identities, relationships and categories of the social are defined in language matters: it makes a difference for the type and direction of people's action—or inaction (Purvis and Hunt, 1993:474; Bourdieu, 1982:127-128). More fundamentally, the war of interpretations in which movements are engaged can be viewed as battles over the power to establish authoritative definitions that imply "acts and interventions" (Fraser, 1989:166). Walker's analysis of the discursive struggle around the issue of wife-battering in Canada is instructive in this regard:

86

> As "Women's movement activists struggled with professionals for control over the terms in which the issue was to be recognized and acted upon," [...] "the struggle [became] one of contestation over whose knowledge will define the situation, who is to be held to blame, and *what kind of action will be taken by whom*." (Walker, 1990:18). (my emphasis)

Defining the issue as "domestic dispute" locates the problem within the Criminal Code and the purview of its law enforcement agencies, whereas "family violence" channels invervention within the practices of social work professionals (Walker, 1990;11, 14). By contrast, "wife-battering" refers to Canadian women's groups' struggle for feminist services and for social solutions countering male violence.

If the constitutive character of language is the object of the struggles for the fixation of social meanings in which movements engage, it is not only from the more abstract point of view of

embedding new identities, relations and representations in 'norms and codes,' policies and programs, or in the 'democratic project.' The discursive practices of the actors also generate and enable (Weir, 1993:242)—or conversely, foreclose and preempt—social action. The legitimation, if not the institutionalization, of specific actionable meanings has consequences for the subsequent pursuit of movement politics—as well as for the daily life of people (as the example from Walker also suggests).

Language As a Bounded Mode of Action

As a social mode of action, language typically operates within parameters that pose limits to the possibilities to signify and to resignify. The limits placed on 'what can be said' are also limits on 'what can be done' by social agents engaged in social struggle. The bounded nature of linguistic and discursive practices is another important feature of language as a dimension of the exercise of, and struggle over power. Movements' efforts to (re)constitute social reality and to impose new actionable meanings run against and have to break through these limits, or 'effects of closure,' embedded in language-in-use.

87

A first series of effects of closure are the limits placed on speech before speech can be there, limits that preempt the alternative to be expressed. If, to paraphrase Foucault (1984:127), discourse, or language, is a violence we do to things/to the world, the ways we arrest the flux of social reality potentially also arrest our possibilities of knowing and acting on the world within certain types of patterns. More specifically, these limits take place at the level of the *doxa*. That is, at the level of the classification schemes, categories, relationships, etc., that are the most entrenched in what we call 'common sense.' Widespread and largely accepted, elements of the doxa usually go unquestioned (Maingueneau, 1991:247-248; Angenot, 1989:14, 160). Women organization's counter discourse production, with its explicit objective of "changing the mentalities" (Masson and Tremblay, 1993:177), is aimed at the doxa. Their speech repositions 'women'

as subjects and agents of non-habitual social processes and in new relationships with the other actors and objects of these processes. These enunciations are attempts to re-open what it is possible to say about women and what it is possible for women to do.

The expression of the unexpressed is also foreclosed by the existing range of meanings socially available to signify the world. Some "ways of being cannot be spoken because the people who live them have no language for them" (Cain, 1994:84), and cannot be acted upon in socially transformative ways until people do have a language for them. A "labour of enunciation" (Bourdieu, 1991:129) has to occur in relation to this emergent speech. Under women's movements efforts, for example, the unease, the shame, the unspeakability of certain social situations have been (re)interpreted and (re)named. The new terms of "'sexism,' 'sexual harassment,' 'marital, date and acquaintance rape,' 'labor force sex-segregation,' 'the double shift,' and 'wife-battery'" have contributed to remake, Fraser argues, "entire regions of social discourse" (1992:179). Proposing new categories, new meanings to reinterpret the group's experience of the social world, as well as bringing into existence some of the ineffable (Bourdieu, 1991:129), some of the unthinkable (Cain, 1994) components of the experience of lived social relations, movements constitute a new actionable knowledge in the form of new sets of meanings that are made available as basis for political action.

Effects of closure not only operate on 'speech before speech can be there,' but also on the 'speech that is.' *Discourses* limit both linguistic practices (the textual meanings that can be enunciated) and discursive practices as events (whether and how these events can occur). There are two main avenues through which 'discourse' is usually acknowledged as effecting closure. The first one stresses the regularities—or fixations—of meanings in the linguistic practices associated with particular socio-enunciative positions that are also positions in a field of power. In this sense, 'discourse' is usually understood as sets of conventionalized

fixations that bound institutionally positioned speakers to particular ways of signifying. Discourses

> define, describe and delimit what it is possible to say and not to say (and by extension—what it is possible to do and not to do) with respect to the area of concern of that institution, whether marginally or centrally. [...]organise and give structure to the manner in which a particular topic, object, process is to be talked about. [...]provide descriptions, rules, permissions and prohibitions of social and individual actions. (Kress cited in Yeatman, 1990:164).

Discourses constrain what can be said and what can be done by given institutional actors. 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.

A second way in which discourses effect closure is through what Foucault identifies as their "external conditions of possibility" (1984:127). That is, through the rules of the discursive economies that bound the very enunciation of discourses. By this, Foucault points to the implicit inscriptions of power that make it possible or impossible for particular statements or meaning-making practices to occur at all in, or from, specific institutional positions. In this perspective, he sums up an ensemble of "procedures of exclusion" through which not only the objects of discourse ('what can be talked about'), but also the site, the circumstances and ways of speech, as well the speaking subject her/himself are limited, rarefied, foreclosed.

Women's movement organizations in Canada, for instance, venture since the 1980s on the terrain of economic policy. Their discursive interventions re-encode in gender terms the objects of conventional economic discourse such as free-trade or the deficit. We can see from Brodie's account (1994:30) that women organizations have been denied so far the status of legitimate

speakers on the institutional (state) sites where economic policy is discussed. Their alternative discourse is dismissed and its implications therefore preempted. The respective range of legitimate 'women issues' and of appropriate 'economic issues' remains curtailed as well. The effective closure of this site on the speaker, its speech and the potential actionability of the latter is undeniably an expression and an effect of the exercise of relations of power.

Effects of closure on the speech 'to be' and on the speech 'that is' appear as much an important part of what is at stake in social movements' struggles on the terrain of the symbolic than the meanings themselves. Among the things that oppositional social actors 'do with language' are discursive practices that attempt, and sometimes succeed, in opening up the fields and the sites of meaning-making production, liquefying closure and setting up new parameters for further political action.

CONCLUSION

90

The recent interest for the symbolic dimension of collective action, and for its intertwining with questions of strategy and politics is among the most interesting developments in social movement theory today. Yet, as a fair number of scholars have remarked, the field remains ill-equipped to fully appreciate the role played by symbolic constructs in movement activity. It is my contention that the pursuit of this inquiry requires moving away from Resource Mobilizations' understanding of symbolic constructions as simple rhetorical 'tools' in the hands of movement activists and their opponents. The relationship between 'the symbolic' and power is more intimate, and its reaches have further implications in terms of social life and social structure. As underscored by Melucci and explored in a more detailed manner by Laclau and Mouffe, the symbolic is more adequately conceptualized as an intrinsic dimension of the exercise of power, and of the political struggles over the power to constitute social reality.

In this light, a promising avenue for social movement theory

is, I suggest, to engage more extensively with the theorizing (and, eventually, the methodologies[13]) that critical approaches to the study of language and discourse have to offer. This engagement produces a revision of social movement research orientations in particular directions. Namely, it stresses the need for a politically-oriented analysis of movement meaning-making practices that pays attention to the specificity of the language in which movements' meanings and struggles over meanings are couched. This is not promoting the return to a classical, fine-grained analysis of political ideologies. Nor does it amount to considering movements' struggles as a textual "contest between competing tropes"[14] or, in a postmodern fashion, as the disembodied confrontation of contending discourses. Rather, it proposes to understand the ways in which language and discourses are implicated and put to work, as agent-driven modes of action, in political projects of dominance and change.

The action perspective I am arguing for directs the attention towards analysing the linguistic and discursive practices of concrete actors interacting within a political field, and the consequences of these practices for continuity and change within wider social processes. There are two distinct, although related, components to this proposition.

First, it advocates a detailed form-and-meaning analysis of movements' linguistic practices. In this chapter, I have repeatedly made a case for the analysis of the particulars of movements' representations. I have underlined the contingency of movement identities and interests, the variability and ambiguity of movement projects and politics, and the relational and consequential character of frames. If language is, furthermore, theorized as a constitutive, performative and actionable mode of action, then the examination of the linguistic specificity of movement meanings cannot be avoided. What social movement research needs is not so much a "descent into discourse" than a linguistically-sensitive analysis of real instances of people saying and writing things (Fairclough, 1992:57) in the course of collective action.

91

Second, integral to this proposition is the recognition that text-internal analysis of meanings is not enough. Acts of language occur in specific historical, socio-political, and strategic contexts, and do something in these contexts. Textual meanings have to be located within the "context of situation" (Halliday, 1989) and discursive constraints that bound their production and their enunciation. They must be situated within the political field and the institutional sites where they get played out as the discursive practices of movement actors interacting and struggling with other actors, and examined in their outcomes and consequences in terms of subsequent political, institutional, and social action[15]. In addition, discursive practices have to be inscribed in the socially and historically located strategies and projects of the social subjects that produce them (Maingueneau, 1991). Finally, these practices cannot be treated in isolation from the larger social processes they contribute to realize, or to alter (Threadgold, 1989:103).

Placing the emphasis on a linguistically-sensitive, politically-oriented approach to movements' symbolic production would certainly enable a more in-depth, sharpened analysis of specific discursive struggles over meanings, namings, and framings. More fundamentally, however, and as I have tried to make clear in this article, a focus on the language/power relationship opens new grounds for our understanding of the symbolic challenge of movements, and broadens the scope of our inquiry into the role played by 'the symbolic' in the unfolding of movement politics.

NOTES

1. This article is the revised version of a chapter to be published in William K. Carroll (ed.) *Organizing Dissent (2nd ed.)*. I would like to thank Lorna Weir, Heather Jon Maroney, Bill Carroll, Antje Wiener, and one anonymous referee for their critical and insightful comments on earlier drafts of this paper.

2. For a brief history of RMT's turn towards issues of meaning construction see Donati (1992:136-137), or Benford (1993:197-199). For a more in-depth questioning of the rational choice assumptions at the hearth of

the RM model see McClurg Mueller (1992), and Ferree (1992).

3. The field of sociolinguistics divides into two very different theoretical strands (for an introduction see Van Dijk, 1985a, 1985b). The "Anglo-american" position is influenced by the ethnography of speaking and by micro-interactionist traditions. The "European" (or "Continental") tradition owes more to its engagement with early semiotics, structuralism, Marxism and poststructuralism.

4. The other route indicated by Melucci under the concept of movements' symbolic challenge is the inquiry into the new "ways of life" and "cultural models" developed by oppositional movements. Versions of this line of inquiry have been proposed by Escobar (1992) and Starn (1992).

5. Semiotic systems include linguistic as well as non-linguistic systems of signs (such as dress codes, visual symbols, and non-verbal expressions). For an accessible introduction to social semiotics and the study of semiotic practices, see Lemke (1990).

6. The idea that movement identities, interests, and political projects are the object of a process of political hegemony that occurs "internally," amid the heterogeneous subjects and organizations that compose a movement I derive from Michaud (1992: 212-213).

93

7. The challenge from poststructuralism and from the non-Western feminist critique has made it impossible to speak of "women," or "women's interests" in universalizing terms. On these questions see in particular Riley (1988), Mohanty (1992), Nicholson (1994), Pringle and Watson (1990).

8. Despite much variation in the use of the term 'discourse' nowadays, this notion, as used by critical discourse analysts as well as in Laclau and Mouffe (1985) is not synonymous with 'language.' Rather, discourses are expressed through linguistic means—this among other mechanisms. Discourses are, more fundamentally, *sets of rules* bounding meaning-making practices, as we will see later in this section.

9. The schools of critical linguistics (Fairclough, 1992; Fowler, 1991), systemic functional grammar (Halliday, 1989; Weir, 1995), social semiotics (Threadgold, 1989), and the French school of discourse analysis (see overview in Maingueneau, 1991), are usually identified with 'critical discourse analysis' (CDA). Reference to earlier theorizing by Bourdieu, and by Foucault (first published in French in the 1970s and 1980s) is a feature of many of these works. For a mapping of CDA's orientations and a brief overview of the different schools, see Van Dijk

(1993:249-251).

10. My use of the term 'text' in these pages is limited to its commonsense acceptation and includes written and spoken linguistic production.

11. On this issue, see note 12.

12. The respective weight of language, or discourse, and of "non-discursive" practices in constituting social reality is currently the object of heated debates. Postmodern attempts to present all-encompassing versions of "discourse" as the source of the social (as, for example, in Laclau and Mouffe's version) are resisted by most critical discourse analysts. Their position rather acknowledges that there is a dynamic, dialectical relationship between non-discursive and discursive practices, between lived existence and what can be captured by language and discourse. On this last point see in particular Cain (1994).

13. An overview of the methodological apparatus available for doing linguistically-based discourse analysis can be found in Maingueneau (1991). Good examples of empirical works using these methods include Fowler (1991), Fairclough (1993), Van Dijk (1993), and Weir (1995).

14. A position attributed by Tarrow to deconstructionists (Tarrow, 1994:119-121).

94

15. See Walker (1990) for a good example of this type of work.

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