Structure, routine and transformation: movements from below at the end of the century

Abstract

This (very provisional) paper draws on the Irish experience of counter cultures to think about the shape and direction of movements from below at the end of the century and to find ways of asking "where do we go from here?" It starts by trying to make sense of the existing directions of counter cultural movement projects, which it sees as organic challenges to everyday social routines ("ordinary life") that are extended to the point of challenging large-scale power structures ("politics"). It does this by looking at some of the political tensions in the Irish versions of these projects: between strategies of mainstreaming and ghettoising, of consensus and disruption, of populism and elitism, and trying to identify the internal divisions of interest and rationality that underlie these tensions.

If we want to be able to choose our directions well and to bring others along with us, we need to find ways of evaluating these choices that are neither arbitrary nor automatic. This paper suggests that it is possible to develop an immanent critique which asks how adequate different strategies are to the counter cultural project as a whole. This might mean, for example, using comprehensiveness rather than one-sidedness, scope rather than limits, or compatibility rather than contradiction as yardsticks to judge the relationship between a political strategy and a movement. On this basis it suggests that a strategy oriented to the development of counter-hegemony, conflict and popular mobilisation might come closest to being adequate to the existing movement.

To develop an appropriate strategy and to make it happen are two different things, and the paper then goes on to try to think about the social construction of this kind of strategy. It does this by looking at the organisational frameworks, communicative structures and techniques of the self involved in building and sustaining a counter culture capable of taking such a direction, and examines some historical and contemporary models ("1968", 1980s movement scenes, and contemporary "cultures of resistance") for possible points of reference. It also asks the crucial question of who within the counter culture might find such a strategy attractive, what kind of movement it "constructs" and what its chances of internal success might be.

The paper then tries to see where the current situation, and the strategy it argues for, fit within the longer history of transformative politics and movement politics. It suggests that there has been a revival from the late 1960s on of themes that were important on the radical left until the early 1920s, but were increasingly marginalised with the closure of organised capitalism and the collusion in mid-century of the mainstream left with organisation from above and taken-for-granted forms of social life. An important question within contemporary capitalism is how far the changed circumstances of weak states and contested everyday cultures, as well as the "movement legacy" of decommodified areas, offer space for such a strategy.

The paper finishes by taking issue with the claim, made both by many on the neo-traditionalist left and its postmodern critics, that the critique of structural inequality and that of everyday routine are necessarily opposed to one another. It argues that relating the two has been a key part of the relationship between intellectuals and movements on the left since Marx and Morris, and that it is crucial for any attempt

to transform social relationships to change both the structural arrangements they generate and the everyday routines which reproduce them. If a coherent and emancipatory alliance of the two critiques can be developed, it is worth serious attention, whether or not it appears in a form we find congenial.

Structure, routine and transformation: movements from below at the end of the century

I: Introduction(1)

This paper is an attempt to think about present-day social movements from the viewpoint of a long-term participant with an interest in theory, in other words to ask questions like "what are we up to?", "where are we trying to get to?" and "how are we trying to do that?" One of the difficulties with this kind of question is that there are many different possible *kinds* of answer we can give, ranging from the intensely specific and task-oriented ("we're trying to prevent this particular incinerator proposal from going through") to the grandly general and utopian ("we have lost our inner connection to nature, and we need to find it"), not forgetting tangential answers which refuse the question ("I think we need to do more dancing and less committee meetings"). It isn't a rejection of these kinds of answers to suggest that there are also spaces in which the more movement-theoretical questions are useful; and perhaps to identify those spaces is also to identify how we can go about answering the question, or under what circumstances and for what purposes this kind of question and answer might be useful.

What I have tried to do in this paper is to look at this process using a specific set of examples, drawing mostly on my research in the Irish counter culture. When I sat down to write this paper, I thought that it might be possible to defend my analysis of those examples; since it became clear in writing it that that would require a book in itself, I've retreated to the much more limited hope that I can use them as *examples*, to make more concrete what is (all too visibly, I'm afraid) a first attempt at thinking through the question of *how* movements go about the business of understanding and changing themselves.

Movements understanding themselves

Talking in terms of social movements is a way to get at this, even though a lot of the literature that uses that language is not very good (Cox 1997). It makes it possible to say "well, these questions are ways of clarifying the self-understanding of a movement". This is a line of thought associated particularly with Alain Touraine (1981), though of course it goes back before him to thinkers like Lukács (1971) and Gramsci (1991), and before them again to Marx (e.g. 1967). Immediately this begs a couple of questions. One is "what is a movement?", which is a can of worms that I don't want to get into here, partly because I did a paper on it here last year (Cox 1998, see also Cox 1999) and partly because as will become clear I think the answer is itself to an extent constructed by internal conflicts over organisation and

ideas (Melucci 1989), though not in as *ex nihilo* a way as some authors would have us think (Laclau and Mouffe 1985).

How can a movement understand itself?

A better question is "how can we know what the self-understanding of a movement is?" Lots of different ideas are voiced in movements, for lots of different purposes and by lots of different actors, after all. When we look at movements, though, we find that to have a self-understanding, to have a view on the movement as a movement, rather than simply having a view on particular issues, on organisational goals, on personal ideals and so on, is not always something people do. In other words, it's an achievement of quite a particular kind, and movements don't always seem to have this kind of capacity for self-awareness. Quite extensive movements, and quite powerful ones, can exist without talking in these terms (except perhaps in pep talks at annual conferences or in the pub after the fifth pint). So when do movements think in these terms?

When can a movement understand itself?

An obvious kind of answer, drawing on the sociology of knowledge (Goldmann 1969, Mannheim 1960), is to say that ideas are systematically produced around a subject when it plays some role in the purposes the actors want to achieve (which is not of course to say that the subject need itself be real: much energy can be expended on discussing the moment at which the soul enters the foetus, for example). So there are likely to be ideas around the nature and purposes of the movement as a whole (a) when one of the things people are doing is trying to build connections across the movement, whether for strategic reasons ("how do we win?") or for identity reasons ("how do we survive?"). These ideas need to become clearer and more specific (b) when the goals of the movement are both large-scale (going beyond e.g. getting a specific law repealed) and within reach (not a matter of the far-off future but a question of massive social changes happening within the next few years); and when the movement is internally pretty complex (so that it becomes important to find common denominators) and has had a significant effect on the surrounding society (so that there's a need to make distinctions).

When are movements best at this?

If I'm right in this, then, a movement's capacity for self-awareness is at its height when a wide-ranging and radical movement is in a position where it can realistically look at remaking society in its own image. Obviously this isn't something that happens every day, but within the Marxist tradition it's illustrated by (say) the blossoming of a whole range of movement theorists - Gramsci, Lukác, Luxemburg, Lenin and so on - around precisely such a situation. Conversely, we'd expect that movements with limited goals, or movements with little hope for the future, talk in mostly organisational or utopian terms respectively; and movements which have actually taken state power are always liable to identify the movement with what is likely to become its major instrument, and so in a sense see themselves through that particular glass, darkly. So (c) we might need to add a third point to those of radicalism and strength, which is that of autonomy: a movement dependent on "traditional" intellectual structures, whether the state bureaucracy, a commercial media or a professional academia, will be harder put to it to "see the wood for the trees" than one which has "organic" decision-making structures, communications organs and spaces for theorising of its own.

Where do these questions come from?

In this paper I'm falling rather uncomfortably between the two stools of organic and traditional activity. With one hat I've been involved in alternative politics of different kinds in Ireland and elsewhere for the last 15 years or so; more particularly I've been involved in different kinds of political project, different attempts at creating an alternative media and different thinking spaces within that. With the other hat on I've followed the kinds of questions this experience brought up into a research project which (if I can get it finished this year) will have been over ten years in the making, and which has had me involved in the different worlds of "reading the literature", teaching students, administering academia and trying to build links between (some) activists and (some) academics.

Trying to understand movements from below

This research involves trying to make sense of the form and direction of social movements from below within disorganised capitalism, which I've provisionally defined as taking the shape of a (very loose) counter culture. I've given a couple of papers to this conference (Cox 1996, 1997) looking at the "local rationalities" I've been finding at the grassroots of this counter culture, among the kind of ordinary participants who occasionally lend a hand or come to an event but do so consistently over a period of decades. One way of phrasing this is to say that the counter culture combines a challenge to the structures of the social totality with a challenge to the everyday routines that reproduce that totality (this useful distinction comes from Lichterman's excellent book: Lichterman 1996). I should say that I'm not talking here about a single movement "issue", or even about a particular kind of "movement", but rather talking about the direction I think movements from below, and the way people in disorganised capitalism "do" movements from below, are going. My own research has mostly been among people involved in different kinds of alternative, green and anarchist projects in Ireland, and inspired by work I did on the West German social movement scene of the 1980s (see Cox forthcoming), but I'm interested in that not so much in itself as for what it tells us more generally about the way social movements are going or might go, both within that peculiar (and rapidly changing) mix of semi-periphery and semi-core south of the Border and within that peculiar (and rapidly changing) mix of periphery-core relationships that make up the capitalist world-system towards the end of the "long twentieth century" as in Arrighi's (1994) terms we're moving from a phase where capital is stabilised locally through long-term productive investment to one of a globalising expansion of financial and speculative capital.
All of this means, of course, that what I'm saying here is itself a bit speculative, or more precisely that what I can reasonably hope to do is not so much to demonstrate "this is how movements from below should see themselves in this situation" as to look at what are reasonable ways to go about asking this kind of question.

The Irish context

So I want to start doing that by looking at this counter culture in Ireland south of the Border. The background to this is made up of three elements:

- Following dependent industrialisation in the 60s and 70s and deep industrial crisis in the late 70s and 80s, Ireland has reinvented itself as only a small country could through developing niches such as computer localisation and tourism and through a clientelistic relationship with the EU.

- As part of this turn-around, the capacity for action (though not autonomy: Breen et al. 19xx) of the Irish state has increased considerably, first with the expansion of its activities into new areas in the 1970s and more recently with a willingness, fueled by EU funding, to offer movement elites access to policy-making and support across a scope ranging from neo-corporatist arrangements at national level to local "partnership" arrangements and state funding for e.g. women's refuges.
- Movements from below, which had been very effectively suppressed by the nationalist movement they had helped to power in the 1920s, began to be able to reassert themselves from the 1970s on, with a flourishing of large-scale and often remarkably successful movements, such as the long-fought campaigns over contraception, divorce and abortion, the defeat of nuclear power, etc. In the late 1980s and even more in the 1990s there has been an increasing divide between movement elites, oriented towards an apparently more open-minded state, and an increasingly disempowered grassroots, drifting into demobilisation or eccentricity. With the successful cooptation of the parliamentary Left, there is a widespread disorientation, which is being experienced as a source both of creativity and of powerlessness.

How do movements choose strategies?

There are then, predictably, a wide range of attempts to put some shape on movements from below: single-movement identity politics, traditional party-building perspectives, a search for organising ideas (social movements, sustainable development, a new left), and academic or artistic responses. Three themes, I think, come out of this, which I want to use to structure this paper and to see if it's possible to generalise this kind of discussion beyond specifically Irish - or specifically British - concerns. Table 1 illustrates this:

Field of tension	Spectrum of responses
Interaction with state structures	From clientelism via mainstreaming to ghettoising
Relation to cultural orientations	From consensual via educative to disruptive
Self-construction in terms of class and power	From populist via mass organisations to elitist

1. The first theme is how movements grasp their interaction with the state. *Clientelist* orientations aim to act as specific advocates for a particular set of clients, ideally in a policy community with the relevant departments; this has been particularly attractive for welfare-oriented movements and for welfare professionals within them. *Mainstreaming* orientations aim to generalise their themes to all areas of the state; at its best, this has been the dominant theme of the Irish women's movement, which has been notably generous and ambitious in this respect. *Ghettoising* orientations expect nothing but opposition from the state; perhaps the best example is the republican movement. Foweraker (19xx) discusses the specific natures of this dilemma for movements in dependent societies, where, as Gramsci put it, "the state is everything and civil society nothing", so that movements have to enter into structuring relationships with the state at a very early point.

2. The second theme is how movements see their relationship to existing cultural orientations. One theme, attractive to rural community movements, has been to stress community *consensus* above all, and this of course has specific meanings in the nationalism of a post-colonial state. A second is to think in terms of *educating* the population, in other words challenging cultural orientations from above in line with an emerging cultural hegemony, often backed up by a rhetoric of modernisation; "official environmentalism" (Tovey 1993) has often found this strategy particularly attractive. A third is to be explicitly and deliberately *disruptive* of existing cultural modes in the name of an alternative and subordinate culture; much modern Celticism falls into this camp.

3. The third tension is around the area of how movements construct themselves in terms of where they recruit, how they operate, and so on. One approach is the predictable *populist* one of status-conscious groups led by charismatic figures or focussed on the symbolic leadership of celebrity; new religious movements may come closest to the classical model of this. A second is that of mass *organisations* with a stable bureaucratic structure, of which farmers' organisations offer a good model. Thirdly, there are *elitist* orientations which work towards a small group of full-time (paid or unpaid) activists interacting with dominant elites in the state, the legal system, the media etc.; professional environmentalists may be the best example of this.

Obviously these typologies aren't exhaustive, and in fact most movements contain internal tensions around these issues. But it's precisely these tensions that I want to start from, because I think they highlight key issues in movement strategy: how do we challenge social structures, how do we handle our interaction with everyday routines, and how do we relate to each other within the movement?

Why do participants prefer given strategies?

As the examples I've given suggest, the kinds of answers we give to these are likely to be tied to - in a sense, are - our "local rationality" as movement actors, in other words the way we make sense of our situation and respond to it, which is a matter both of the situated experience we have of the social world generally and our movement location in particular and of the way we understand and pursue our interests and purposes: in other words, a matter both of structure and of culture. Table 2 illustrates this:

Field of tension	Responses mediated by
Interaction with state structures	Centrality of state involvement to movement structure and participants' occupations; scope of movement goals (perceived acceptability to power structure)
Relation to cultural orientations	Cultural orientations of participant groups (mainstream vs. marginalised groups + internal dissidents) and framing of movement goals (instrumental vs. communicative rationality)
Self-construction in terms of class and	Class basis of most committed participants and points of reference for action (status claims, mass

power   movements, elite intervention)

The left and right columns here are of course alternative ways of saying the same thing (logical arguments consist of elaborate truisms), but hopefully the right-hand column makes some of the underlying issues a bit clearer. Taking them in order:

1. The *structural situation* of participants, and the movement as a whole, vis-is state institutions - whether it and they exist within the "soft fringes" of the welfare state, for example, or are private-sector employees or self-employed, is likely to have a major impact on what the movement as a whole thinks it can or should do with the state: is it the normal mechanism for processing everyday demands, something on which one projects hopes for wider change, or only a source of harassment? Inseparable from this kind of mental processing is *how the movement understands and constructs its own goals:* as already bearing the form of specific administrative or legislative measures, as a demand for the state as a whole to act in certain ways, or as an autonomous attempt to change society and culture without or against the state.

2. The *life experience of participants* in relation to the dominant everyday routines of the society they are living within is obviously crucial to their cultural strategies and to how they construct the goals of their movement. Willing participants in dominant cultural groups (elite or popular) are likely to want to frame issues in instrumental terms, as a matter of the most practical way to achieve goals that can be taken for granted within those cultures, and will devote much effort to making this link and in effect showing how non-threatening the issue is. Members of excluded cultures (eg ethnic minorities or alternative elites) or dissidents from within the dominant groups (eg feminists, gays etc.) are more likely to be attracted either to educative strategies if capturing the relevant institutions seems plausible, or to disruptive strategies if it does not, in both cases privileging the communicative over the instrumental insofar as they are arguing for replacing one way of framing the world with another on the grounds of its intellectual, emotional or aesthetic superiority.

3. Thirdly, movement participants try to create and reproduce particular kinds of movements in ways which are tied both to their own *class experience*, as marginalised and fragmented, as members of coherent and highly structured social groups, or as elite members, and to their *reference points* in terms of action and interaction: public spaces owned by other people, participation in large-scale organisations, or a belief in the key importance of "insider" decision-making processes for determining outcomes.

Summarising this, key tensions within movements in terms of strategy have to do with participants' situation in relation to social structure and everyday routines, and with the way in which they understand the structure and routines the movement is directed towards or against. But this is not the full story, or there would be little to say. Obviously the internal structure and culture of a movement is not a given, but is itself a site of struggle and conflict. Less obviously, so is the situation of participants that participation in social movements, as Rachel Dix showed last year (1998), can entail radicalisation and personal transformation as well as the better-known effects in terms of the formation of alternative elites, downward social mobility and on occasion the transformation of the situation of a whole social group. So the questions I am interested in, of the shape and direction of social movements, are not neatly given by their starting point, any more than there are infinite possible outcomes. This is of course what makes thinking about them both difficult and necessary.

II: Immanent critiques of strategic choices

So movements have genuine choices to make about their directions, although they do not make them "under circumstances of their own choosing"; their capacity for the kind of self-awareness which can think about direction and choices arises because movements are in a situation where participants need to do so, in other words where they are already making these choices consciously and actively and have some capacity for organisational reflexivity (the ability both to act on oneself and to think about oneself).

How do we think about our choices?

The question then arises: how can we justify making one kind of choice as against another? There are two kinds of non-answer. One is a fatalism which sees choices as always fully predetermined by our social situation, to which the obvious response is that this is only sometimes and under some circumstances the case; there are certainly situations in which movements as movements do not have the capacity to act on themselves, so that decisions are the product of social situation, of wider social changes over which the movement has no control, or of individual choices which from the point of view of the movement are essentially random. But then there are also circumstances in which the movement *does* have this capacity for organisational reflexivity; and as I've tried to argue we can specify when this is likely to be the case. Another kind of non-answer is an ungrounded universalism, which amounts in terms of movement politics (not necessarily of philosophical argument) to referring choices to some taken-for-granted worldview. If all actors take the same things for granted, however, this will tell us nothing; if they disagree, we have no practical means of resolving the dispute.

Thinking from the inside out

As against both of these strategies I want to suggest that it's possible to develop an immanent critique, by which I mean in this context a line of argument which does not reach outside the movement for intellectual resources. In other words, we can accept that knowledge is socially grounded *and* that there are frequently contradictions between our understanding and our action, and use this situation to clarify the way the movement thinks about itself within its own terms. So we are not importing an answer from outside, but trying to clarify what is already there. This depends on the assumption, which is central to any emancipatory strategy, that there is something to emancipate people from: in other words, that there is a gap between the explicit organisational forms and ideologies that participants *officially* subscribe to and the creative ways of doing things and thinking that they engage in *unofficially*, as it were. This is then the gap between what is and what could be, which is precisely where movements find something to do.

Fitting strategy to purpose

Practically, this means identifying two terms and asking how adequate one is to the other. Thus, framing the question in cognitive terms, we can ask whether and how far the movement's strategy is adequate to its purpose: "is method X the best way to achieve goal Y?" or "is purpose Y compatible with the interests of the institution Z we are trying to use to achieve it?" Now this is a fairly straightforward approach, and many movement-internal debates are cast in precisely these lines. The

immanent critique of a movement's strategy has more depth than this, though, and for two reasons.

Fitting project to rationality

Firstly, as I've said, knowledge interests are tied to social action. So this narrowly cognitive approach runs into difficulties when people refuse to follow through what seem to us like perfectly logical arguments. At that point, if we've done things by the book, we might reasonably suspect that we're in the presence of ideology - ours and theirs - and abandon the fiction that what we are dealing with is pure and innocent knowledge of the world as it is (if we were, the kind of discrepancy between purpose and strategy I'm talking about would be both considerably rarer and considerably easier to overcome). Thus we can reframe the question as one of the adequacy of a movement project - the way it constructs itself, the way it engages with the world, the directions in which it hopes to transform the world - to the local rationalities at the base of the movement, in other words to the socially-grounded ways in which movement participants make sense of their own lifeworld. (I've defended this approach more extensively in Cox 1998.) This process is a "critique of ideology" of a specific kind, in which as activists and as theorists we encourage others and ourselves to abandon received orientations (practical as well as intellectual) which tie us into accepting the hegemony of traditional organising and intellectual structures and to develop practices and ideas which come closer to expressing and developing our own motivating orientations, in other words to develop organic structures of organisation and thinking. Clearly only some movements are capable of acting in these ways, but equally clearly movements which set themselves sufficiently ambitious goals and come sufficiently close to realising them need to be able to do so, and frequently enough are.

Measuring up to the whole movement

Secondly, there is typically not a total community either of explicit views and organisational structures or of underlying local rationalities: activists think and do different things, and if we get them individually to clarify their own needs, ideas and motivations we will not arrive at the same result in every case. So this project depends on rejecting a methodological individualism and stressing both the ways in which the existing social totality structures received ideas and ways of doing things and the ways in which social movements are transformative processes (Barker 1997, Dix 1998).
This is very well known in community development and feminist activism, and receives back-handed recognition in e.g. alternative and environmental movements through the discussion of the virtues of "community"; but in some senses I think it has to be central to any concept of movement as movement: to participate in a movement which is challenging social structures and everyday routines is both to transform those (if successful) and to enter into new kinds of relationships, with other participants, with those whose cooperation and support we are seeking, and with opponents. So to the extent that there is a movement, there is a "movement totality" which is not simply the sum of the individuals involved; but to the extent that there is also a "movement process" of recruitment, mobilisation, change, advance and retreat, there will always be a gap between the existing understanding and orientations of participants and this process or totality. Movements from below also face the specific problem that, as movements from below, they are always by necessity struggling against an organisational and ideological hegemony which is not theirs.

Changing heart and hand

This understanding is of course at the basis of Touraine's (1981) methodology, as I think of Gramsci's (1971); and in both cases the link between changing understanding and changing action is explicit. It isn't, and can't be, purely a matter of changing how we think or purely a matter of changing how we act. The two are intimately connected; and any movement capable of organisational reflexivity has already got this far.

To put a clumsy title on this approach, it is a kind of dialectical realism, which on the one hand recognises the existence of totalities and processes operating to some extent behind the back of the actors, but on the other hand recognises that these totalities and processes are the results of social action and nothing else. Given this, it is not an unreasonable goal to work towards a greater self-awareness on the part of movements as a whole. To do this, as Touraine in particular stresses, we need to engage with actors in contexts which approximate the movement rather than those which reproduce traditional intellectual structures. Rather than meeting them as market researchers speaking to isolated consumers, or as traditional intellectuals translating the orientations of groups into the language of existing power relations, this strategy of immanent critique needs precisely to be immanent: to take place within movement structures and as part of movement processes. In other words, it can only work in and as part of autonomous movement relationships which enable the movement to experience and transform itself as a movement: whether this means party-like organisations, collective decision-making situations, the alternative media, festivals and get-togethers, or whatever. But, given this, it can also be done, and then becomes not so much an isolated and external exercise in polemic as an organic and shared process of interaction and development - which is not to say, of course, that it is conflict-free, steered by communicative rationality alone, or devoid of power relations; simply that the power and conflict are necessary rather than extraneous.

How are we doing?

There are a few yardsticks that can effectively be used to evaluate how close any actual process comes to this ideal and to see how far the communicative, as opposed to instrumental, rationality reaches within it. These follow from the concept of movement self-awareness developed above:

1. *Comprehensiveness rather than one-sidedness.* If a movement is in some sense a totality, then the process of developing its self-awareness will be more adequate to this totality the more it is comprehensive; conversely, the fewer aspects of the movement and forces within it that are taken into account the less adequate it is likely to be.

2. Scope rather than limits. By the same token, a self-limiting movement analysis, which fails to see the movement as a process and takes existing limits for granted, is unable to develop a picture of the movement of sufficient scope to be adequate to future possibilities. This is so almost by definition, at least for movements from below: insofar as they are attempting to change some aspect of the way things are and are still in existence as movements, this implies that they have not yet achieved that goal, and thus that they aim to reach a scope which they have not yet reached. A failure to try and think "forwards" limits movements to where they are, which is precisely not where they want to be. Movement self-awareness thus needs to try to take on board questions like the known shape of successful movements

in the past, the knowledge that is available of social groups that the movement hopes to include but has not yet been able to, and the scope of sister movements in other contexts.

3. *Compatibilities rather than exclusions.* Movements proceed, if they are successful, from fragmentation to synthesis by overcoming the starting-points of particularism, sectoralism, status politics and so on. In other words, participants come to find that they have compatible interests with one another not as the result of an abstract analysis on the basis of given interests, but through a struggle in which to a greater or lesser extent their given interests (given by the existing state of affairs) and the mutual exclusions these produce become relocated in terms of a possible state of affairs, in which (on terms other than those produced by the status quo) they can find an emancipatory compatibility rather than a particularist exclusion.

I think it is these kinds of question that need to be asked of specific direction-giving processes: how far are the processes in question geared towards producing one-sided, limited and exclusivist directions and how far do they move in the direction of comprehensiveness, breadth of scope and the search for compatibilities?

Celtic illustrations

To make all of this more concrete, I can give a few examples from current attempts in the Irish counter culture to rethink what we're about. Given the crisis I mentioned earlier, there have been a series of attempts to tackle the question of direction. Some of these include:

- Fairs with extensive workshop space using the framing device of sustainable development (hence environment, global economics and development issues);
- "Women's studies" conferences trying with more or less success to span the range of academic, community and artistic interests;
- The development and transformation of an extensive alternative press with left, feminist, environmental and development themes;
- Strategy sessions and policies within political parties and formal organisations which might have the capacity to structure and lead particular movements;
- Formal conferences around "environmental" themes with speakers representing different kinds of organisational form within the movement;
- Get-togethers of small groups of activists in party-like organisations in a fairly discursive and unspecified "political" space (hence left / feminist in orientation);
- More conservative attempts to organise "NGOs", the "third sector" or the "voluntary sector", often with underlying charity or religious ideologies;
- Meetings of "elders" of the "alternative movement" and "alternative media" with a view to creating new organisational forms to meet new needs;
- Left academic conferences around classic themes of economics and politics;
- My own current project of bringing together theoretically-minded movement participants with politically-minded academics under the general rubric of "social movements".

This isn't exhaustive, but may be sufficient to give a sense that movements from below in Ireland at present are certainly capable of posing themselves questions about direction, whatever about their capacity to answer them coherently and practically. If we think about the comprehensiveness or otherwise of these different

projects, the scope or limitations of the different kinds of interaction involved, and the range of movements and participants that are included or excluded by this process, it becomes possible to see both how the kind of yardsticks I have outlined may be useful and why it may be important to think in these terms.

Although these are specifically Irish projects, we have a sense of not being alone in this, and there is considerable interest in the Zapatista-sponsored Encuentro process and more recently in the "People's Global Action" projects: in dependent societies, movement actors cannot be and never have been parochial in their orientation. The problem, in fact, is often the reverse, that it is too easy to build external links and too difficult to forge local networks.

Provisional answers

At this point, of course, one possible response would be in a sense to leave the matter at this point and say "movements will work this out for themselves, or not", particularly since my own research project also amounts to an attempt to ask these questions in the kind of way I have outlined (albeit at the level of ordinary participants rather than heavily committed activists). But I think it is possible, and perhaps necessary, to think beyond this, for a number of reasons:

- If movement participants are committed to this sort of perspective, they still need to ask themselves how to bring it about, and identify the kinds of social relationships that are likely to produce more or less useful answers. That a self-clarification process is possible is not the same thing as saying that it will come about, after all.
- Thinking through the possible consequences of the process is a necessary part of arguing for the process itself, as well as becoming clear about what it might entail and asking ourselves whether and how we stand to gain from clearer and more explicit strategic thinking. It is after all possible that the process would be a cul-de-sac, or more instrumentally a diversion of energies; thinking takes time, but not as much as organising does.
- In line with my arguments against purely cognitive (or contemplative) approaches above, there is little value in coming to an intellectual answer that we are not in a position to implement. So the workability of an answer is an important part of its "truth value", and given the costs and risks of movement action it is worth thinking this through in advance as far as can be done.

One I prepared beforehand

So I've cheated a bit and prepared one set of possible outcomes of this direction-finding process beforehand, not of course ex nihilo but one based on the best sense I can make, both as a participant in some of the processes I've described earlier and as a researcher coming to the end of a research project geared towards these themes. So while this is in a sense a "placeholder" response, it isn't purely wishful thinking, but is the best provisional answer I can come up with by projecting forwards these political and research processes. What follows is then a possible answer which, on a purely cognitive analysis, seems to come closest to adequacy to the movement totality, the local rationalities and the explicit purposes of the counter-cultural project in Ireland at least. Table 3 shows the shape of this:

Field of tension	Strategic direction
Interaction with state structures	Counter-hegemonic

Relation to cultural orientations   Conflictual

Self-construction in terms of class and power Popular

1. Not only are contemporary movements from below in Ireland considerably broader than those organisations within them which are devoted to interacting with the state, but those organisations are notably unsuccessful at acquiring an organisational hegemony over the movements which would structure the movements as a whole in terms of a particular relationship to the state. The local rationalities of activists are considerably broader in scope than their public activities, and typically see their involvement with the state in instrumental terms of political exchange. Lastly, the contradiction between the explicit purposes of social movements and the power relations upheld by the existing state is and remains wide in most cases. In other words, the state-fixated orientation I described earlier exists *faute de mieux* and not as an organic expression of the structure of Irish movements. Given this, serious long-term perspectives have to place the development of counter-hegemony, the restructuring of social relationships along alternative lines and towards different purposes, as an important aim. This has been a major theme of community development work, but one which has accepted clientelistic relationships - and hence a self-limiting strategy - rather too easily.

2. One of the major problems facing movement culture in Ireland is the extent to which existing social institutions (small proprietorship, religion, sports, literature, the pub as well as the major political and representative organisations) are the products of the late 19th century and early 20th century revolution. This has been a key sticking point in Irish movement politics since the 1920s: that the central term of cultural community has been dominated by an increasingly conservative movement from above. Given this, attempts at joining this consensus, transforming it from above or disrupting it from outside have little purchase, and the key question becomes one of how conflicts within that community - of class and gender, since it is defined precisely in ethnic terms - can be brought to life. Women's movements have made some steps in this direction, but for reasons which Coulter (1993) outlines, they have tended themselves to be split by this ethnically sensitive division between anti-Catholic and liberal women's movements and community women's groups.

3. The central weakness of movements which go along with existing social divisions and relationships rather than challenging them is that they reduce movement politics to the politics of identity in relationships similar to those of caste, where what is at stake is issues of status within existing social relationships rather than any attempt to challenge such relationships. Movements that construct themselves in this way can tackle issues of distribution and of who holds power, but not issues of exploitation and domination as such, as the history of the nationalist revolution itself makes clear: would-be emancipatory movements that simply reproduce existing social relationships, whether populist, elitist or mass-organisational, will not achieve emancipation, whatever else they may achieve. Restructuring social relationships within the movement then becomes an important part of the work of the movement, for which "popular" (as opposed to populist) seems as good a name as any.

This is of course only one possible set of solutions to the strategic tensions I identified earlier, and it is entirely possible that the movement processes of self-reflection or the research process I am completing will revise this dramatically or

make much of it appear as wishful thinking. For the moment, though, it is sufficient if this works as a placeholder, to make it possible to develop the question of how movements produce a direction for themselves, which is what I'm mainly interested in in this paper. The "maximalist" scenario implied by these three orientations - counter-hegemonic, conflictual and popular - is sufficiently different from the existing orientations of movements from below to highlight the scope of the consequences, and hence to think about the general value and importance, of pursuing this kind of line of critique.

III: The social construction of movement strategies

It is one thing for a direction-finding process to come up with a possible solution that is more or less adequate to the nature of a movement, and another thing for it to actually happen and to work. In this section of the paper I want to explore the questions of what the kind of strategy I have just outlined might entail internally, mention some points of reference, and think about its chances of winning internally: these being the kinds of questions that would need to be asked of any strategy. So with luck this exercise will make it possible to see how one could start to think about any strategy, not just the one I've taken as a direction here.

Looking to the past

In looking at the first question - the internal implications of picking a particular strategy, I think three areas need to be highlighted: organisational frameworks, communicative structures, and techniques of the self, roughly how movements structure themselves, how they talk to themselves and how activists think about themselves. This can be made a bit more concrete by illustrating it briefly with three different examples from recent history, as follows (Table 4):

Movement	Org.al frameworks	Comm. structures	Techniques of the self
"1968" in the States	Central national organisations	Large numbers of similar publication, linked by news service	Lack of boundaries, permanent pressure, hedonist / puritan conflicts
1980s NSMs in W. Germany	Deep local networks of organisations and projects	Differentiated, primarily national publication; "alternative public sphere"	Good life; "sustaining the tensions"; moral purity
Cont. DIY in RoI	Significant but vague support; few and particularist projects	Organisational press strong, independent press in tatters	Submerged in alternative urban or rural lifestyles

To elucidate these a bit:

1. The key organisational situation in the American 1968 was that of a number of large-scale national organisations, notably SDS but also e.g. the black organisations or the anti-war groups. There was a massive alternative press, which apparently consisted mostly of large numbers of alternative publications following a limited number of models - a sort of media Fordism - deriving as much as anything from this organisational situation and dependence on centralised sources of information (Mungo 1990). With the exception of the long-term activists, who had learnt their trade five or fifteen years previously, techniques of the self seem largely to have been determined by circumstances - the lack of boundaries entailed by participation in a massive and radical movement wave; the high-pressure operating circumstances; and internal conflicts between puritan and hedonist ways of life. Clearly such a situation could not be sustainable indefinitely, but neither would it need to be.

2. In the "alternative scenes" of West Germany in the 1980s, by contrast, centralised national organisations played a more modest role by comparison with the importance of local (in particular metropolitan) networks of movements and organisations: Frankfurt, Hamburg, Berlin and so on. The bulk of the alternative press attempted at least to locate itself at a national level (albeit normally proceeding from a single urban base), and entailed a "flexible specialisation" rather than Fordism, with different publications being sharply distinguished in terms of content, format, audience etc. The same long-term internal differentiation was also reflected, as far as I could judge, in the techniques of the self that activists disposed of: different variants of the "good life" (notably those of urban intellectuals and those of rural romantics) for the more stable parts of the movement, strategies of "sustaining the tensions" (or *Kontradiktionen aushalten*, "withstanding the contradictions") for those more on the edge of project, political or personal survival, and a concern with moral purity as a means of group defence for the most marginalised groupings.

3. In the contemporary DIY scene in Ireland, there is quite a large amount of rather vague support, sympathy and identification, with relatively few active projects at any one time and those often deeply particularist due to their primary relationships with state or supporters rather than with other projects. Consistent with this, there is a respectable alternative press in the shape of the in-house organs of movement organisations, but the independent alternative press has had to struggle to survive, particularly in recent years as the few committed volunteers have become more employable. Techniques of the self tend to be submerged within wider alternative ways of life - urban or rural - which are good for sustaining commitment and solidarity but weak on the production of action.

What does a strategy need to work?

It need hardly be said that the examples given above are very sketchy, not to mention "essentially contested", but with luck they will work as examples, to show what the different areas I'm trying to thematise mean, since in the direction-finding mode the kinds of answers that can be given are necessarily more abstract (Table 5):

Movement orientation	Org. frameworks	Comm. structures	Techniques of the self

Counter-hegemonic	Autonomous network of cooperative relationships	Shared cultural orientations	Attempts to challenge dominant class / gender / ethnic relationships
Conflictual	Integrated system of comm.	Ability to talk in "internal" language	Thematising and questioning nature of existing speech situations
Popular	Means of emotional sustainability	Ability to maintain autonomous sense of reality	Skills for handling permanently unsettling modes of interaction

Organisational frameworks

The most obvious feature of the organisation of a *counter-hegemonic* movement has to be the existence not simply of autonomous projects and organisations, but of an autonomous network of relationships between those projects, in other words one which is not mediated through joint participation in a commodified market, in state-structured activity, or in a shared space within the commercial media. These relationships do not need to be all-encompassing, and given that the welfare state and commodified popular culture have long since penetrated the spaces within which earlier movements were able to articulate themselves more fully (think of 19th century working-class self-provision of welfare or mid-20th century underground culture), it would be remarkable if they could be so for any other than a very small number of "conscientious non-participators", who are likely to find the effort needed for survival in the long term outweighing the demanding process of network-building. Nevertheless, *some* level of autonomous cooperation for practical purposes is fundamental to developing movements as movements, and a key part of the generation of trust, solidarity and interaction between their different parts. One of the greatest weaknesses of contemporary movements from below lies precisely in this area: how can we find reasons to cooperate which make sense across the movement and do not feed right back into state and market?

For a movement to be capable of *conflictual* intervention in everyday routines these networking relationships need to be constitutive of a shared cultural orientation which is distinctly other than that of the dominant cultural modes. Autonomous interaction is not enough, in other words; it needs to be placed on a footing which does not simply reproduce the orientations which are taken as instrumental in dominant contexts. They may be instrumental in their own terms, that is geared to the achievement of goals which make sense to participants but not within the terms of the dominant ideology, and of course this alternative "common sense" is necessary to sustaining the sociological "realness" of a movement.

Thirdly, for a movement to be *popular*, these relationships need to avoid simply reproducing existing class, gender and ethnic patterns of interaction, familiar relationships of domination and exploitation. This is not to say that a movement can (or necessarily should) try to create a full-blown sphere of freedom within itself; rather that at least the germ of transformation needs to be present within its internal interactions.

This of course still does not tell us what those interactions should be about, and of course this is one of the crucial questions facing both the Irish processes I've been talking about and global attempts at interaction: given the failure of attempts to impose a single structure on such movements and the strength of dominant institutions, this is probably the most serious stumbling-block facing movement activists at the end of the century.

Communicative structures

How do communicative structures fit into this? Willie Thompson's *The Left in history* (1997) suggested that in the rubble of Stalinist and Social Democratic attempts to impose a coercive hegemony on movements from below, the starting point should instead be attempts to reach a communicative hegemony. I would have said that he's right in this in so far as it is obviously easier to make a fair stab at saying something that will be widely acceptable than it is to find a form within which people are happy to cooperate.

But communication which simply consists of the distribution of "information" in the abstract is no communication at all, and more importantly leaves a movement at the level of a preference for consuming one kind of "information" over another.

For a communicative *hegemony* to exist, there must be a communicative *structure* which enables the "theoretical leadership" Gramsci spoke of. Since we are talking about movements which do not exercise such a hegemony over society as a whole, this imposes severe problems, the more so since areas in which movements from below have been able to develop their own institutions in the past - internal media, educational institutions, cultural facilities and so on - have now been extensively colonised by capital and the state. They are still of course areas that movements (have to) invest in, but the movement media of the end of the 20th century is far weaker in numbers, frequency and distribution than (say) the socialist press at the end of the 19th century, and more generally the cultural structures of contemporary movements from below are more marginal and very often also more dependent on state support or commodification than those of their counterparts a century or even fifty years ago (Williams 1965, cf. Consorzio Aaster 1996 on the changing face of Italian socio-cultural centres).

So once again there is a problem of "where and what?", which this paper can't hope to tackle. What I can talk about briefly is the nature of the communicative structures that would have to exist for a movement to take the kind of strategic direction I have been talking about. As with organisational frameworks, and for the same reasons, a counter-hegemonic movement needs an autonomous network of communicative institutions: an integrated alternative press rather than a particularist one, self-controlled cultural centres which relate primarily to one another rather than to the world of commercial culture, spaces for discussion which are designed as that rather than as recruiting points or academic exercises, and so on.

This offers the chance to act conflictually, which is something other than simply taking up a position within the existing cultural field of the dominant society. By analogy with ethnicity, it entails being able to talk internally, the existence of a more or less coherent structure of feeling and way of making sense, and not simply being able to represent externally. The two communicative exercises - speaking y your own language, and talking the language of the wider society in a distinctive way, are not identical activities. This is made possible to the extent that the movement's cultural activities have something to say to the movement, and not simply to the outside world, in other words to the extent that there is an internal communicative structure and people are trying to communicate with one another inside the movement. Without this, there is no scope for conflict with dominant cultural

routines, because there are no alternative routines to offer, simply an alternative set of choices within an existing system.

This is then the field where a movement has the chance to become popular by creating an alternative kind of communicative relation, by (to fall into utopianism for a minute) enabling forms of communication across class, gender and ethnic divisions which do not simply reaffirm those divisions but seek to understand them, thematise them and ultimately overcome them.

Techniques of the self

The concept of "techniques of the self" comes from Foucault's *History of Sexuality* (1988), in which he discusses the ways in which individuals were enjoined to construct themselves as sexual beings within different historical discourses on sex. Some such concept is a necessary part of understanding how we "do" the structures and institutions we are involved in (Berger and Luckmann 1967). Although it can be taken for granted in many fields, one area where it cannot is clearly social movement activity, which of its nature is creative and when successful (when movements are "advancing") involves learning not merely *how to* do things people have not done before (write a leaflet, speak in public, occupy a building, set up a government) but also how to become the kind of person for whom such things are easily produced in terms of motivation, interaction with others, and (perhaps most importantly) maintaining the effort over time - "burnout" and erratic behaviour have always been problems in sustained social movement activity.

It is, I think, harder to say much about this area than about the others, partly because relatively little sustained thought has gone into it. But it is clear that setting oneself in opposition to dominant institutions has particular implications for social recognition and everyday interaction: how do activists sustain their sense of reality and purpose when institutions central to the societies they live in act as if they did not exist or consistently misrepresent them? Building counter-hegemony is a long and weary activity, in which our own resources of energy, emotion, friendship, obligation and so on are constantly being used up: how are activists to find ways of sustaining themselves emotionally in the long run? Similarly, how do activists negotiate the "moving boundary" of cultural conflict that seeks not simply to "agree to differ" on everyday social routines but to challenge the routines that others identify with while retaining some sense of reality and validity for their own routines? Internally, to generate movements which are popular in my sense, activists must learn to live with one another in new and unsettling ways, which can neither entail a wholesale acceptance of existing status positions nor a denial of their existence.

The internal politics of movement organisation

As well as the social construction of movement strategy, any reality-oriented thinking also needs to be clear about the internal politics of this construction: what is entailed, who it might be attractive to and what its chances of internal success are. Having tried to identify the nature of the counter culture and its characteristic internal tensions in the Irish context, and proceeded from this to argue for a particular set of resolutions to those tensions which come closest to being adequate to the counter cultural project as a whole, I've also tried to name the necessary elements in the social construction of such a strategy. All of this entails, of course, constructing (or better, reconstructing) the movement, not *ex nihilo* but along the most organic lines of development possible. This has added up to a maximalising project (maximising comprehensiveness, scope and compatibilities), geared around

the development of counter-hegemony and grounded in a strong autonomous movement framework.

So far so good, or so bad in that this is clearly quite a long way off in terms of what the movement can achieve in and of itself. During "wars of position", however, the most committed movement activists are not in the business of storming the Winter Palace, but of creating the orientations which will make it possible for the movement to do so rather than to present a petition for an audience with the Tsar. Which activists are likely to find this perspective attractive?

Who might like this kind of thing?

Coming back to the Irish situation, I would highlight three features of activism which seem to encourage participants to be more ambitious along these kinds of lines. One is straightforwardly occupational situation, in the sense of the extent to which activists are dependent on the movement for their means of existence or are employed in conventional situations. Against the self-images of many participants, but in line with libertarian critiques of bureaucratic socialism, my own sense is that those who are trying to make a living from activism are typically under such pressure to ensure the survival of their institutions in the short-run - securing state funding, reliance on marketing etc. - that it is hard for them to think in terms of restructuring the movement for any longer-term. Autonomy, in other words, is paradoxically least valued by those who think of themselves as most autonomous - but who in their movement activities are most dependent on the processes of commodification and political exchange. For similar reasons, tendencies to organisational patriotism, particularism and parochialism are particularly strong among this elite.

A second and related theme is movement situation, in that for similar reasons those who do not form a central part of the major formal structures of the movement are in a better position to rethink the nature of movement activities: creative initiatives are much more the property of organisational dissidents rather than apparatchiks, independent activists rather than organisation people, communicators rather than power wielders.

A third and (to me at least) unexpected discovery has also been the gender and ethnic relations involved: that those who do not find their vision of the movement encapsulated by existing organisations are to a high proportion women and people from ethnic minorities. Thus there is a clear divide between meetings of movement notables, organisation spokespeople and so on with agendas tightly related to developing the interests of existing organisations (which have a higher proportion of men and of Irish Catholics) - and meetings of dissatisfied activists in communicative or exploratory spaces: the provisional list of participants for our *Ireland from Below* event, for example, is over 2/3 female and over half either non-Catholic or non-Southern Irish. There are other possible reasons for this, of course, but in retrospect (this was a welcome, but unexpected, result for us) it should not be very surprising to find that in non-revolutionary moments movement organisations tend to reproduce rather too much of the relations that characterise the dominant social institutions, and that the push to broaden this is likely to come in a sense from "outside" that provisionally stabilised core.

How can the chances of success be identified?

This brings me to the question of the chances of internal success, and to the probably banal observation that radicalising a movement in this way also entails making it over; under current conditions, with relatively low participation rates in

formal movement organisations, this means less a struggle for the "commanding heights" of existing movement institutions than an effort to mobilise outside them and in new ways. Having spent several years trying to move the Green Party to the left, this wasn't a very comforting conclusion personally, but again once reached it isn't particularly surprising. The success of such an approach depends on two things. One, the ability of such activists to mobilise effectively outside existing institutions, is only partly within their control, and depends not just on finding forms that are adequate to popular needs but also of course on the direction and shape of those needs themselves. The other factor, though, is within the control of such activists, at least to a limited extent, which is to remain in contact with one another, to develop their thinking together, and to support each other's attempts at creative responses. So solidary rather than destructive interaction, holding non-routine kinds of communicative spaces open, and creative rather than conservative techniques of the self are all useful in this approach.

IV: Historical context

So far I've tried to identify some important tensions within movement strategies, asked how we can argue for resolving them in one way rather than another, and looked at the kinds of things that are entailed by such a choice of direction. In this section I want to step back from this internalist view to ask about the general situation within which movements from below find themselves at the end of the century and how movements respond to these general situations, so moving from what is still the partial totality of a movement to the totality of a society.

Both kinds of movements

Movements from below, after all, are always faced with (usually more powerful) movements from above (Cox 1998), so that their activity does not take place in isolation (2). And although I have been mostly talking about the Irish situation, social movements in modernity are pre-eminently international (the second edition of Tarrow's Power in movement (1998) is one of the few works of SM theory in which this is thematised in any useful way). Table 6 tries to give an overview of this for the recent history of capitalism (the dates are obviously pretty nominal, since the processes in question are neither perfectly aligned to each other nor entirely synchronous internationally):

Period	c. 1875 - c. 1923	c. 1923 - c. 1968	c. 1968 - present
Capitalist drive	Liberal / open	Organised / closed	Disorganised / opening
Movement orientation	Radical, broad left	Increasingly conservative, "narrowed left"	Radical questions, fragmentation
Movement dialectic	Upwards from 1880s to mid-1910s	Downwards to 1940s, upwards to 1960s	Downwards from mid-1970s, upwards from mid-1990s?

I should think that every date and assessment on this table is open to challenge (and it would take a much longer paper than this to defend them); what I want to argue

for here is the *possibility* of thinking usefully in these kinds of terms, in other words of a historical and interactive analysis of movements. There are three elements involved:

1. The cycles of capitalist action, understood as movement from above, the organising and reorganising of social life through the mechanisms of capital and the state. The three-part model I outline here, deriving from Claus Offe (1985), Lash and Urry (1987) and Wagner (1994), is useful descriptively and in terms of the local orientations of capital. As I think Arrighi (1994) has shown, though, this must be situated within a longer time-frame, as representing one of several "long centuries" of capitalist accumulation and reorganisation from the 15th century, each of them containing a movement "inwards" (and hence towards closure in Wagner's sense) in which capital is productively "commodified" in the long-term in particular systems of production and distribution, which then come to entail a particular stabilisation of inter-state relations and local cultural forms, and a movement "outwards" (towards opening in Wagner's terms), in which the "creative destruction" of these systems of commodity exchange for the purposes of expanding the financial circuits of capital entails precisely the kind of "disorganisation" of states and cultures discussed by Lash and Urry. So movements from below have to be situated within a context produced (though not necessarily fully controlled) by these massive movements from above.

2. The "movement orientations" I suggest here are largely based on the premise that the original "New Left" analyses of the late 1950s and early 1960s had something to them, in identifying a break from the practices of Social Democracy and orthodox Communism, as they had developed in particular since the First World War and the Russian Revolution. The dates given are structured in particular by Katsiaficas' (1987) suggestion of a series of "world-revolutionary" moments, in other words that within the capitalist world system there are a series of high points of popular opposition to and attempts to overthrow the existing order, which are themselves as international in scope as the movements from above they are challenging. In this scheme of things, the new cycle of accumulation of the latter half of the 19th century comes after the defeat of the movements of 1848, which belong to the "long nineteenth century" in form and orientation. As is well known, workers', nationalist and feminist movements change shape dramatically in the second half of the nineteenth century, and the high point of these movements is expressed, under deeply unpropitious circumstances, from the middle of the First World War onwards, in mutinies and desertions, revolutionary socialist movements, and nationalist insurrections. Following the defeat of most of these movements and crucially the split between the Second and Third Internationals, there is a widespread reaction expressed in fascist movements, and it is the resistance against this which marks the first turnaround of the fortunes of the Left in many European countries at least, and which lays the foundations for independence movements in Asia. "1968" is obviously the most recent of Katsiaficas' "world-revolutionary moments", and much of the history of the subsequent two decades has been taken up with the (still undigested) consequences of that event. Optimistically, I have suggested that in the latter half of the 1990s there are signs of a new upturn, in the appearance of new generations of activists for whom 1968 is ancient history, and a growing creativity in the form and structure of movement activity. I will return to this point in more detail in a moment.

3. This second point (movement orientation) points towards a third, which is the internal dialectic of movements. Gramsci's aphorism can be used to suggest an alternation between "wars of movement" (direct, head-on challenges to the established order) which correspond at their height to Katsiaficas' world-revolutionary moments, and "wars of position", lower-level conflicts carried out for control of different fields of civil society. This needs to be qualified in two ways. One is to observe that the "battle" does not always go in this direction, and as we know "movements from above" not only wage a steady war of position under ordinary circumstances, but are capable of unleashing aggressive "wars of movement", usually as part of a situation in which a major challenge from below has destabilised power relations to the point where a new system needs to be imposed from above; European fascism, and the New Right of the 1980s, both have important elements of this imposition of a new elite consensus following the breakdown of the old in the face of the movements of the 1916 - 1923 period and those of the 1965 - 1975 period. The extent to which this is connected to the simultaneous moves towards "organisation" / "closure" and "disorganisation" / "opening" respectively is one that I don't feel competent to tackle here. What is worth saying, though, is that this dialectic structures movements from below, in a spectrum varying from "flecks and carriers" (Waite 1997) to "moments of collective effervescence" (Barker 1997). In other words, "movement" by no means has the same referent at each of these points: at one time it may mean a handful of isolated activists surrounded by a hostile culture in which even the most limited acts of resistance are difficult; at another, enormous popular movements that can perhaps be channelled by activists, but hardly controlled. The "social movements" literature tends to assume a more stable middle ground of "medium-range" movements with relatively secure organisational structures, which perpetuates an artificial distinction between "ordinary" movements and revolutionary movements, but also one between "ordinary" movements and periods of "apathy" or "demobilisation": one cannot be understood without the other.

The changing face of movements

Within this long twentieth century, then, the face of movements has changed considerably, and it is worth focussing on one aspect of this in particular.: the "three Lefts" of the twentieth century. This is obviously a massive subject, and I can't pretend to do more than raise a couple of issues here whose main point is to ask "where are we now?" Again, pretty much all the suggestions I am making here are highly contested ones, but again I think it is worth trying to ask the question, in the hope that perhaps someone else is in a position to come up with a better answer. Table 7 illustrates the general proposition:

Period	c. 1875 - c. 1923	c. 1923 - c. 1968	c. 1923 - c. 1968
Shape of left	Radical left	Authoritarian left	Fragmented left

By this I don't of course mean to suggest that radicalism, authoritarianism or fragmentation were uniquely properties of these periods, but simply to suggest overall themes of the time, as follows:

1. Movements from below up to the 1920s existed within a space where challenge on a very broad front - to capitalism, to the form of (usually deeply undemocratic) states, to patriarchy, to ethnically-based oppression, to religion and so on - was widely possible and frequently combined aspects of multiple such critiques, along with the persistence of particularistic and reformist orientations. This challenge to structure was often combined, and not only among intellectuals, with a challenge to everyday social routines and a commitment to more emancipatory forms of culture, however conceived, which acted in direct competition with the encroaching generation of popular culture "from above" through nationalism, the development of state intervention, the re-formation of religious and status structures in the new industrial and urban contexts and the development of commercial mass media. Themes of self-education, sexual emancipation, cosmopolitanism and so on were widely possible within this movement, even in the most apparently unpropitious circumstances such as Irish nationalism (Kiberd 1996, Coulter 1993).

2. During the "mid-century closure", heralded by the defeat of many of these movements and aggressive "movements from above", not only in explicitly fascist Europe but in weaker variants such as post-colonial nationalism in Ireland, movements from below found themselves increasingly contained (where they were able to exist at all). Crucially, there was an increasing collusion on the one hand with the state, whether as in Social Democracy and dominant nationalisms the existing state or as in orthodox Communism the Soviet state: libertarian left forces, of whatever shade, were inreasingly marginalised. Along with this, there was an increasing taking-for-granted of the new "popular culture from above", marked by a widespread sympathy for dominant nationalisms and an increasing relegation of gender issues, resulting in the development of a new Left populism which depended on an increasingly narrow construction of popular interests and culture.

3. "1968", and the movements which preceded (civil rights, peace etc.) and succeeded (feminism, ecology etc.) it, transformed this situation, but in unforeseen ways. On the one hand, the increasingly narrow definition of "left" by comparison with the 1920s made the exercise of hegemony on anyone's part rather unlikely, and has I think to be seen as a major contributor to the rise of particularist identity politics (Rowbotham et al. 1979). On the other hand, the fact that actually existing states (capitalist, communist, post-colonial) rather than imagined future states became the primary point of reference perhaps made thinking in terms of a total social order (in other words, mentally taking other movements from below on board and trying to project such a larger alternative totality into a possible future) difficult if not impossible, and hastened the fragmentation of movement thinking of this kind beyond the formulaic or utopian. Movements from below at the end of the century, then, are nothing if

not fragmented; and they are so that it is hard to see how and if they can be put back together again. (Humpty Dumpty comes to mind?)

The prospects at the end of the century

Something can perhaps be said about the prospects within which movements are now acting, however. It is widely accepted that "disorganisation" produces rather weak states, not necessarily in relation to their populations - disorganised capitalism appears to be compatible with a wide range of local power arrangements and forms of social control - but certainly in relation to other states. As Warren Magnusson (1996) has argued, there may be advantages to movements from below from this sort of situation where their immediate target is not an all-powerful national state, but something perhaps in the long term more comparable to a city government in that it is neither self-sufficient in power terms nor possessed of effectively closed boundaries: disorganisation, in other words, may offer more local scope at the level of states than organisation did.

Secondly, one of the most successful legacies of "1968" on most accounts has been the increasingly contested nature of everyday culture. Movements which are aiming to tackle not only structures, but also routines, clearly benefit from this situation, insofar as movement action is not "deviance", but need to avoid such challenges being transformed wholly into the currency of identity politics and the "field of cultural conflict".

Thirdly, the "movement legacy" of earlier movements should not be underestimated. Claus Offe has drawn attention to the role of "decommodified areas", generated by the welfare state and offering particular advantages to initial movement mobilisation and survival. By comparison with the authoritarian empires of the late 19th century or the fascist regimes of mid-century, such scope for popular movements as exists is not to be sneezed at. In both cases, the situation is of course worse now than in the recent past, and perhaps in part at least this is deliberate. In this longer context, the near-total disappearance or *trasformismo* of genuinely Left forces from parliaments and governments, is not that unusual (it mirrors, for example, the role of liberal and republican forces in France and Italy at the end of the last century, or of Social Democratic politicians in Britain, Germany and France in the inter-war period).

All of this suggests that in some ways the "old Left" / "new Left" arguments of the 1950s and 1960s were not misplaced, though the "new Left", the shape of movements from below in our current period, proved to be very different from what was thought at the time. In a longer view, what has happened is that the libertarian left which was marginalised in the mid-century closure has returned, but in a fragmented context where "left" hegemony over movements from below is limited at best. Hence the concept of a counter culture to describe the shared shape and direction of movements from below at the turn of the century: something which is visible more at the level of the everyday rationalities of participants and in the form of their projects than at the level of nation-state institutions. If there is such a shared shape and direction, though, the project of self-clarification I am arguing for here is not impossible, though it is certainly long-term. Along with the internalist questions discussed in the first three sections of this paper, these externalist questions - which situate movements from below within a broader totality

structured by their interaction with movements from above - would, I think, be important elements in the attempt to think through such a project in any form.

V: Conclusion

The bulk of this essay has been an attempt to argue for a particular approach to how movements can clarify their own strategic orientations, drawing from my own research and activity within what I've been calling the Irish counter culture, which I am using as a general way of describing what I take to be as the shape and direction of movements from below in disorganised capitalism. I want to conclude with a brief defence of the direction of this counter culture. I have suggested that contemporary movements from below tend to combine a critique of structural inequality and everyday routines. Now the suggestion that this is a good thing is under attack from two directions simultaneously.

On the one hand, "postmodern" critics are frequently happy with the critique of everyday routine (albeit more in the "contemplative" terms of an ironic reflexivity than in the practical terms of actually making any changes), but reject any attempts to link this critique to "grand narratives" which might suggest that such routines come from somewhere and reproduce some nameable social structures. On the other hand, there is a kind of Left neo-traditionalism which sees the challenge to everyday routine and the stress on the libertarian and the emancipatory as undermining the foundations of the instrumentalist building blocks on which that particular kind of Left project is apparently to be built.

I think this polarisation is simply mistaken. Without the challenge to social structures, the critique of everyday routines returns as status conflicts and identity politics. Without the challenge to everyday routines, the critique of social structure becomes a matter of interest group struggles and machine politics. In other words, the choice is between Weber and Marx, not as an argument over objective realities, but as an argument over objective *potential*, and hence over political choices: to take either social structure or everyday routines for granted, and attempt to operate within the context produce by this, is to foreclose the possibility of a genuinely revolutionary challenge, in the sense of one which does not take the social totality and its constitutive relationships for granted and reduce the questions available for discussion to a matter of specific institutions or specific aspects of everyday life. We have to start from the latter, of course; but that does not mean we have to stop there.

This, I think, is why in Marx as in Morris, in Gramsci as in "1968", there is a stress and even a fascination with both - but also why it is precisely in and around the high points of radical movements that it is easy to think and act in this way. As Thompson put it at the end of his work on Blake (1994), the "romantic" and "revolutionary" tendencies have moved further and further apart since Blake's day, for reasons which are largely external to those movements. Holding them together is always an effort, and always to an extent against the grain. It is also, though, a necessary and important part of any seriously transformative movement to start thinking and acting in this way before the moment in which it may be possible to put this fully into

practice. The counter-hegemonic challenge to the structures of the social totality, the conflictual challenge to the taken-for-grantedness of everyday routines, and the attempt to build a popular movement which starts to do at least some of this internally are certainly a tall order, and not one which existing movement institutions are likely to find easy to undertake or sustain. But if the counter culture is to develop its full potential, it needs to find ways of creating a coherent and emancipatory alliance of these two elements: the critique of structure and the critique of routine.

I am not sure this argument will hold water at every point, and in fact there are good reasons why it is difficult to think the totality of a movement which only exists in fragments. But I do think it is important to make the attempt, and I hope that if this attempt does not satisfy (it doesn't fully satisfy me) it may at least inspire someone else to come up with a better one.

Bibliography

Arrighi, Giovanni (1994), *The long twentieth century*. London: Verso

Barker, Colin (1997), "Some remarks on collective action and transformations", in Colin Barker and Mike Tyldesley (eds.), *Third International Conference on Alternative Politics and Popular Protest*. Manchester: MMU

Berger, Peter and Luckmann, Thomas (1967), *The social construction of reality*. London: Allen Lane

Breen, Richard et al. (1990), *Understanding contemporary Ireland*. Dublin: Gill and Macmillan

Consorzio Aaster et al., (1996), *Centri sociali*. Milano: ShaKe

Coulter, Carol (1993), *The hidden tradition*. Cork: Cork UP

Cox, Laurence (1996), "From social movements to counter cultures", in Colin Barker and Mike Tyldesley (eds.), *Alternative Politics and Popular Protest II*. Manchester: MMU

Cox, Laurence (1997), "Reflexivity, social transformation and counter culture", in Colin Barker and Mike Tyldesley (eds.), *Third International Conference on Alternative Politics and Popular Protest*. Manchester: MMU

Cox, Laurence (1998), "Gramsci, movements and method", in Colin Barker and Mike Tyldesley (eds.), F*ourth International Conference on Alternative Politics and Popular Protest*. Manchester: MMU

Cox, Laurence (1999), "Power, politics and everyday life", in Paul Bagguley and Jeff Hearn (eds.), *Transforming politics*. London: Macmillan

Cox, Laurence (forthcoming), "Towards a sociology of counter cultures?", in E. McKenna and R. O'Sullivan (eds.), *Cultural diversity in modern Ireland*. Aldershot: Avebury

Dix, Rachel (1998), "A short story of individual and collective transformation", , in Colin Barker and Mike Tyldesley (eds.), *Fourth International Conference on Alternative Politics and Popular Protest*. Manchester: MMU

Foucault, Michel (1988), *The history of sexuality* (vol. 3). London: Allen Lane Foweraker, Joe (1995), *Theorizing social movements*. London: Pluto

Goldmann, Lucien (1969), *The human sciences and philosophy*. London: Jonathan Cape

Gramsci, Antonio (1971), *Selections from prison notebooks*. London: Lawrence & Wishart

Gramsci, Antonio (1991), *Il materialismo storico e la filosofia di Benedetto Croce*. Roma: Riuniti.

Katsiaficas, George (1987), *The imagination of the new left*. Boston: South End

Kiberd, Declan (1996), *Inventing Ireland*. London: Vintage

Laclau, Ernesto and Mouffe, Chantal (1985), *Hegemony and socialist strategy*. London: Verso

Lash, Scott and Urry, John (1987), *The end of organized capitalism*. Cambridge: Polity

Lichterman, Paul (1996), *The search for political community*. Cambridge: CUP

Lukács, Georg (1971), *History and class consciousness*. London: Merlin

Magnusson, Warren (1996), *The search for political space*. Toronto: UT Press

Mannheim, Karl (1960), *Ideology and utopia*. London: Routledge

Marx, Karl and Engels, Friedrich (1967), *The communist manifesto*. Harmondsworth: Penguin

Melucci, Alberto (1989), *Nomads of the present*. London: Hutchinson

Mungo, Ray (1990), *Famous long ago*. New York: Citadel

Offe, Claus (1985), "New social movements", *Social Research* 52: 817-868

Rowbotham, Sheila et al. (1979), *Beyond the fragments*. London: Merlin

Tarrow, Sidney (1998), *Power in movement* (2nd edition). Cambridge: CUP

Thompson, EP (1994), *Witness against the beast*. Cambridge: CUP

Thompson, Willie (1997), *The left in history*. London: Verso

Touraine, Alain (1981), *The voice and the eye*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP

Tovey, Hilary (1993), "Environmentalism in Ireland". *International Sociology*

Wagner, Peter (1994), *A sociology of modernity*. London: Routledge

Waite, Mike (1997, "Flecks, frames and carriers", in Colin Barker and Mike Tyldesley (eds.), *Third International Conference on Alternative Politics and Popular Protest*. Manchester: MMU

Williams, Raymond (1965), *The long revolution*. Harmondsworth: Penguin

---

Footnotes

(1)Thanks are due to Anna Mazzoldi for extensive comments on the first part of this paper, to Hilary Tovey for comments on the abstract, and to Simon Jones for useful discussion of a key idea. Back to top

(2)This distinction between "movements from above" and "movements from below" relies of course on the assumption that contemporary societies do in fact involve relationships of exploitation and domination, and that such relationships are inherently asymmetrical. Back to top