4 Mind the Gap!

Strategic Interaction during Summit Protests

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Summit Protests as Protest Wave

Triggering a series of tactical interactions between authorities and protesters, the 1999 WTO protests in Seattle unleashed a wave of summit protests. While the ideas and the organization of the counterglobalization movement have received ample scholarly attention (Pleyers, 2010; Maecckelbergh, 2009; Juris, 2008; della Porta, 2007; Freyberg-Inan, 2006; Starr, 2005), the interactions of this movement with authorities and other players are surprisingly unexamined (Scholl, 2012). The analysis of interactions during summit protests may, first, help us to understand the development of the counterglobalization movement, and, second, enrich our scholarly understanding of tactical interaction, especially in transnational arenas.

This chapter analyzes summit protests as a chain of tactical interactions. Bringing back agency by focusing on what different players are doing and how this creates, shapes, redefines, and reproduces political arenas, I will consider five players, constituting, at the same time, arenas for dynamic interactions: counterglobalization movements, intergovernmental organizations, governments, police, and the media. As pointed out in the introduction to this volume, these kinds of compound players are neither homogeneous nor stable.

The analysis of the dynamic interactions between the players is based on several years of ethnographic fieldwork, qualitative interviews, documentation, and film analysis. The time span covers summit protests from 2000 to 2009, with a geographical focus on Europe. Where necessary, however, background information on previous protests and other geographical areas is included.

In the next section, I discuss how tactical interaction has so far been grasped and how we can build toward a useful framework for understanding tactical interaction in various transnational arenas. I then examine the five key players at summit protests and the arenas they constitute through their interaction. In my conclusion I reflect on the dynamic interactions that took place during counterglobalization protests in the past decades and argue that the initial tactical innovations by protesters were neutralized, which therefore made summit protests “events without events.”
Tactical Interaction

Tilly (1986: 4) argues that a contentious repertoire of action comprises all the means a group has available to make claims. In this chapter, however, I focus on tactical repertoires: all those action forms contentious players use consciously to protest. Although protest mainly takes place in the streets, social media show that it does not necessarily have to be so. However, online and street protest have become increasingly connected and intertwined (Gerbaudo, 2012; Van Laer, 2010).

Looking at tactical interaction means looking at the actual doing of purposeful actors. This has consequences for how we study social movements and their interactions. So far, what social movements or police say is more often the object of inquiry than what they do (and how they do it). Systematic ethnographic fieldwork, but also film and photo analysis are important methods to foster deeper understanding into the dynamics of interaction during public protest.

The proposal of this volume to focus on strategic interaction rather than on political opportunities is very useful in this respect. Strategic arenas create a context in which various players interact with each other. The context is no longer seen as a set of “structures,” but as other players who use their tactical tools to influence the other players. This chapter also takes into account a temporal perspective: summit protests throughout the past decade as a chain of interaction. How do we analyze the process of interaction over time?

The most exhaustive long-term study of tactical interaction is probably McAdam’s (1983) study of the “pace of black insurgency.” In his work, he highlights that a process of interaction is structured by tactical steps in response to each other, stressing the necessity of protesters to introduce new tactical dilemmas each time.

In looking at the tactical repertoires of the players involved in summit protests, I also want to foreground the process of tactical innovation and tactical adaptation, and the moments in which new tactical dilemmas have been created.

The above account of innovation and adaptation might suggest a certain symmetry between protesters and authorities. However, this would be misleading. The “doing” of protest requires entirely different tactical choices than the “doing” of social control (see Scholl, 2012). As many scholars have argued, disruption is an important tool of social movements (Piven, 2006; Gamson, 1990; Piven and Cloward, 1977). Della Porta et al. (2006) admit that the earlier observed shift in policing protest in the Western world from
escalated force toward negotiated management (della Porta and Reiter, 1998) has not necessarily been beneficial for protest movements. Protest became normalized, regulated, channeled, and, ultimately, ineffective (McPhail and McCarthy, 2005: 6). Hence, transgressive summit protest can also be seen as a reaction to the pacification of protest in the decades before.

As opposed to protesters’ attempts to disrupt summit meetings, the police try to control them. Their activities are typically called “policing” in the literature. This term and its operationalizations, however, tend to eradicate the more subtle forms and effects of police work, and it also neglects the fact that a lot of “policing” takes place during and around summit protests and involves many other players such as intelligence services, cross-border security agencies and think tanks, armies, and corporations. Elsewhere, we therefore suggest the term “social control” as a better term to grasp the subtle, pervasive and networked character of contemporary police work (Starr, Fernandez, and Scholl, 2011).

The different “doings” of protesters and police are thus contradictory. Whether confrontation or even violence happens or not, there is an underlying antagonism within any street interaction. Too often scholarship has internalized and interjected the police view into its analytical categories, for example, by relating “less violent events” to “more democratic policing.” Knowing about the contradictory logic of doing protest and doing control, we also need to unravel it in the micro-events of protest interactions.

However, protesters do not only interact with police. Governments, media, and – in the case of summit protests – intergovernmental organizations, are equally important to understand the dynamics of protest interactions. In the literature on protest policing, these players often do not receive systematic attention, partly because analyzing the interactions between several players is fairly complex. Since all these players constitute important arenas as well for other players and, therefore, influence their tactical considerations, innovations, and adaptations, this chapter attempts to move our understanding of multiplayer interactions forward.

Players in Transnational Contention

In the following section, I unravel the complex interactions during summit protests by looking at five key players that shape this process: counterglobalization movements, police, media, intergovernmental organizations, and governments. By presenting them as five distinct players, I do not want to suggest that they are homogeneous or cohesive. Protesters, governments,
the police, and the media are compound players and can have different and often conflicting but also shifting views on tactical choices. Where possible, my analysis will point out these conflicts. Moreover, I do not want to suggest that empirically they appear as “one” actor. Protesters do many things at the same time and can stage several actions parallel to each other. In a similar way, one police unit can use tear gas against protesters at one spot, while a nearby unit leaves a sit blockade in peace. Last but not least, all of these players constitute arenas as well with certain rules and resources that shape the interaction of various players within (and across) certain arenas.

**Counterglobalization Movements**

Social movements are necessarily a different sort of player than the others: although formal organization may take part and play vital roles in social movements, there are many other participants and networks much less institutionally embedded, and normally come together to effect some sort of social change. This makes them more fluid and less stable, heterogeneous, and, at times, contradictory. The diversity of counterglobalization movements has been a point of attention and might make it a special movement in this sense.

Hardt and Negri (2004) nicely capture this point with their term “multitude” (as opposed to the homogenizing idea of a “mass” movement) and compare the first summit protests with the list of grievances French citizens presented in 1789 to King Louis XVI in the “Cahiers de Doléances.” In order to coordinate the diversity of people and struggles that came together under the frame of global justice, counterglobalization movements organize above all in networks. Although not free from hierarchies, these relatively flat and horizontal networks enable a rapid exchange of information and coordination of large-scale actions (Maeckelbergh, 2009). Nevertheless, the diversity has led to certain tensions between various currents that calibrated over the years (see Pleyers, 2010: 181 ff.).

Shifting and developing, throughout the past decade summit protesters have consolidated a certain repertoire. The summit repertoire consists of a number of elements. Notable is the combination of the logic of numbers, the logic of damage, and the logic of bearing witness (della Porta and Diani, 2006: 171). Summit protests are mass protests attracting ten to hundreds of thousands of protesters that converge close to the venues of summit meetings. However, they do not only converge and protest; they also attempt to disrupt these meetings by applying transgressive tactics such as blockades
or collective intrusion into the red zone. Underlying these disruptive tactics is the logic of damage: by trying to “shut them down” (Harvie et al., 2005), protesters heighten the costs of summit meetings and the scope of the logistical operations. Finally, summit protests also bear witness. Many protesters organize or participate in symbolic actions that are intended to (globally) send out a message about global inequalities and specific policies established during summit meetings.

Influenced by the British anti-roads movement, “Reclaim the Streets,” combining joy, creativity and protest during mass actions in the streets (see Scholl, 2011), summit protests in the late 1990s were often called “Carnival against Capitalism.” This was a conscious decision by organizers in order to revive the dull practice of mass rallies but also to invoke unpredictability. Many action forms attempted to imitate carnival by “putting the world upside down.” Mocking authorities and the police, Pink and Silver protesters danced in pink (and silver) costumes and feather boas to the energetic music of samba bands, without avoiding battle with police lines. The “Clandestine Insurgent Rebel Clown Army” (or CIRCA) consisted of protesters dressed as clowns in military uniforms, marching, crawling, and mocking the police. Humor was an important instrument to create confusion (see Scholl and Duyvendak, 2010). It also helped to create a sympathetic image for bystanders and an attractive one for potential participants. Tactical carnivals also created dilemmas for the police. How do you tell a clown to stop playing? However, not everyone agrees with the tactical use of humor and some action forms also ended up being purely about having joy and fun. The more militant protesters saw this as counterproductive to their confrontational or “serious” actions. Reversing a famous statement by Emma Goldman, one activist commented to me: “If I have to dance, I am not part of your revolution.”

Another important tactical innovation of the summit protest repertoire is the use of “swarm intelligence.” Swarm intelligence refers to the capacity to converge from many sides toward one point (in this case the summit venue or the red zone) without centralized command and control. Nunes (2005: 305) points out that “swarm networks must be able to coalesce rapidly and stealthily on a target, then dissever and redisperse, immediately ready to recombine for a new pulse.” Even the military think tank RAND researched extensively the swarming logic of networks as an organizational practice of oppositional movements that could inspire counterinsurgency initiatives (Arquilla and Ronfeldt, 2001).

Decentralized swarming tactics created a number of dilemmas for police: it forced them to disperse officers and attention, it made it difficult to use
the police tactic of arresting or neutralizing central leaders, and it was difficult to avoid reconfiguration after a police intervention (for example, protesters joining another rally or action after being stopped by police). At the 2007 G8 protests in Heiligendamm, protesters innovated decentralized swarming and purposefully stretched police lines each time by splitting up into “five fingers.” So much space came free in-between police officers that protesters could just glide through. “Mind the gap” was the advice a German action network gave to the protesters. This advice also nicely captures the interaction between police and protesters on a more general level.

Swarm intelligence was frequently combined with another innovation: “tactical diversity.” This was the result of a creative resolution of a tactical dilemma many mass protest movements face: how to deal with the fact that there is not one leader but many tactical preferences that may imply very different risks and police responses (see also Hurl, 2005). In the absence of a central command center, protesters at the 1999 WTO protests in Seattle decided to take the WTO venue as the center and divide the space around it into slices like a cake. These slices had different colors signaling differing levels of militancy and risk (Dixon, 2009). Next to organizing the protesters for swarming from multiple directions toward the WTO meeting, this approach, while still acting in common, also helped to keep different tactics spatially separated. A similar tactical approach was applied at the 2000 IMF/World Bank protests in Prague. Protesters broke up into three marches designated by different colors and each march applied different tactics to encircle the conference center.

Finally, summit protesters have introduced a number of innovative tactical uses of the body for street protest. The centrality of the body also reflects the logic of damage and the choice for direct action and civil disobedience tactics. In both traditions, the individual and the collective bodies of protesters are put in the way in order to create obstacles for the opponent. However, each tactical use of bodies differs. The Italian Tute Bianche (White Overalls), for example, padded their bodies and used huge shield constructions to protect their bodies from police attacks and to highlight the violence of police resulting in theatrical and comical clashes. The aforementioned CIRCA poses a very different dilemma to police, as do the Pink and Silver protesters. Both action forms use the body for cross-dressing, art, and confusion.

Counterglobalization movements also constitute an arena, first and foremost, for the involved activists. Because of identification and the projection of hope for change, movements can easily result in internal conflicts on ideological, organizational, and tactical questions. The various tactical preferences described above, have frequently triggered fierce debates and
mutual accusation, above all on the question of confrontational tactics (see, for example, George, 2001).

Counterglobalization movements also serve as arenas for some politicians or business leaders who want to profile themselves by subscribing to (some of) the ideas of the movements. They are also an arena for police to carry out investigations, for example, with undercover cops infiltrating the movements. Even the media sometimes “infiltrates” the movement in order to get exclusive coverage. In order to avoid such types of infiltration, the internal arena of counterglobalization movements may be protected (for example, avoiding online communication on action plans).

**Intergovernmental Organizations**

Disruptive mass protests during summit meetings did not remain unanswered. Intergovernmental organizations responded by making summit meetings arenas for relegitimation of their meetings and policies. Relegitimation included a number of co-optation tactics.

Many intergovernmental organizations exist, and new ones are created, so they constitute a compound player. Despite their differences, they can also act in a coordinated way, such as the classical Bretton Woods organizations: the World Bank, the IMF, and the GATT (forerunner of the WTO). Those three organizations, and the EU and the G8 (reflecting the hegemony of the rich Western countries in all the other organizations) have also been the most frequent target of counterglobalization protests. Generally, it concerns organizations that serve as important arenas for global economic decisions and that have been carrying out neoliberal ideas and policies since the 1970s (which is not to say that they are the only actors of neoliberal capitalism; see Harvey, 2007).

A first step undertaken by intergovernmental organizations was to use the visibility created by the very protests for their messages. Having a spotlight turned on their major meetings, intergovernmental organizations could not, as they did previously, hold their meetings far removed from public attention. The first G5 and later G6 meetings in the 1970s, for example, were fairly informal meetings. After being faced with mass protests in front of their doors, intergovernmental organizations now try to come up with ambitious agendas for their meetings that are made public in the media. Using the visibility of their meetings, they now claim to discuss and solve global problems. Depending on attention issue waves, however, the exact topic may change quite frequently (Dowling, 2010).
Another co-optation tactic of intergovernmental organizations was to project increasing inclusivity by selectively expanding access for previously excluded players. This could be representatives of big NGOs, such as at the 2000 IMF/WB meeting in Prague, or government officials of Southern countries, such as at the 2001 G8 summit in Genoa. Responding to the critique of being undemocratic elite spaces, this rather tokenistic practice nevertheless transmits the idea that summit meetings are engaging in serious dialogue with civil society and the developing world.

In response to the critique of the content of their policies, intergovernmental organizations started to selectively address – if only rhetorically – certain demands of counterglobalization movements. In fact, this process started already in the 1980s when AIDS, hunger, and poverty were making it to the top agendas of these meetings. In the first years of the 3rd millennium, a number of summit meetings responded to the recent wave of counterglobalization protest by addressing poverty, debt, and climate change. Final declarations caught worldwide attention, such as the G8’s 2005 statement to alleviate poverty of the world’s 20 poorest countries and helped to create an image of benevolence suggesting that these organizations respond to criticisms from civil society and are, after all, not that undemocratic.

This selective interaction with their critics was accompanied by a geographical move that helped intergovernmental organizations to insulate themselves from counterglobalization movements (Scholl and Freyberg-Inan, 2013). For many years after the 2001 G8 protests in Genoa, summit meetings took place in remote rural areas that were difficult for protesters to access. Although this geographical move did not stifle big counterglobalization mobilizations, it made it harder for protesters to apply their disruptive repertoire of blockading. Moreover, it helped intergovernmental organizations to organize their meetings as exclusive spaces for political debate on global problems. Anyone outside of the large fenced areas was associated with political hooliganism rather than with political dissent.

Being an international platform for national governments to meet, discuss, and make decisions, intergovernmental organizations function as arenas. Governments may use these organizations to (re-)gain legitimacy on the national level, to portray a positive image of their country, to make strategic alliances, and to push certain (often economic) decisions supposedly to benefit their national economies.

Counterglobalization movements, as I have shown above, have used summit meetings of intergovernmental organizations to confront neoliberal capitalism. Whether protests at summit meetings were a good tactical choice or not, they definitely had a visualizing effect. Power holders and
relations on the transnational level are not easy to unmask and pinpoint (Uitermark, 2004). In this sense, summit protesters acted foremost as geographers by saying, “Here is where decisions on transnational affairs are being made.” The transnational capitalist class of neoliberal globalization is not an abstract idea; it is a concrete reality, with meetings, suppers, hotels, big limousines, press conferences, logistical operations, and so on. It is an entire world opened for staging protest, intervening disruptively, and by doing so, creating transnational contention.

For the media, summit meetings accompanied by large protests are “hot” items, and constitute an arena to get access to the discussions and procedures of intergovernmental organizations, but also to counterglobalization movements, their ideas, action plans and spokespersons. As events with global repercussions, summit protests can provide a competitive arena for mainstream media to profile themselves (to an international public) as the best, quickest, and most exclusive news outlet covering the events.

Also for police, international summit meetings serve as an arena. On the one hand, they like to show that they can manage such events in a professional and smooth way. Policing summit meetings is always a chance for police commanders to profile themselves and prepare their next career steps. The police chief of the 2005 UK G8 security operation, for example, became head of the International Permanent Observatory on Security during Major Events (IPO). On the other hand, summit meetings serve as an arena for police to introduce, test, and present new police tactics, ranging from the use of less-lethal weapons (such as taser guns or rubber bullets) to cooperation with military forces. These new weapons and tactics often continue to be used after summit meetings and can durably change the practice of protest policing in certain countries.

**Governments/Politicians**

Governments act as compound players taking on various roles in the interaction with counterglobalization movements. On the one hand, national governments act as the official hosts of international summit meetings, and therefore are responsible for all the logistical and security-related preparations. Summit meetings are often seen as a chance to put the spotlights on the hosting country, and national governments therefore desire a smooth and sometimes glamorous course of the meetings. However, due to the increasing intensity of the security preparations in response to the first
mass protests since the 1999 WTO protests in Seattle, and the potential damage to the city, few cities queue for hosting a summit meeting.

On the other hand, governments may respond to counterglobalization movements beyond such summit protests. Their responses comprise various forms of social control, such as co-optation, surveillance, and prosecution. One way of co-opting counterglobalization critique is by selectively inviting certain moderate groups for consultative talks. This way, in 2007 the German government suggested that there was no reason for protest, since the critique was part of the official summit. Another form of co-optation is to rhetorically integrate some of the discourses, arguments, and values of counterglobalization movements. A good example is President Clinton, who immediately after the 1999 Seattle protests suggested that he understood and shared the critique of the protesters (see the 2000 film This Is What Democracy Looks Like [dir. Jill Friedberg and Rick Rowley]).

Monitoring of counterglobalization networks and groups on a national scale has become a continuous effort. This can happen through police infiltration, paid informants, and phone and computer tapping. In order to stop certain activists at the border governments keep lists that may also be exchanged in case of a concrete mass protest. At the 2009 NATO summit in Strasbourg, for example, German police used data collected at the 2007 G8 protests to return hundreds of Germans at the French border.

An additional aspect of governments as compound players is their access to the judicial apparatus in order to maintain the public order. State prosecution usually starts many trials after summit protests, sometimes against individual protesters perceived as leaders (for example, two girls supposedly having shouted “Push!” to other protesters in front of police lines at the 2009 UN climate conference in Copenhagen), or against entire groups (such as the 25 protesters charged for ransacking the city of Genoa in 2001, 10 of whom were sentenced for a total of 98 years’ imprisonment), or against random protesters arrested in the streets in order to set an example. The fact that police officers (or governments) are rarely charged demonstrates that access to and use of the judicial apparatus are not symmetric.

Governments can play a role on the national, provincial, and local level. For the 2009 UN climate summit, the city of Copenhagen introduced a special law package enhancing the discretionary responsibilities of police and restricting the rights of protesters. Before the 2000 IMF/WB protests the mayor of Prague suggested that the local population not leave their houses during summit or even leave the city (German, 2000). Hence, beyond national politics, local governments have their own agency.
Governments also constitute a contested arena that is used by other players. In the first place, governments may constitute an arena for political debate on the national scale. This can be a debate about the central issues of a summit meeting, or about the critique articulated by counterglobalization movements. The debate can also focus on the legitimacy of the summit, or the government itself. An example is the government of Berlusconi and his Minister of Internal Affairs, who were at the center of a fierce debate after the police violence at the 2001 G8 summit.

Counterglobalization movements use this arena for voicing their critique, gaining legitimacy, and questioning the impact of the security preparation on the right to protest. Sometimes they find allies among members of parliament or even the government, who may help to push parliamentary investigations around the security operations. An important entry for stirring parliamentary debates is the extensive cost of such security operations (see Starr et al., 2011). After the 2003 G8 in France, parliamentary debates heated up in Switzerland because this non-G8 member country had to carry huge security costs for the operations taking place largely on Swiss territory. Also after the 2007 G8 in Germany, a number of German parliamentarians questioned the government about the costs, above all of the deployment of the army (see, for example, Ströbele, 2007).

By critically interrogating government representatives and monitoring their decisions, the media can amplify such debates. The media's general interest in contentious issues makes them receptive to discussions of controversial security preparations. One example, are the ever higher and larger fence constructions erected for summit meetings to keep intergovernmental institutions separated from protest. Besides their gigantic costs, the fences trigger media attention as visible manifestation of the fear of governors. However, not all media outlets are critical toward such government measures, and those who are usually are not all the time.

**Police**

Police are compound players for many reasons. Police forces consist of many departments and differing scales of responsibility (local, state, federal, international), and all of them can be involved in the control of counterglobalization protest at summit meetings. Police are the visible representation of the state's internal monopoly on violence (Lipsky, 1970); at the same time, they can retain varying levels of discretion (Waddington, 1998: 128). Big police operations usually involve the government, parliaments, the judicial
apparatus, and police unions. The variety of police unions in many countries also shows that police cannot be seen as a single player.

Various scholars have observed a shift in police tactics in response to counterglobalization protests (Scholl, 2012; Starr et al., 2011; Fernandez, 2008; Vitale, 2007; Vitale, 2005; Peterson, 2006). Della Porta and Reiter’s edited volume (1998) discerned a shift in Western democracies after the 1960s and 1970s from an escalated force approach toward a negotiated management approach, focusing on the channeling of protest. This policing style came under pressure by the counterglobalization movement’s disruptive and confrontational tactics. In response, policing has been both violent and subtle, ranging from massive use of pepper spray and batons to the extensive preparatory manipulation of the media and the geography of summit meetings (see Scholl, 2012).

The new approach is often preemptive and focuses on the preclusion of undesired events (read: disruption). This translates into increasing focus on preparations, such as information gathering, preventive monitoring, constant risk assessment, but also into a prevalence of certain tactics during street protests, such as corralling, constant surveillance, and the use of less lethal weapons instead of baton charges. Notwithstanding differences between national police cultures, the shift toward such tactics marks a difference between the early counterglobalization protests and the ones after the 2001 G8 in Genoa.

One of the remarkable features of police work around counterglobalization protests is the increasingly networked collaboration and the exchange of standardized information and procedural protocols. This collaboration not only happens through traditional outlets such as intelligence services, liaison officers, and heads of police departments, but also through newly created security think tanks and agencies, such as the EU’s UNICRI and IPO program. Conflating a football championship with a G8 protest, these intergovernmental agencies give general advice and develop security protocols for what they call “major international events.” Various handbooks are in circulation, as well as several undercover police agents operating across various countries (Monroy, 2011).

The police are an arena for internal conflict; various fractions within police forces may disagree about the legitimacy, strategy, or organization of certain operations. These conflicts are sometimes reflected in reports and publications of police unions. One example is the biggest German police union criticizing the difficult circumstances and the poor provision of rank-and-file police officers during the 2007 G8 protests (Gewerkschaft der Polizei, 2007).
Defending the preparations and operations of “their” police forces, governments can also enter the arena of the police. However, governments may also be urged to respond to public critique and outrage in reaction to police brutality or police actions widely seen as disproportionate. The 2001 G8 protests in Genoa, above all the violent raid of two protest convergence centers and the subsequent torture of the arrestees, provide a case in point. Although the Italian government felt pressured to react to criticism, no senior police officer was suspended, and the then-head of the Italian police served afterwards as the head of the Italian intelligence services.

Through media attention conflicts around police brutality may receive more urgent scrutiny. Though usually being a rather useful arena for the police, media can also enter the arena of the police through critical investigation of certain methods or entire operations. This is especially the case when journalists themselves become the target of police brutality, such as at the 2001 protests in Genoa. When police preparations become more and more extensive and visible in the months before the actual summit meetings, media play an important role in questioning the sense, extent, and costs of such operations. The construction of the 12-km-long barbed and razor-wired fence in Germany for the 2007 G8 meeting lasted nearly five months and triggered many news features with critical remarks about the security operations (see Scholl, 2012).

The 2001 G8 protests in Genoa are a good example for seeing how activist footage feeds into mainstream media coverage. This combination made the Italian police violence widely accessibly and visible to an international audience. Like this, activists often document incidences of police misconduct to feed the mainstream media and stir a debate about certain police methods, the entire operation, or even the police as an institution (see also Scholl and Bril, 2012). For the 2007 G8 protests in Germany activists cooperated with a network of left-wing lawyers to observe and document police behavior during the street protests.

**Media**

Frequently mistaken for a dataset, media are themselves an important player during counterglobalization protests. Media do not simply reflect the reality of protest events; they actively intervene in them and shape social struggles. Given the multitude of outlets, media clearly are a compound player with varying interests and values. Nevertheless, as Herman and
Chomsky (1988) pointed out, a number of structural filters reflect the corporate media's tendency to reproduce the view of the elite.

Media often claim to “represent” the voice(s) of a movement in an adequate way, and for many people these “representations” then become the first access to learn about a social movement. In trying to represent the movement, most journalists try to speak to what they consider the “representatives.” In the case of counterglobalization movements, this causes frequent trouble: many networks and action groups explicitly refuse to have “representatives” (see Wood, 2005); they are easily outflanked in media representation by networks and especially bigger organizations that do have visible media spokespersons. As the research on the 2007 G8 in Germany by Rucht and Teune (2008) shows, media cited repeatedly a very small number of spokespersons (typically belonging to big organizations).

Through the selection mechanisms in the search for movement representatives media actively shape the representation of the movement and, moreover, create a contrast between “professional” activists and the “rank-and-file” protesters. Incited by the occurrence of confrontational protests, this can lead to a perceived division between “good” and “bad” protesters. After the 2001 G8 protests in Genoa, for example, European corporate media univocally demonized the so-called black bloc. The effects of such media categorizations are far-reaching and can result in internal movement splits, loss of support and sympathy, and outright criminalization of (parts of) the movement. In the case of counterglobalization movements in Europe, this has frequently happened, not without associating counterglobalization protesters in general with violent terrorists (Fernandez and Scholl, 2013).

Media are a contested arena as well and many players consider it an important arena to be visible. Politicians and police communicate the justification of the security measures to the local and national population via the media, activists try to disseminate their critique and independent coverage of their actions. The battle for media presence of all these players reflects the battle for the sympathy of (the so-called) public opinion. Though unclear what exactly that is, many of the players perceive media representations as a reflection of the reality of that public opinion. Visibility in the media, then, can be seen as a legitimation strategy invested by various players in order to achieve credibility.

The increasing effort that many counterglobalization activists invest in media campaigns and press management testifies to the contestation of the media arena. Even the more radical networks at the 2005 and 2007 G8 protests in, respectively, Scotland and Germany, had press working groups
producing daily press releases and establishing contacts with journalists and interview partners. At G8 protest in Germany there were attempts to bring together the press teams of various protest networks in a daily press conference. However, the proactive management of the movement’s media representation, such as receiving journalists at the entry to a summit protest camp, contradicts the wish of other protesters to remain anonymous and uncooperative with the corporate press. Quite some energy has therefore gone into the elaboration of independent media outlets, such as Indymedia, a website for participatory and shared news reporting (Kidd, 2003). This creates a new media arena, equally interesting to other players, such as police and journalists. Other action forms, such as the Clandestine Insurgent Rebel Clown Army (see Scholl, 2012), explicitly aim to create frivolous but friendly photo ops for the mainstream media.

For intergovernmental organizations the media are an important arena for responding to critique and opposition by shedding a benevolent light on their meetings. The harmonious final group photo with all the leaders for the front pages of daily newspapers is a crucial part of this. At the 2007 G8 in Germany, some protesters successfully blocked the access of journalists to the summit. Because of bad conditions on the water that day, the alternative route via the sea was also blocked, so in the end no journalists could make it to the official photo shoot.

Throughout the summit protests in the past decades, police have improved their media management. Nowadays, they devote much more money, personnel, and time to their press work. International manuals for securing summit meetings include extensive sections on police media work and ensure that best practices can circulate internationally. The German police copied the activist practice of hosting information evenings and, on several occasions in the months preceding the G8 summit, invited the local population to attend them. Preparations also included the construction of a special media center close to the summit (and far from the protesters) and an accreditation procedure for journalists wanting access to this center. The office of the German Federal Criminal Police refused to give accreditation to a number of journalists. During the week of summit protests, the police were present with several mobile information vehicles to facilitate easy access for their version of the events to journalists. They also released several press briefings on a daily basis, some of which turned out to contain false and misleading information discrediting the protesters (Backmund, 2009).

Governments also found corporate media a useful arena in their response to the first major counterglobalization protests. Their legitimation strategy often includes co-optation. This means that parts of the movement’s critique
is (rhetorically) integrated, which makes it harder for the more radical and anti-systemic messages to be heard. This way, governments regain agency in the debate on global justice. During the 1990s governments already invited civil society representatives to their summit meetings, normally high-ranking officials of large NGOs. These kind of initiatives are widely circulated in the press and do suggest that governments are responsive to critique. For the 2005 G8 protests in Scotland, the British government designed an even more elaborated media campaign including pop stars such as Bono and Bob Geldof, a free pop concert (possibly distracting people from participating in the protests), and a broad alliance of large NGOs supporting the British government in their supposed attempt to come with solutions concerning global poverty (Dowling, 2010).

Summit Protests as Dynamic Interactions

Interaction during counterglobalization protests is a complex phenomenon and not easy to unravel. Many compound players are involved, and each of them, in turn, can constitute an arena for all the others. Nevertheless, a careful, systematic, and patient attempt to take them apart and relate them to each other can broaden our understanding of what happens during a single summit protest, but also of how players (in different arenas) respond to each other over time.

We have seen how intergovernmental organizations, governments, and police have reacted to certain tactical innovations of counterglobalization movements, and how those, in turn, try again to innovate in their tactical repertoires. Innovation and adaptation are important mechanisms to understand tactical interaction throughout time. They can explain the continuation, transformation, but also the sudden end of certain interaction dynamics. In the case of counterglobalization protests, we can observe successful adaptations of authorities and a standstill in tactical innovation on the side of protesters, which channeled the initial vibrant interaction dynamic into more predictable and contained interaction rituals.

After having staged a number of tactical innovations, such as decentralized swarming and tactical diversity, which became central to the summit protest repertoire, counterglobalization movements found it difficult to move forward and to pose new tactical dilemmas to authorities. Governments, intergovernmental organizations, and police, on the other hand, have adapted their co-optation and control tactics to these early innovations and neutralized them in large part. The media have been a useful arena for their purposes.
Summit meetings as an arena for transnational contention thus have revealed a dynamic interplay of contestation, co-optation, and control. However, even though many players interact in various arenas, street protest still reflects the underlying antagonism between contenders and authorities, the “doing” of protest and the “doing” of control. So far, authorities – police, governments, and intergovernmental organizations – have been successful in forming a law-and-order alliance to control the disease of counterglobalization dissent. Where anti-austerity protests take it from here, is yet to be seen.

Note

1. I prefer the term “counterglobalization” over “alterglobalization” or “global justice movement,” because it stresses the oppositional character of the alternative practices in question.

References


MIND THE GAP!


