Metaphoric Analysis of a Shipyard Union Dispute: Theory and Method in the Cultural Analysis of Collective Action

Rather than treating grievances and political opportunities as objective, given, and exogenous to organized movement groups, cultural analysts of social movements have recently focused on cognitive and linguistic processes by which factors relevant to collective behavior are themselves interpreted collectively. Theoretical and empirical studies within this tradition have investigated an array of issues including cognition, ideology, and identity (e.g. Johnston and Klandermans 1995; Kubal 1998; Polletta 1998; Tarrow 1992; Jasper 1997). Much recent work, including papers by Fine (1995), Billig (1995, 1992, 1991), Johnston (1995, 2002, 2005), MacLean (1998), and Steinberg (1998, 1999, 2000), has begun to focus explicitly on the role of language within social movements and other political processes. Fine, for example, examined narrative framing on the part of VOCAL (“Victims of Child Abuse Laws”), a social movement founded in response to a series of well-publicized cases involving parents wrongly charged with abusing their children (Fine 1995: 138). Steinberg (2000; 1999), in a more elaborate series of studies of the rhetoric of organized cotton spinners and weavers in early 19th century England, has developed a “dialogic” approach to social movement culture inspired by the early twentieth century literary theorists Bakhtin and Volosinov, and by the writings of a number of “rhetorical” social psychologists, including Billig (1995, 1992, 1991). McLean (1998), taking an alternate theoretical tack, has investigated the political culture of Renaissance Italy through both quantitative and qualitative content analyses of patronage-seeking letters. His results show the discourse evident in the letters to be irreducible to the social positions of the writers. Instead, the writers were found to develop “frames of meaning” by assembling cues available from their cultural backgrounds, in order to build relationships and improve their social standings and careers. As with the work of Fine and Steinberg, McLean treats political culture as an analytically autonomous factor, irreducible to social and political structures, analyzable via content analysis, and having demonstrable sociopolitical consequences.

While cultural analysts generally view culture—approximately, the “symbolic-expressive” aspect of human social behavior (Wuthnow 1984)—as both irreducible to economic and political factors and
relevant to collective action, there is a lack of consensus on several key theoretical points, including (1) the apt unit of cultural analysis, (2) the intersubjective coherence of culture, and (3) the degree to which public rhetoric reflects grass roots ideologies and symbolic-linguistic practice.

1. Units of cultural analysis. To the present, cultural sociology continues to be characterized by varying views about the most fundamental units of culture—a debate that subsumes the definition of culture itself (cf. Alexander 1990; Wuthnow et al. 1984; Wuthnow and Witten 1988). The social movement literature is similarly encompasses different views on how best to conceptualize and operationalize culture. In particular, one debate centers on a split between emphasizing, on the one hand, cognition and the human psyche, and on the other, language and discourse.

The predominant tradition in the study of interpretive practices of social movements, “frame analysis” (Snow, Rochford, Worden, and Benford 1986; Benford and Snow 2000; Snow 2004) has followed Goffman in conceptualizing frames largely in terms of individual cognition. Frames are interpretive schemas that enable individuals “to locate, perceive, identify, and label” occurrences within their life space and their world at large (Goffman 1974). Collective action frames in particular perform this interpretive function by simplifying and condensing aspects of an otherwise unpredictable world, in ways that are “intended to mobilize potential adherents and constituents, to garner bystander support, and to demobilize antagonists” (Benford 1998: 197; cf. also Eyerman and Jamison 1991).

Contemporary students of social movements have argued that by largely ignoring a wide body of literature in the analysis of language, frame analysis has bypassed a critical path by which culture informs action. In particular, by emphasizing cognition over discourse, frame analysis has (1) retained an overly instrumentalist and individualistic theoretical outlook (Donati 1992; Polletta 1999), (2) elided the collective, i.e. cultural, nature of interpretation (Polletta 1997), (3) remained characterized by conceptual ambiguities (Zald 1996), and (4) failed to evolve rigorous methods for analyzing, rather than describing, interpretive frames (Benford 1997; Johnston 1995: 68). In an extended critique, Steinberg (1998) has taken frame analysis to task for failing to problematize the role of discourse in interpretive processes, and for consequently inadequately defining the relationship between frames and ideology, and between
cognitive processes and macro social phenomena. With Billig, who has argued that “anticognitivism” (1995: 68) is an appropriate starting point for the linguistic analysis of social movements, Steinberg has made the most pointed argument for the replacement of cognition with discourse in cultural approaches to collective behavior.

2. The coherence of movement culture. Cultural sociology has in many respects inherited cultural anthropology’s tense ambivalence toward construing cultures as coherent, unified systems of meaning (Sewell 1999; Smelser 1992). Where cultural anthropologists of the 1960s and ‘70s tended to represent cultures as neatly integrated wholes that were consensual, mostly resistant to change, and clearly bounded, in the ‘80s and ‘90s, increasing attention was paid to acts of local resistance to dominant cultures, to change over time, to the weak boundaries between cultures, and to the complexity and “loose integration” of modern culture.

Within the study of social movements, both sides of the coherence issue are well represented. Fine (1995, 1982, 1979), for example, has made perhaps the clearest and most consistent case for viewing social movement cultures as highly coherent and bounded. He has introduced the term “idioculture” in order to denote the uniqueness of the internal cultures created, over time, within social movement organizations. Within such intensely interacting groups, members are, through discourse, “cohesively linked” (1995: 129) to one another. While not necessarily homogenous, social movement cultures are nonetheless bounded, distinguishing insiders and outsiders, and “constitutive” in the sense of creating, rather than resulting from, meaning, interaction, and social structure.

Conversely, Steinberg (1999, 1998) has consistently argued that social movement cultures are characterized by a fragmentation of meaning, idiosyncratic subjective experience, and individual acts of resistance. By these lights, discourse is not constitutive of the group, nor does it serve to link members into a community, but is instead “fraught with underlying ambiguities and contradictions” (p. 853). Mirroring the turn within cultural anthropology of the past several decades, Steinberg posits that group culture is not consensual or taken for granted, but is instead structured through a “conflict-riven process of meaning” (p. 854)—one that reflects, rather than creates, social structures.
3. Public rhetoric and the grass roots. Benford (1997) has argued that the empirical literature on social movement framing suffers from a pervasive “elite bias” due largely to the methods most frequently employed by researchers, which generally include interviewing movement leaders and key activists, or analyzing media accounts or movement-generated or related documents (Benford 1997: 421). Benford argues that this tendency has led investigators to elide “non-elite framings” and the construction of “folk ideologies” (p. 422). Further, intramovement disputes or “frame contests” (Ryan 1991) are very rarely the subjects of research, yet they are a ubiquitous feature of the internal politics of movements (Benford 1993). Thus while elite rhetoric is surely more easily procured than is group discourse, this methodological convenience has come at a cost, and we currently have no analytic means for understanding the degree of consistency between a movement’s public statements and its grass roots discourse.

LANGUAGE AND COGNITION

Johnston (1995, 2002, 2005) has sought to inform debates within cultural analysis through investigation of the complex interaction of cognition and language (p. 220). This seems eminently sensible, given the extraordinary development of cognitive science as an independent discipline, the influence of the “cognitive revolution” across the humanities and social sciences, and innumerable experimental demonstrations of the existence and pertinence of mental imagery (e.g. Shepard and Cooper 1982), and of the influence of cognitive schemas on language (Holland and Quinn 1987; Lakoff and Johnson 1999; Fernandez 1991).

The basic idea guiding Johnston’s brand of “micro-discourse analysis” is that, through close attention to language, “the analyst can reconstruct a schema that systematically shows the relationships between concepts and experience represented in speech” (Johnston 1995: 220). The method devised by Johnston to accomplish this is too elaborate to cover here in detail. It involves line-by-line analysis of transcribed interviews with social movement participants, whose utterances are characterized in terms of their pragmatic intent, the social role they convey, and other interpretive categories.
While Johnston claims that the methods he has evolved are “only rough” and await further development, his are the only methods yet developed that even attempt to systematically reveal the cognitive frameworks linking language and thought within collective behavior. Yet in terms of the theoretical disagreements addressed in this paper, Johnston’s method of interpreting the interview responses of movement participants is deficient on several fronts. First, the approach is overly individualistic both in theory and method. His professed aim is to aggregate, based on the linguistic practice of a single individual, to the level of group discourse. Surely movement participants, when questioned in a formal interview, will behave, speak, and presumably think differently than participants engaged in intragroup discourse. And we currently have no way of knowing, with any precision, how the behavior of individuals engaged in collective action differs from that of solitary persons.

Second, despite his claims, Johnston’s content analytic methods are ultimately more social-psychological than cognitive-linguistic. For Johnston, the analysis of “schemata” incorporate a variety of phenomena, including “the speech situation,” “social roles,” “pragmatic intent,” and “tone, pitch, cadence, [and] melodic cues,” all of which are standard concerns of sociolinguists, but are not cognitive per se. These phenomena are quite distinct from cognitive schemata, mental imagery, or any of the standard grist of cognitive science and cognitive linguistics. In the hopes of extending Johnston’s theoretical and methodological program, it is to this latter area of inquiry—the quickly developing field of cognitive linguistics—that I now turn to lay out my approach to the role of culture in social movements. I refer to the approach as metaphoric analysis because it involves focusing on the occurrence of figurative speech in movement discourses, and role of figurative speech in structuring social movement discourses.

New directions in the study of language and cognition

Given the turn to language and cognition within philosophy, literary theory, and the human sciences, it is perhaps surprising that sociology—in particular cultural analysis—has not been much influenced by the emerging cross-disciplinary study of what has come to be known as cognitive linguistics (e.g. Lakoff 1987; Lakoff and Johnson 1980; Gibbs 1994; Fauconnier and Sweetser 1996). Diverse research traditions
have arrived at the view that language is, at base, a carrier of figurative signs and symbols—a view traceable to the founders of the field of semiotics, including Peirce (1991) and de Saussure (1972 [1909]; cf. Giddens 1987: 196). Linguists, cognitive scientists, and anthropologists have begun to investigate the intimate interrelationships of language and cognitive faculties such as mental imagery and cognitive schemata. While the sociological study of collective behavior has mostly remained aloof from these efforts, the emerging approach is mirrored in recent sociological views of the evolution of cognition and language. Jonathan Turner (1996: 14), for example, has proposed that since vision is the dominant sense modality, and since the pre-wiring for language developed among hominids (early humans) with enhanced control and integration of sense modalities under vision, cognition is probably visually based. Further, spoken and written language are, evolutionarily, added on to more primal visual bases of cognition; and thus the most basic units of communication are gestalts (or “folk models”: cognitive and visual configurations; see Holland and Quinn 1987) rather than information sequences.

Goldberg similarly argues that even the simplest sentences encode, as their central senses, types of nonverbal events that are basic to human experience (1998: 203-220). Event types are seen as special cases of “conceptual archetypes” (Langacker 1991)—recurrent, sharply differentiated aspects of everyday human experience. These experientially based models are seized upon in language as the prototypical values of basic concepts. Taken together, these views have several implications for the study of cognition and language, and suggest that language may be basically figurative in nature. That is, human language does not operate, as computer languages do, in terms of information sequences and syntactic rules. Rather, written and spoken language depends on semantics, on conceptual archetypes based on subjective bodily experiences (such as up-down, in-out, straight-curved, hot-cold etc.). Moreover, the set of conceptual archetypes is finite (Goldberg 1998: 205). The entire set of archetypes can be thought of as marking, on a cognitive-linguistic level, the structure and limits of the “repertoire” (Tilly 1992) or “toolkit” (Swidler 1986) that constitutes, in prominent sociological conceptions, culture.

Conceiving of cognition as encoding basic experiences by way of mental models has had major implications for both theory and empirical linguistic research. The study of figurative thought and the way
it may be manifested linguistically in metaphor and other tropes, has gained prominence (Fernandez 1991). Experimental research by cognitive scientists and psychologists supports the view that figurative language is not only ubiquitous, but plays a significant role in shaping “problem setting” (Schön 1979), decision making, and behavior. For example, Read and his colleagues found that metaphor use in political communications increased both participants’ recall of passages and speeches, and linking of written passages and orators (Read, Cesa, Jones, and Collins 1990). In a subsequent study, the experimenters found that metaphor use influenced participants’ attitudes toward the subject of a written passage (in this case, seat belt legislation). Johnson and Taylor found that positively and negatively valenced metaphors embedded in newspaper articles affected participants’ ratings of both the issues and persons mentioned in the articles (Johnson and Taylor 1981). Similarly, Bosman found that metaphorical descriptions of a political party systematically influenced participants. All this suggests that figures of speech such as metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, simile, and so on, all matter when we pay attention to how people talk. Insofar as movement participants endeavor to be liked by potential recruits and by one another, have their ideas remembered, and alter the political attitudes of others, the images and experiences embedded in language should affect mobilization.

DATA

The data are from one of the most notable episodes in modern British labor history: the 1971 “work-in” by the unions of the Upper Clyde Shipyards in Scotland. The Upper Clyde Shipyards was a consortium of four shipyards—the Govan, Linthouse, Stenhouse, and Clydebank yards—allocated along the Upper Clyde River in the north of Scotland. During the summer of 1971, the union was threatened by several government plans to divide the four shipyards, to sell off one or more yards, and to close down others. In July, the 8,000 workers of the Upper Clyde took possession of the shipyards and, despite the mandate of the Tory government, continued to work. What came to be known as the U.C.S. “work-in” was the largest of the 190 workplace occupations that occurred in Britain between 1971 and 1975 (Woolfson 1976).
Ultimately, the union was successful in staving off attempts to close any of the shipyards. In October of 1972, a new contract preserving the four yards intact was signed by the union and the government. The contract was considered a major victory for the union, both in the popular press and by the union members themselves (BBC 1972; Hay 1972), as the Tory government was pressured into a wide reversal of its industrial relations policy for the region, and was forced to pay for a massive refloatation of the loans financing the U.C.S. Further, the work-in helped catalyze subsequent workplace unrest, including demonstrations by dock workers in Pentonville, and anti-unemployment strikes by miners (Woolfson 1976).

During the summer of 1971, the conservative regional minister Nicholas Ridley argued in a series of letters to his fellow ministers that the shipyards of the Upper Clyde should be divided and sold to private industry at low prices. For Ridley, whose family had owned the biggest shipyard on the Tyne River, labor agitation at the U.C.S. threatened to encourage wage increases in other shipyards in the region. Unbeknownst to Ridley or the government, U.C.S. union members had attained a copy of the now infamous “Ridley report,” and waited until the second week of September to publish it. By then the government, led by Ridley himself, had closed the Upper Clyde Shipyards. The report, published in the local and national press, summed up Ridley’s earlier discussions with other shipbuilders on the Clyde, and spelled out his findings regarding the financial viability of the four yards. In his view, the yards on the Upper Clyde were a “cancer” whose militancy was forcing up wages elsewhere. The profits of the remaining private yards were suffering as a consequence. So, concluded Ridley, the government should “put in a government ‘butcher’ to cut up the U.C.S. and sell (cheaply) to the Lower Clyde.” The report, and particularly the term “butcher,” were seized on by the union leadership, as will be seen below.

The ideal data set for exploring a social movement organization’s internal discursive culture would be detailed transcripts of a group’s discussions over time. Such data would allow for an investigation of unfiltered popular language, though the data would preferably cover a lengthy period, rather than only brief encounters. Luckily, just this kind of data set was constructed by Charles Woolfson in the 1970s (see Foster and Woolfson, 1986). Woolfson, who was a social science doctoral student at the
University of Glasgow at the time, recorded meetings of the shop stewards of the Upper Clyde Shipyards in Scotland during their 1971 “work-in,” which turned out to be one of the most notable episodes in modern British labor history. Woolfson later transcribed the recordings. These transcripts were analyzed by Woolfson and later by Collins (1996, 1999). The transcripts are exceptional in their level of detail, their completeness, and the length of time they cover. The transcripts are of exceptional quality, in that they are rich in nuances of local pronunciation,¹ and appear to comprehensively record every statement made in the meeting. The full set of transcripts comprises three volumes covering a span of just over a year, and includes meetings of the shop stewards only, mass meetings of the shop stewards and the rank and file, and several press conferences and interviews with the union’s leaders. Transcripts of one of the stewards’ meetings, in August 1971, are used in this chapter.

The meeting examined here is a relatively early one, and revolves around the British government plan, articulated in the “Ridley Report,” to close down some or all of the four yards. Faced with this new threat, the debate in the meeting primarily concerned tactics to thwart the government plan. These transcripts were selected because . . . The stewards, including their chairman James Airlie, Jimmy Reid, Sammy Barr, Jim McCrindle, Willie Robertson, Alex Bill, and a number of others, are divided among themselves over whether or not to encourage Archibald Kelly, a capitalist entrepreneur, to make a bid to the government for the four yards. The upside of the possible bid is that it would demonstrate to the government and the public that the yards are commercially viable as one unit. This might pressure the government to retain all four yards. However, the potential buyer has a reputation for buying shipyards and selling them off for scrap. So the downside is that if we were to make a bid for the four yards, it might somehow go through, and the union could face the complete loss of all of their four shipyards. Importantly, the transcripts show the stewards to have been divided over whether or not to encourage the bid. James Airlie, Alex Bill, Sammy Barr, and Willie Robertson supported the bid, while a clearly definable contingent opposed it. Each faction was faced with the task of winning over their fellow stewards.
Two aspects of this particular dispute require mention. First, the faction in favor of negotiation with Archibald Kelly (the potential buyer) led by the chairman James Airlie, won. Second, initial analyses indicate that the stewards in favor of negotiation spoke slightly more than did the opposing faction. Out of a total of 1023 lines spoken, stewards favoring negotiation accounted for 537 lines from the transcripts (52%). The opposition faction accounted for the remaining 486 (48%).

The full set of transcripts also contains several press conferences and interviews with union leaders. The press conference examined here was held September 23, 1971, and was the first following the August 12 stewards’ meeting. It was held by James Airlie and Jimmy Reid—both of whom were present at the stewards’ meeting. In it they discuss the union’s strategy and position with regard to negotiations with the government. As an example of the type of public discourse often examined in research on social movement framing, the transcribed press conference provides, in combination with the transcripts of the stewards’ meeting, an opportunity to compare grass roots and public linguistic practice.

**METHODS**

The content analytic methods developed in this chapter are substantially new. Their purpose is to provide rigor in extracting figurative language from the transcripts so that the cultural analysis of collective action might be more empirically grounded. In introducing these methods—which I label metaphoric analysis—an epistemological note is called for. Believing, with Walter Lippmann, that for the individual, political reality is the intersection of “the world outside and the pictures in our heads” (1925), these methods are aimed to get at both that which is signified (external reality, the world outside) and signifying symbols (clues to subjective meaning). Philosophers of language and cognitive linguists have come up with numerous terms roughly synonymous with signified and signifier (e.g. Richards 1925; de Saussure 1972[1909]; Peirce 1991). Here I employ the standard vocabulary of contemporary cognitive linguistics: the term “topic” denotes an externally real phenomenon, and “vehicle,” the metaphor, metonym, etc., conveying the meaning of the topic. Folk models are thus figurative models—vehicles—of real sociopolitical factors relevant to the collective.
Content analysis of the transcripts was performed by the author. Coding involved exhaustive analysis of every sentence of every shop steward who spoke at the meeting. References to any of three topics were extracted and coded. Based on several strands of contemporary social theory, these topics were chosen for their presumed relevance to the union members and for their codability. These include social actions, the general situation, and instances of reflexive language.

Social actions. Gamson’s (1992) work on political language suggests that for social movements to gain adherents, the actions of individuals and social groups must be interpreted in such a way as to spur contention. In particular, Gamson argues, potential movement participants are more likely to mobilize if they adopt an “injustice frame” by which the actions of an outgroup are presented as morally unacceptable. The crystallization of an injustice frame “requires a consciousness of motivated human actors who carry some of the onus for bringing about harm and suffering” (p. 29). Based on peer-group interviews of members of working-class Boston communities, Gamson found evidence for the existence and effects of injustice frames. First, he argued for a strong overall relationship between injustice frames in media discourse and popular discourse, on issues ranging from affirmative action to nuclear power (p. 58). Second, participants in the peer group conversations who adopted an injustice frame were also more likely to adopt an “adversarial frame” specifying “a clearly defined them” who are perpetrators of unjust social actions (p. 112). Third, the adoption of an injustice frame was strongly associated with support for remedial collective action. Thus this theoretical approach, and the empirical evidence for the effects of the framing of social actions, suggests that members of disputing factions in the shipyard stewards’ meeting will use differing forms of language to talk about the actions planned and executed by relevant social actors. For example, they will frame the actions of the British government as adversarial, unjust, and immoral, or else as rational and morally within bounds.

The problem setting. While particular representations of social groups and actions may be necessary for mobilization, they are arguably insufficient without a more general guiding image of the situation facing a group. Schon (1979) has labeled this process “problem setting,” and argues that much of the interpretive work shaping social decision making occurs at this initial stage of issue framing or
interpreting the situation. The idea is that social problems are not given: they are constructed by human beings in their initial attempts at making sense of complex and troubling situations. The initial assessment of a situation determines both the kinds of purposes and values people seek to realize, and the directions in which they seek solutions. For Schon, the interpretation of social issues often takes the form of stories or scripts built around core generative metaphors: “Each story conveys a very different view of reality and represents a special way of seeing. From a situation that is vague, ambiguous, and indeterminate . . . each story selects and names, “different features and relations which become the ‘things’ of the story ...[which] proceeds via generative metaphor” (146). This view—that mental frames built around core metaphors structure patterns of social interpretation—suggests that within the stewards’ meeting, members of disputing factions are likely to use different figures of speech to talk about the general situation facing the union.

Reflexivity. Benford and Hunt (1994) argue that processes of “counterframing” and “reframing” are endemic to social movements. Here, movement participants question frames with which they disagree, and offer alternatives. In a similar vein, much research on social movement framing has tended to emphasize the conscious and instrumental manipulation of interpretive frames. By this perspective, frames are “deliberately chosen worldviews, which can be embraced or suspended depending on leaders’ perceptions of strategic imperatives” (Polletta 1997). Clearly, the issue of whether participants in social movements question cultural models or else enact them in a taken-for-granted manner speaks to the question of the intersubjective coherence of such models. As such, it has been a source of debate and a catalyst for research. For example Steinberg (2000; 1999), in his studies of the rhetoric of organized cotton spinners and weavers in early nineteenth-century England, has shown how the workers came to configure available ideological frames to suit their own purposes. Steinberg argues that the labor leaders were well aware that they were transforming oppressive ideological material (in this case the dominant British theories of political economy espoused by factory owners) into the stuff of solidarity and political contention. This argument yields at least one correlate for a linguistic view of framing: that interlocutors are aware of (or capable of reflection on) the frames employed by themselves and others. The formal
term for linguistic reflexivity is *metalanguage* (in this case, perhaps more accurately *metapragmatics*: cf. Silverstein 1993). Thus, if counterframing has a metalinguistic aspect, and actors regularly reflect on, manipulate, and challenge linguistic frames, then members of disputing factions in the stewards’ debate would be expected to question the validity of each other’s linguistic frames.

**Coding scheme**

Based on the arguments above, the topics coded for in the content analysis include the *social actions* (i.e. tactics) planned or executed by each side, and the *problem setting* facing the union. Both metaphorical and non-metaphorical “vehicles” were coded. Also, instances of linguistic reflexivity were noted.

References to each of the three topics were coded in terms of a respective set of categories. For *social actions*, referring, for example, to the strategy of using a possible bid for the four yards by the capitalist Kelly as leverage against the government, or to government plans for the future of the shipyards, references were coded as either metaphoric (e.g. “butcher this industry”) or non-metaphoric (e.g. “it’s apolitical exercise”). For the *general situation* facing the union, references were coded as metaphorical (e.g. “the other hurdles we’ll have to cross”) or non-metaphoric (e.g. “long-term best interests of the workers”). Also, several statements concerning the union’s situation were coded as *reflexive statements* because they directly contradicted metaphoric assertions made by others.

**RESULTS**

The results of the content analysis are presented in Tables 1-3. Table 1 presents all mentions of *social actions*, Table 2 all mentions of the *problem setting* facing the union, including several reflexive statements (more on these later), and Table 3 a comparison of public and grass roots rhetoric. Tables 1-3 reveal a set of dramatic differences in the rhetoric of the opposing factions within the stewards’ meeting.

**Opposing folk models: pressure and violence**

The content analysis indicated that two linguistic signifiers recurred through the course of the stewards’ meeting: a “pressure” metaphor representing the social actions of the union itself, and a set of metaphors of a violent fight representing the union’s general situation—in particular, the relationship
between the union and the government. These metaphors were parts of the group’s ordinary discourse, as they are for many groups engaged in collective action. They are everyday metaphors that, because of the figurative nature of thought and language (Lakoff and Johnson 1980), structure larger systems of meaning. These metaphors were employed in distinct ways by two factions within the stewards’ meeting.

1. Pressure. The pro-negotiation faction employed a very limited set of metaphors to depict the union’s planned tactic to thwart government attempts to break up the yards (coded as a social action: see Table 1). This language revolved around a central “pressure” metaphor (cf. Kempton 1987, Gentner and Gentner 1983 for explications of similar models). From almost the start of the meeting, the chairman refers to the plan to pressure the government into negotiations.

there is also a political problem there, surely, the solution, if they want a way out, and I think the pressure’s building up, and they’re looking for a way out (UCS Transcripts: 3; all italics are mine)

The metaphor was repeated several times through the course of the meeting (see Table 3).

We feel it might no’ be the Kelly formulation but it’s the first start to it and it’ll place this government under considerable pressure. (UCS Transcripts: 5; all italics are mine)
I think here that if you’re gonnie reject any plan that will put the pressure on this government, it would be a mistake. (UCS Transcripts: 12)
It’s important politically and the pressure now goes on the government and that’s where we want to keep it. That’s the tactic as we see it. (UCS Transcripts: 15)

A second trope that is closely related to the pressure metaphor involved imagery of “smoking out” the government into the open. By soliciting a bid from the capitalist Kelly, the union would place the government in a politically awkward position, such that the government’s degree of commitment to the workers’ livelihood would be made public. This metaphor was repeated time and again-

It smokes this government out if we can get a bid for all four units because one of the points that Eden was making, that no-one yet was interested in eh bidding for the four units intact a) that would smoke them out and b) its important in oor opinion that to get a solution to this the government is in a dilemma (UCS Transcripts: 3)

I don’t think they’ll go for Kelly, I don’t think he’s got the eh eh the acumen or the ability to operate such a complex, that’s a personal point of view but it smokes the government out, it’s the first time anybody’s
publicly said that they’ll bid for the four units, but more important is the pressure can now go on from the the movement in order that the capital is made available for the reorganisation. (UCS Transcripts: 5)

it puts the government in a ludicrous position and as Jimmy Airlie says, it ’11 smoke them out . . . .in the open and I think we can use this for political propaganda. (UCS Transcripts: 14)

Noo, we’ve nae love for Kelly nor anyone else, that’s the idea of the exercise, to smoke this government oot (UCS Transcripts: 14)

As the stewards’ debate primarily concerned the wisdom of negotiating with Kelly, the hegemony of the pressure metaphor for this tactic is of great relevance. James Airlie and his fellow stewards who favored negotiation with Kelly framed their proposed social action by way of two closely related metaphors based on “pressure” imagery (of “pressuring” the government and “smoking them out” into the open). Attempts by the opposition to rework this frame were limited, and the opposition presented no alternative interpretation—perhaps because “pressure” metaphors were part of the stewards ordinary discourse, and thus taken for granted. However, while the pressure frame was ubiquitous, this trope for the union leadership’s planned tactic is more fully understood in the context of the abundance of violent conflict metaphors used by the faction of stewards opposed to the plan.

Table 1 about here

2. Fighting the [good] fight. Where the stewards in favor of negotiation rarely mentioned the government, the opposing faction continually rendered the government as an adversary, employing a rich set of interlinked metaphors to describe the government and its actions vis-à-vis the union. A statement by one of the stewards is indicative of much of the language used by the opposition side:

Right from the very start when the government announced their plan to axe the UCS, we mounted a campaign. . . . Alright, we’ve got the public sympathy, we’re getting money in, getting letters but the Government are still gonnie go ahead wither their bloody plan to axe the rest of us. (UCS transcripts: 25)
A great deal of the opposition rhetoric revolved around the metaphor of fighting the government. The conciliatory language of the pro-negotiation side is absent here. Instead, union-government relations are framed as an endless struggle:

Now I’m no’ naive enough to think that at the end of the day . . . there’ll be nae redundancies. I realize there would be. But at the same time, the fight here, the thing that’s kept us together is the fact that we’ve decided that not one of these sections will close down. (UCS transcripts: 10)

I think myself it’s a terrible mistake to listen to Kelly because Kelly’s ideas divide to me, are nae to us, no’ in the fight that we’ve put up, that I don’t, the fight that we’ve put up is quite simple. (UCS transcripts: 10)

You’re no fighting the Government, you’re only fightin ‘ private enterprise. The government’s aff the hook. He’s given this job getting them off the hook. (UCS transcripts: 15)

Jimmy, mainly because we’re in a fight against the government and they’re attempting to do away with the Upper, with the shipbuilding in the Upper Reaches . . . (UCS transcripts: 18)

It disnae matter what plan you’re doing, or what development of the plan, if it in any way attacks the livelihood of our fellow workers then we’ll fight it and fight it again. (UCS transcripts: 26)

Thus, fighting imagery was common in the discourse of members of the faction opposing negotiation. It captures their assessment of the problem, namely, that confrontation with the government and private capital was the real issue, and the stewards’ goal should be to defend the union brotherhood. This, of course, was not the position of the stewards in favor of negotiation (see Table 3), who used imagery more appropriate to talks—i.e. pressure metaphors.

Table 2 about here

Taken-for-granted categories

Questions of the reflexivity of social movement culture speak to issues of cultural coherence. If movement participants are continually reevaluating and openly questioning each other’s tropes and other rhetorical practices, then conceiving of culture as internally coherent and intersubjectively homogenous is
troublesome. Instead, a more postmodern view of culture as fragmented and wide open to idiosyncratic subjective interpretation would be warranted. Thus reflexivity is central to theoretical debate within the cultural analysis of social movements (e.g. Johnston 1995, 2002, 2005; Johnston and Klandermans 1995; Steinberg 1998) and within cultural sociology generally (Sewell 1999; Wuthnow, Hunter, Bergesen, and Kurzweil 1984).

In the case of the shipyard stewards’ August 12 meeting, there is essentially no evidence of linguistic reflexivity. Union members on the opposing sides never questioned each other’s linguistic practices as such. Rather, in several instances, stewards altered their interlocutor’s metaphor to suit their own purposes—while retaining its basic structure. This pattern is exemplified in the following quotation—an attempt by a steward opposing negotiation with Archibald Kelly to rework the “pressure” frame to his own ends:

Mr. Chairman, this wan, you’re talking about pressure going on the Government. I would disagree with you on this one, for the simple reason. Plessey’s is the glaring example to get the pressure off the government. So they gave it to private enterprise. Kelly takes o’er. Six months later he turns roon and says, I’m shuttin’ this yin and ahm shuttin’ that yin. ‘ (UCS Transcripts: 15)

The steward never questions whether “pressure” metaphors are a reasonable to frame the issue being debated. Instead, he adopts the metaphor (seemingly unreflexively) while turning it towards his own end: in this case, to oppose the tactic under consideration. One of the stewards favoring negotiation, Alex Bill, reworked the opposition’s fighting the fight image in a similar manner:

Well look, I’m quite amazed at the shop stewards here, because what is all this fighting about. The fight is about one thing, that the government have said to the UCS, you’re not on for any more money, we’re cutting you up, you’re not viable. . . . So our first commitment is to put up the necessary finance to retain the yards in the Upper Clyde. You’re no fighting the government, you’re only fightin’ private enterprise. The government’s off the hook. He’s given this job getting them off the hook. (UCS transcripts: 30)

Thus, in the case of both “pressure” and “fighting” metaphors, the images are taken-for-granted and sufficiently malleable to express multiple ideas. As linguistic vehicles, they are adopted wholesale,
seemingly unreflexively, by the participants in the dispute, adding credence to the notion that culture—in the context of this particular collective action—is collective, coherent, and to a degree, thematic.

*Elite and grass roots framing*

Two of the union stewards, James Airlie and Jimmy Reid, held a press conference a month after the August meeting. In it they expounded on their bargaining position with respect to the government, their unwillingness to even consider breaking up the four yards, and their opposition to every plan proposed by the government thus far.

Comparing the transcripts of this press conference to those of the stewards’ meeting allows for examination of the relationship between grass roots and public discourse, which may in turn address Benford’s (1997) argument that examining the public rhetoric of social movements provides little insight into processes occurring at the grass roots.

The results of the comparison were striking and, frankly, unexpected. In large measure, the stewards holding the press conference (James Airlie and Jimmy Reid) engaged in the same linguistic practices as in the closed meeting. The dominant tropes at the meeting—pressure and fighting metaphors—emerged again. For example, in his initial remarks, Reid employed the familiar violent conflict metaphors (of “butchery” and “fighting”) to depict the government’s plans and the union’s situation:

> Now if anyone examines it, it’s precisely Davies’ proposals in the House of Commons umpteen weeks ago. *It’s the butchery of the industry.* . . . Our reaction’s been consistent, this is the proposal *we’ve been fighting against the outset.* And I want to make this perfectly clear. It’s the decision and position of the workforce in the UCS that they would have no truck with *this butchery of our industry.*

Responding to a reporter’s question on union tactics, Airlie likewise employed the familiar “pressure” metaphor

> We are saying that we are, our position remains clear, that we are not leaving these yards, they’ll not, no contraction, not a job down the road
and we will put the pressure on the government from the broad movement.”

The transcription of the press conference is relatively short, containing only 106 lines of text. Reading the transcripts, it is hard to imagine that the entire transcribed portion of the press conference lasted more than 10 minutes. Yet in this brief period, both of the dominant folk models found in the stewards’ meeting were strongly in evidence (see Table 3). They were easily available resources—cognitively because of they were figurative images, and linguistically because of their common usage in the grassroots meetings. It is especially suggestive methodologically that mechanisms that impart elite-grassroots continuity are cognitive and linguistic.

*Table 3 about here*

While generalizations based on a single case are unwarranted, the unexpectedly high degree of overlap between public and grass roots discourse—overlap brought to the fore by a metaphoric-analytic focus—speaks to debates within social movements scholarship. Currently, the literature is split between work on framing that tends to emphasize framing contexts, relations between movements, and relations with external constituencies (such as the general public or potential recruits), and work on movement culture that examines processes occurring within movements themselves. There has been little discussion regarding interaction between the two: between intragroup discourse and public rhetoric and symbolism. The lack of research on the interaction between these two phenomena might suggest that little actual interaction exists. And yet, the public rhetoric of the shipyard stewards mirrored their private discourse. Perhaps they were simply too naive to hone their rhetoric for a larger audience. While superficially plausible, this explanation is awkward, given the extraordinary strategic and organizational skills displayed by the stewards during the course of the work-in. As a preliminary explanation, I suggest that two factors are at work here: the presence, of *two* men at the press conference, and the fact that both men
were themselves present at the stewards’ meeting. These explanatory factors are discussed more fully below.

**IMPLICATIONS FOR THEORY AND RESEARCH**

The strategy of metaphoric analysis was developed to bring some greater degree of rigor to the formal analysis of social movement culture than has previously been the case. While it is a methodology elides many processes relevant to framing, including especially numerous social psychological factors (particularly as compared with Johnston’s method), it also has several important advantages. It encourages examination of the everyday interpretive frames used by movement participants, rather than those of movement leaders, the media, or individuals who are otherwise unusually eloquent, educated, or charismatic. It takes culture absolutely seriously, while leaving room for a kind of microagency—in the cognitive-linguistic sense of focusing on an individual’s ability to modify and transform preexisting frames to suit his own purposes. It takes steps to resolve questions of whether culture, in the context of collective action, should be treated as an individual-level cognitive phenomenon, or else in terms of communal discourse. To be precise, the method of content analysis developed for this project is designed to illuminate cognitive frameworks linking the external world, ideas, and language. These frameworks cannot be observed directly. Instead, their presence and structure must be inferred from investigations of observable, overarching patterns of language use within a social group or organization. Thus the method of extracting metaphors, metonyms, and other linguistic “vehicles” from transcriptions of interactional discourse allows for the examination of overarching patterns of language use that remain obscure with more individualistic methods. Metaphoric analysis, in a sense, is a method that bridges Johnston’s cognitive focus and the indeterminancy of Billig’s rhetorical focus. It brings a new focus to the study of cultural processes of collective action, and holds the potential to empirically inform questions about the location and coherence of social movement culture, and the degree to which movement leaders’ rhetoric reflects grass roots ideologies and language.
1. Units of culture. In placing both cognition and discourse at the conceptual center of an analysis of the culture of a collective action, I have taken up a research direction pioneered by Johnston (1995, 2002, 2005). However, as noted above, extensive research suggests that the interaction of cognition and language informs culture most clearly and forcibly via figurative language has been shown to be ubiquitous in everyday life, not merely a rhetorical device but a fundamental process. The relevance of this perspective for cultural analysis is that the discursive trope—the metaphoric or metonymic model of a given external topic—becomes a viable unit of systematic analysis. While collective cognitive-linguistics processes of representing complex, abstract topics in terms of simple, familiar models have been well documented and theorized (e.g. Durkheim 1933, 1965 [1915]; Moscovici 1961; Wagner, Elejbarrieta, and Lahnsteiner 1995), these processes have not previously been examined in the context of collective action. In the shipyard stewards’ discourse, two such folk models were predominant: pressure and violence models. These models, or frames—at once cognitive and linguistic, subjectively real and collectively diffused—are discrete, investigable units of analysis for cultural approaches to collective action.

2. Collective coherence. A key contribution of this study is to show that when cognitive models embedded in language are treated as units of metaphoric analysis, we can more rigorously address questions of the collective coherence of culture. For example, if individuals participating in collective action were found to employ idiosyncratic, unshared tropes, then it would be difficult to conceive of culture as intersubjectively coherent. However, for the Upper Clyde shipyard stewards, exactly the opposite phenomenon was found. Folk models of pressure and violence were indeed collective, voiced by numerous stewards in more than one setting at different times. However, the group’s culture was not homogenous. Instead, it was divided along factional lines. The faction, i.e. small numbers of like-minded individuals within an organized group—rather than the individual, movement group, organization, or society—may well be the fundamental locus of political culture. Fleck (1979 [1935]) has outlined a similar view. His argument is that collective culture (in his words a thought collective) is the product of, at minimum, a dyad:
A thought collective exists wherever two or more people are actually exchanging thoughts. . . . [A] stimulating conversation between two persons soon creates a condition in which each utters thoughts he would not have been able to produce either by himself or in different company. A special mood which would not otherwise affect either partner in the conversation buy most always returns whenever these persons meet again. Prolonged duration of this state produces, from common understanding and mutual misunderstanding, a thought structure that belongs to neither of them alone but nevertheless is not at all without meaning. (p. 44)

The shipyard stewards’ discourse reflects the view of Fleck and others (e.g. Fine 1995, 1985, 1979) that small groups produce cultures irreducible to the sum of individuals’ ideas and personalities. The total lack of reflexive language on the part of the stewards lends further support to the view that the group’s culture is largely taken for granted. And the similarities between their grass roots and public discourse shows that this culture can manifest itself across domains, which in turn suggests that it is indeed coherent.

3. Elites and the grass roots. Why did the shipyard stewards talk the same way in their press conference, in front of a room full of reporters, as they had weeks earlier among their fellow union members? The history and success of the U.C.S. work-in, and the transcripts of the stewards’ meetings, each suggest that the stewards were highly adept and self-aware as manipulators of the media and as movement organizers and strategists. In all likelihood, they enacted the group’s “pressure” and “butchery” models simply because they were available, and perhaps because they seemed effective. Without further studies of social movements examining both groups’ public and grass roots discourse, we will have no means of understanding cultural or social processes occurring between the two domains, but the close analysis of transcripts like these, using methodologies informed by advances in cognitive and linguistic research, is the place to begin. In the case of the U.C.S. shipyard stewards, however, the high degree of isomorphism between public and grassroots linguistic practice suggests that two factors may be at work. First, following Fleck’s (1979) ideas about the determining force of dyadic communication, the fact that the press conference was held by two stewards, rather than only one, may have played a role. If culture is manifested and transmitted socially, then perhaps the dyad is, as Fleck suggested, the minimum social unit in which political culture, in the sense of taken-for-granted interpretive models having political
consequences, is created and innervated. The second, and more straightforward, potentially relevant factor is that both James Airlie and Jimmy Reid were present at the group meetings. They were fully engaged in the factional debates occurring among the shipyard stewards, including especially the August 12 meeting examined in this chapter, and that these models were invoked by them easily because of their “figurativeness” is central to memory retrieval.

These two factors are perhaps more relevant methodologically than theoretically. Since most research on social movement framing has examined the rhetoric of movement leaders rather than that of grassroots participants, then in determining or judging the degree to which a leader’s rhetoric reflects the group ideology, researchers would do well to keep in mind that the group culture is more readily transmitted by sub-groups of two or more than by lone individuals, and 2) ascertain whether group spokespersons were present at and engaged in group meetings.

CONCLUSION

We may never be able to put culture into a regression equation to sort out its independent effects on the development and outcomes of collective action. So long as human groups create and transmit meaningful symbols, culture will be omnipresent, and hence difficult to quantify in an absolute manner. However, the content, coherence, and form of culture continue to be topics of lively debate both within social science generally and in the cultural analysis of social movements. The results of the present study support a particular view of culture—one among several currently debated alternatives. The culture of the Upper Clyde Shipyard stewards was not so much a sum of individual interpretations, of cobbled-together subjective meanings, as it was collective, coherent, and largely taken for granted. The divisions evident within the group were factional, not individual. The stewards’ collective culture—their idioculture—can be seen as a web of meanings structured by cognitive-linguistic models based on familiar and systematically related binary oppositions (which may help their cognitive availability), such as high versus low, forward versus backward, us versus them, and pressure and release (see especially Table 2). This array of tropes is characterized by, at minimum, a “thin coherence” (Sewell 1999) whereby
otherwise arbitrary signs and symbols are made meaningful via their grounding in embodied experience and their web of positively and negatively charged interrelations. The relevance of this conception of culture to collective action is perhaps best captured by Weber, who conceived of the social influence of ideas in his famous metaphor of a railway “switchman.” Here the social forces that influence collective action only do so insofar as they are interpreted, collectively, in terms of meaningful symbols and binary oppositions that, like switchmen, “determine the tracks along which action has been pushed” (1946: 280). Emotive, interrelated symbols—not brute social and economic forces—channel thought and direct groups toward, or away from, action.

1 The transcripts record the stewards’ speech in excruciating detail. What may appear to be errors in transcription in the portions quoted below are in fact verbatim and correct.

2 It is interesting to note the co-occurrence of emotive metaphors (of fighting and violence) with discussion of social solidarity. The question of how this Durkheimian finding of “effervescent” symbols reinforcing social bonding is socially constituted may be a worthwhile topic of future research (e.g. Ignatow 2007).