Media Strategies and Political Projects: A Comparative Study of Social Movements

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Abstract: This paper analyses the relationship between social movements and the media strategies that they invoke to pursue their respective goals. Three social movement organizations (SMOs) active in Vancouver, British Columbia, are taken to exemplify three distinguishable types of social movement politics: "recognition" (Gay-Lesbian Centre), "redistribution" (End Legislated Poverty), and "salvation" (Greenpeace). We employ a qualitative comparative case analysis, based on interviews with activists and on archival documents from each SMO. In tracing the media strategies of these groups, we recount their histories, focusing on the way in which each has framed its project and on the organizational and strategic dimensions of its practice. The varying attempts of these SMOs to cope with the asymmetrical and dependent power relations between movements and mainstream mass media are interpreted with reference to Antonio Gramsci's theoretical perspective on counter-hegemony and Nancy Fraser's conceptual distinction between "affirmative" and "transformative" politics. In exploring how SMOs respond to potential media blockage, distortion, or facilitation of their ideas and actions, we clarify some of the dilemmas that confront critical social movements in a mediatized age.

Resume': Cet article analyse la relation entre mouvements sociaux et les stratégies médiatiques qu'ils utilisent pour atteindre leurs buts respectifs. Trois organismes de mouvements sociaux (OMS) actifs à Vancouver, Colombie Britanique, ont été choisis pour illustrer trois types de politiques de mouvement social: la "reconnaissance" (Centre des Gais et Lesbienes), la "redistribution" (Fin de la Pauvreté Légiférée) et le "salut" (Greenpeace). Nous employons une méthode qualitative et comparative d'analyse de cas basée sur des entrevues avec des activistes et des documents d'archives de chaque OMS. Tout en retraçant les stratégies médiatiques de ces

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Since the 1970s studies of popular culture and social movements have viewed the mass media as a key site of political contention in advanced capitalism (cf. Hall et al, 1980; Fiske, 1989; Hackett, 1991; Ryan, 1991). Scholars in the US, beginning with Gaye Tuchman (1978), Harvey Molotch (1979) and Tod Gitlin (1980) have described the production of news as a hegemonic “system of power” into which oppositional movements step when they contest prevailing definitions and dominant cultural and political frames (Gitlin, 1980: 251). Movements, it is held, depend in great part on the mass media to “get the message out” (Stone, 1993), and in doing so they use “an establishment institution to fulfil nonestablishment goals: communicating with movement followers, reaching out to potential recruits, neutralizing would-be opponents, and confusing or otherwise immobilizing committed opponents” (Molotch, 1979: 71).

In other words, movements make strategic use of the media for various counter-hegemonic purposes which include critique of existing social and material conditions, disruption of dominant discourses, codes and identities, and articulation of alternatives, whether in the form of new codes, identities and ways of life or progressive state policies. As Gitlin points out, however, there is a tension in using a hegemonic system for oppositional purposes, which poses continuing challenges to critical movements:

Straining to take advantage of the media’s interest in “exciting” or “important” news, oppositional movements step into this web of conflicting yet interdependent corporate and State powers. One core task of opposition movements is to contest the prevailing definitions of things, the dominant frames. They must “rectify names,” they must change the way people construe the world, they must penetrate and unmask what they see as the mystification sustained by the powers that be. In this sense, all insurgent movements must be empirical in their approach to the conventional definitions of objective reality; they must probe to discover in practice how far the principles of news “objectivity” can be severed both from the disparaging codes and from the corporate and State interests that sustain and delimit them (1980: 283).

In this paper we are interested in examining one important aspect of the complex relationship between the media and social movements; namely, how three social movement organizations have developed media strategies as aspects of their specific political projects.
Theory

In pursuing this sociological problem, we make use of a sensitizing framework presented by Gamson and Wolfsfeld (1993), who have distilled many of the strategic considerations in movements' use of news media into a model of movements and media as interacting systems. They claim that the movements/media relation is one of asymmetrical dependency: the position of media at the centre of a mass communications network gives media a spectrum of options for "making the news", while movements have few options beyond the mass media for getting their messages to wide publics. "The fact that movements need the media far more than the media need them translates itself into greater power for the media in the transaction" (Gamson and Wolfsfeld, 1993: 117). Within this asymmetrical relationship, movements need the media for three main purposes: to mobilize — to reach their constituencies, to validate their existence as politically important collective actors, and to enlarge the scope of conflict, drawing third parties into the conflict to shift the balance of forces in a favourable direction. According to Gamson and Wolfsfeld, movements are particularly concerned that media discourses grant them 1/ standing — i.e., a quantity of coverage that places the movement clearly in the public gaze, 2/ preferred framing of the issues at hand — i.e., a construction of the news that features the terms, definitions and codes of the movement, and 3/ sympathy — i.e., coverage which is likely to gain sympathy from relevant publics. They go on to advance hypotheses about the effectiveness of movements in influencing media coverage that refer to generic fea in contrast to Gamson and Wolfsfeld, who pose their analysis at the level of whole movements, our interest here is in analysing the strategic relations between movements and the media at the level of specific groups engaged in specific forms of struggle. Viewed this way, media strategy can be understood contextually as one aspect of a group's broader political project, which needs to be situated historically within a narrative of the group's formation and ongoing mobilization. Further, in focusing on local social movement organizations rather than the broader movements to which they belong, we offer some corrective balance to the more familiar discussions of whole social movement industries, which often elide differences between SMOs that operate within the same social movement.

Two further sets of distinctions are especially helpful in conceptualizing media strategies as aspects of larger political projects. In the first place, we can distinguish, as complementary and often simultaneous modes of political (and cultural) engagement, what Gramsci metaphorically termed wars of position and wars of manouevre. The latter characteristically involve assaults on

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existing institutional structures and cultures entailing rapid deployment of
forces in a specific conjuncture to gain tactical advantage — as in the use of
demonstrations and direct action, an effect of which is often a massive surge
in media standing that may constrain elites from pursuing certain courses. In
contrast, a movement group conducts a war of position characteristically by
attempting to occupy or create new spaces for alternative identities, moralities,
and ways of life within the limits of existing social, economic, and state
structures, activating a longer-term process of building a counter-hegemonic
bloc of social forces through popular education, consciousness-raising,
community development, self-reliance, etc. Both forms of engagement are
important in counter-hegemonic politics — indeed, Gramsci viewed their
combination — in his so-called dual perspective2 — as indispensable to
transformational change in advanced capitalism — yet it is clear that specific
groups occupying particular niches in the life of larger movements may favour
one or the other, with consequences for their media strategies.3

In the second place, we can with Nancy Fraser (1995) distinguish between
two understandings of injustice which animate contemporary movements. The
first, a socioeconomic concept, sees injustice as rooted in political-economic
structure and pursues a politics of redistribution. The second, a cultural
concept, sees injustice as rooted in social patterns of representation, interpreta-
tion and communication and pursues a politics of recognition. For Fraser, the
struggle for recognition is fast becoming paradigmatic to political contention
in the late twentieth century; clearly it figures prominently in the praxis of
many so-called new social movements. Yet such struggles occur in a world
of exacerbated material inequalities (Fraser, 1995: 68); and in such circum-
stances announcements such as Melucci’s (1994) that movement activism now
takes the postindustrial form of symbolic challenge are at best premature and
at worst painfully naive (Bartholomew and Mayer, 1992). Fraser also draws

2. See Gramsci (1971): 169-70, 229-239), and Sassoon (1987: 193-204) who comments that
in Gramsci’s dual perspective the war of position and the war of manoeuvre are part of a
single, dialectical process: “What begins to disappear in Gramsci’s problematic is the question
of whether a movement or period is ‘revolutionary’ or not. It is rather a question of which
pole of the dialectic is nearer at hand. Neither pole is wholly revolutionary or not
revolutionary on its own. Rather, it is the unity of the whole and the relation of the elements
within it which must be analyzed” (Sassoon, 1987: 194). Thus, for instance, while holding
that strikes are generally wars of manoeuvre involving the use of force, Gramsci suggested
that “Gandhi’s passive resistance is a war of position, which at certain moments becomes a

3. We are aware that Gramsci referred his theoretical perspective to the overall politics of
historical conjunctures, and that we are applying his ideas to the narrower domain of specific
social movements organizations; but the concepts of war of position and war of manoeuvre
are no less relevant at this more concrete level of struggle.
the important distinction between affirmative and transformative remedies for either form of injustice:

By affirmative remedies I mean remedies aimed at correcting inequitable outcomes of social arrangements without disturbing the underlying framework that generates them. By transformative remedies, in contrast, I mean remedies aimed at correcting inequitable outcomes precisely by restructuring the underlying generative framework (1995: 82).

Our overall objective is to analyse how social movement groups with differing commitments to cultural and socioeconomic justice — and to affirmative and transformative remedies — have selectively taken up Gramsci’s dual perspective on social change in the course of engaging themselves with the mass media. One aspect of the organizational prowess of social movement groups is that they are not simply passive victims of media stereotyping, but that they are able to use the media to advance movement goals. Accordingly, our aim in this paper is to outline those attempts and to interpret the differences between SMO media strategies in a theoretically informed way. We do this through analysis of selected case studies that represent conceptually distinct SMOs, enabling us to trace the connections between their media strategies and their specific political projects. We see this as a necessary step toward a fuller articulation of movement-media relations in a taxonomy that links kinds of SMOs with characteristic media strategies.

Method and Cases

The larger research project from which this study was drawn began in 1991 with an intensive survey of 13 core SMOs operating in the Lower Mainland of British Columbia. The topical focus of the research was coalition-formation amongst the “new social movements”, and this entailed study of the relationship between “old” and “new” social movements (Carroll and Ratner, 1995), the collective-action frames prevalent in different SMOs and movement sectors (Carroll and Ratner, 1996a), and the network of cross-movement activism (Carroll and Ratner, 1996b). In phase 1 (1991) of the research project, detailed case histories were developed from oral histories obtained from several long-time activists in each organization and from documents archived by each organization. In phase 2 (1991–92) a cross-section of 12 current activists from each organization, as well as 50 activists from other SMOs in the Vancouver area, was interviewed in depth. The questions ranged widely; those concerned specifically with movement-media relations are given in Appendix I. Responses to these queries were transcribed verbatim from audio-tapes and analysed using the Ethnograph (Seidel et al., 1988). In phase 3 (1994), follow-up interviews were conducted to document any further developments for each group. All of the interviews pointed to the important
effects of the media on the long-term viability of these SMOs; hence the particular focus of this study.4

Our approach in this article involves a qualitative, comparative case analysis of the media strategies and political projects of three social movement organizations. These cases have been purposively selected from the larger study of 13 SMOs with the intention of clearly representing distinct kinds of political projects while permitting greater analytic depth than would be feasible with a larger sample of SMOs. Greenpeace — now a high-profile international environmental NGO with close to 40 branches in 25 countries — had its origins in Vancouver in 1971, and continues to maintain an active office there. Our case study pertains specifically to that office. The Centre, established in 1979, has been a central node in a network of community-development initiatives among gay men and lesbians, now sustaining nearly 500 members. End Legislated Poverty (ELP), formed in 1985, has attempted to mobilize the poor and to cement an alliance of progressive forces committed to a left program of redistributing income and curbing the welfare state’s social control function.

With regard to Fraser’s distinction between the politics of recognition and redistribution, the Centre presents a fairly clear example of a movement organization dedicated primarily to a politics of recognition, while ELP occupies a position decidedly at the “redistributional” end of the continuum.5 Greenpeace — and environmental groups generally — are difficult to classify in Fraser’s terms; their political projects are framed less explicitly in terms of the human relations of cultural and socioeconomic justice and more in terms of the nexus between humanity and nature. Their problematic is not conceived in terms of “social injustice”, but in terms of planetary survival; furthermore, they do not seek to advance the specific interest of their own SMO constituency - either through “recognition” or “redistribution” — but to secure similar benefits for all. But if this be a distinct kind of political project — what might be called a secular politics of salvation that “addresses fundamental global survival questions”6 — it is so precisely because of its condemnation of the material and cultural injustices that go along with environmental abuses.

4. We thank Donna Vogel for preparing initial case reports and follow-up reports for each organization, and Jordie Newman for help with the analysis of media strategies from the phase 2 interview transcripts.
5. We have purposively chosen our cases to highlight contrasts between politics of recognition and redistribution as they pertain to movement-media relations. With Fraser (1995), we are mindful of the fact that in many contemporary movements (e.g., feminism) struggles for cultural and socioeconomic justice are pursued conjointly.
6. The latter phrase is from one of our Greenpeace respondents. We do not use the term “salvation” in an eschatological sense, but derive it from the non-religious though inspirational Greenpeace vision of an ecologically sane world. Eyerman and Jamison
These groups then — Greenpeace, End Legislated Poverty, and the Centre — are taken to exemplify three distinctive types of political projects associated with different SMOs. In what follows we offer comparative analyses of how the media strategies of these groups have developed in specific socio-political contexts, concentrating on the ways in which each has framed its project and on the organizational and strategic dimensions of its practice.

Greenpeace

Greenpeace was the invention of the media. The image that travelled around the world — purely images of whales and seals — created the profile which attracted the funding which then ... became a self-replicating process. Then the organization went out for more media, more members, more media, more members, and then had its own ability to talk to members through direct mail. Its own organs eventually reached a critical size ... The organization is totally focused on the media; one’s performance in a campaign is evaluated on how successfully you’re able to project a message through the media, because the politicians are totally responsive, capitalism is responsive to media. They don’t want their images tarnished; they don’t want their markets destroyed; they don’t want consumers to see their products as bad and them as bad (Henry).

This narrative, from one of the Greenpeace activists we interviewed, sums up much of what can be said at the outset about Greenpeace and the mass media. The commitment to a media-oriented political strategy was deeply inscribed in the group’s initial formation. In contrast to other groups, one could almost say that Greenpeace’s political project has been elaborated from its media strategy, rather than vice versa. This is not to say that Greenpeace’s political agenda has simply been set by mass-media imperatives; rather, it is to emphasize the salience that media coverage has always held in the group’s political strategy.

Greenpeace emerged out of the “Don’t Make a Wave Committee” — itself an offshoot of the British Columbia branch of the Sierra Club, created in 1969 as an ad hoc vehicle for direct action against American nuclear weapons tests

overemphasize, in our view, Greenpeace’s action-orientation, leading them to conclude that Greenpeace has “... no interest in the development of an ecological philosophy or world view” (1989: 100).

7. In what follows, italicized passages are direct quotations from interviews with 12 activists in each of the three organizations. Names have been changed to protect confidentiality. The interviews were conducted in late 1991 and early 1992, as the second phase of the larger study described above.

8. As Dale (1996:2–3) notes, “... the engine at the centre of this thing called Greenpeace has always been its prophetic understanding of the nature of mass communications, which a handful of Greenpeace’s founders picked up from the writings of Marshall McLuhan.”
in the Aleutian Islands. The decision to sail a boat into the Alaska test zone was philosophically grounded in the Quaker tradition of “bearing witness”, which continues to provide a rationale for Greenpeace-sponsored direct actions. For Greenpeace founders, as for subsequent activists, “determined individuals could alter the actions and purposes of even the overwhelmingly powerful by ‘bearing witness’, that is, by drawing attention to an environmental abuse through their mere unwavering presence, whatever the risk” (Greenpeace, 1991: 7). The means of “drawing attention” committed Greenpeace to a conscious and increasingly sophisticated media strategy which has predominated over concerns with grassroots organizing — i.e., mobilizing an active membership base. The first voyage of the “boys in boats” — a tag which also draws attention to the masculine heroism that has figured significantly in Greenpeace’s history — set the tone for the fledgling group’s future which came to be punctuated by nonviolent direct actions of civil disobedience geared to attract media attention to the group and its framing of environmental issues. Indeed, the founding voyage included as crewmembers three journalists able to send regular reports from the field which made excellent news copy — establishing a pattern in which Greenpeace has carefully cultivated media participation in its campaigns.

Greenpeace has generally eschewed manifestos or other detailed attempts at definitive framing; instead its political project has been constructed in minimal terms, and with maximal flexibility, as the commitment to create a green and peaceful planet — a vision that resonates from the name itself. This is not to say that the initial concern with nuclear testing — which concisely combined environmental and pacific frames — has not been substantially widened; in fact, Greenpeace’s success in stopping American nuclear testing in the Aleutians spurred the group to mount similar direct-action campaigns around sealing and whaling throughout the 1970s. By the time we began our study (1991), Greenpeace’s own framing of its main campaign areas included atmosphere/energy, nuclear/disarmament, ocean ecology, terrestrial ecology (forests), and toxics — a conceptualization that also reflects the extent to which Greenpeace has developed a strong program of ecological research which strategically complements its continued bearing of witness. At the same time, however, the emerging discourse of “environmental justice” was beginning to circulate among Greenpeace activists. In its twentieth anniversary publication, Stepping Lightly on the Earth, Greenpeace Vancouver noted that “increasingly, there is a realization that all the urgent issues facing humanity

9. It should be noted that the “boys in the boats” imagery is disavowed by the later generation of Greenpeace activists. As David Peerla, a former Greenpeace forestry campaigner remarks, “… the organization is trying to internalize various standpoints. It’s trying to internalize feminist within its organizational structure, so that it’s not just boys in boats” (Dale, 1996: 74).
human rights and social justice, democracy, peace and environmental protection — are irrevocably linked" (Greenpeace, 1991: 18). In May, 1997 Greenpeace International’s internet homepage (www.greenpeace.org) framed the organization’s project in the following terms: “Greenpeace is an independent, campaigning organisation which uses non-violent, creative confrontation to expose global environmental problems, and to forge the solutions which are essential to a green and peaceful future. Greenpeace’s goal is to ensure the ability of the earth to nurture life in all its diversity. Therefore Greenpeace seeks to: protect biodiversity in all its forms; prevent pollution and abuse of the earth’s ocean, land, air and fresh water; end all nuclear threats; promote peace, global disarmament and non-violence.”

Organizationally, Greenpeace has evolved from its initially informal, participatory-democratic form into a multinational corporate structure that is hierarchical yet flexible in its responses to local and national conjunctures (Wapner, 1996). One of our respondents—a longstanding activist—compared Greenpeace to a Leninist organization: a highly professionalized vanguard in which general directives flow from the top down while specific tactics are devised within local cells — giving each group a capacity to take swift action as opportunities arise. Hunter (1979: 49), one of the founders of Greenpeace, points out that from the start Greenpeace activists viewed their project as one of creating an environmental “vanguard”; and, continuing with the Leninist metaphor, it is instructive to note that Greenpeace has never aspired to a mass membership. Actually, it has no formal membership; instead campaigners and office staff are paid employees, although their work is supplemented by that of volunteers. Volunteers and Greenpeace supporters — those who give money when contacted by the extensive canvass — have no rights to participate in decision-making; they may define themselves as members but they are actually positioned as subscribers to the organization’s glossy magazine.10

Yet if a Leninist-style organization of professional campaigners has served well in a mediatized11 war of manoeuvre, Greenpeace has turned increasingly toward a second category of professional activist — applied scientists and professional ecologists whose work has lent Greenpeace credibility as a source of reliable information — according Greenpeace a major role in a mediatized war of position for the ecological loyalties of the public.

To say that Greenpeace’s political strategy has been nearly coterminous with its media strategy would be only a slight exaggeration. From the local

11. By the term “mediatized”, we mean simply the actions and practices conducted by groups or individuals in order to influence audiences through their anticipated media impact.
offices to the international level, there are communications departments
dedicated specifically to media relations and production.12

The media is Greenpeace in many respects ... — the need to tailor one’s
message to the media; the response to scale: ... the bigger, the more
dramatic, the better. Therefore you have to organize hierarchically ... to
put these big capital-intensive splashes together ... The whole strategy of
Greenpeace is to use the media as a fifth estate. [So it goes beyond just
the planning of direct actions?] Yeah, sure, it’s planning the actions and
planning the entire campaigns. I mean, how does the media fit into campaign
strategy in a zillion different ways? And the media is there just like the
government, just like giant corporations, just like the public, just like the
experts. Media is a major component of every campaign, every strategy,
everything Greenpeace does (Steven).

Many Greenpeace actions are literally media events — they only receive
validation as social realities through media coverage — without the media
presence these events would be meaningless.

Right from the beginning we have changed or monitored our activities so
that they would be just right for the media. ... Literally, the actions and
things that we do are dictated that way and we close up shop really fast
if the media doesn’t show up (Pam).

With appropriate coverage, media events serve the function of “bearing
witness” but also of free advertising to maintain a flow of funds from the
canvas and direct-mail campaigns to finance further capital-intensive
“splashes”. As one of our respondents put matters,

... our goal is to get the environmental issue discussed, and also, of
course, to get Greenpeace mentioned, because our support comes from the
public (Laura).

Greenpeace thus makes strategic use of the media in mobilizing financial
resources from an otherwise passive conscience constituency.

The emphasis on creating and disseminating strong images through the
mass media has shaped Greenpeace practices in innumerable ways. Each pub-
lic political action that Greenpeace organizes is conceptualized as a two-tiered
reality. One tier — what one of our respondents called the existential — in-
volves bearing of witness by protesters who are genuinely opposed to the tar-
get of protest; the other — that of strategically constructed imagery — entails

12. While it is true that international organizations like Greenpeace are in good position to wage
aggressive media campaigns by virtue of their widespread notoriety, a global and media-
driven orientation has characterized Greenpeace from the start.
the question of how that protest can be conveyed to the public by the media ... So there’s two thought processes happening. One is how would the media pick that up, what would the image look like and secondly, what is an effective way of protesting? (Ken)

Greenpeace thus practices a highly reflexive politics — its direct actions have meaning both in themselves — as interventions intended to disrupt the normal course of capitalist or state practice — and beyond themselves — as significations of “what is wrong” with the world, intended to travel via mass media into the lifeworlds of a dispersed and plural public. The salience of the latter “politics of signification” is what is distinctive to Greenpeace, typically taking precedence over the existential aspect of collective action, and posing a definite set of constraints upon political practice:

Well I suppose, in that we use the media for our purposes, what the media requires of us is what makes us do what we do. If we wish to get a message out than we have to follow certain rules, certain media setup rules, in order for those things to get out. A continuation of media stunts as direct action is largely because that’s the way the media will need to have it in order for it to get there. But more soft, broad-based things don’t get attention, therefore we don’t do them (Sue).

The delicate reflexivity of the Greenpeace-media relationship is conveyed well by Mary:

... it’s a bit of a vicious circle because, I mean, we’re driven by the media ... in that we have to do something that’s dramatic enough to get the media’s attention so that they’re interested in coming out and cover it and thereby convey our message to the public. But then on the other hand, the accusation by them often is, “Well, you’re just manipulating us.” But you know, our response is that you cause us to manipulate you because this is the only way you’ll report what we have to say.

Given the asymmetrical dependence that is structured into the movement-media relationship it is not surprising that Greenpeace has devised tactics which operate within the norms of liberal journalism and news “objectivity” to lessen its vulnerability to the whims of media attention and inattention. Greenpeace campaigners are trained in media relations to develop a sense of what is an appealing soundbite or visual clip.

... [W]hen you’re designing an action, for example, the direct action coordinator, in consultation with the campaigner and the media director, will decide how to hang the banner, where to position, ... how to stage the event so that it will appear in the best possible light on camera (Henry).
Beyond meticulous planning to fashion a product attractive to the media, Greenpeace cultivates friendly relationships with sympathetic journalists, who are often tipped off about impending events or supplied with leaked documents, and who are assisted wherever possible with backgrounders and documentation for their research. Greenpeace is also increasingly involved in direct production of magazines, books, and video footage, the last of which is routinely sold as news copy in the US, affording a fairly close control over the preferred framing of issues. At the time of our interviews in the early 1990s, Greenpeace Vancouver did not yet have its own media department for such production, but its practice was to videotape its actions and make the footage available to the mass media.

This proactive strategy has created a sympathetic media context for Greenpeace's political interventions; as Steven commented, "people in the media like Greenpeace." Yet the relationship is a delicate one that sometimes rubs against the grain of detached objectivity so central to liberal journalism. To be effective in putting out its preferred frame to a wide audience, Greenpeace must facilitate and influence the media without being perceived as manipulative. As one respondent observed,

> You can go, you can try and organize them [the media] too much, and that backfires.... They resent feeling as though they don't have power over the situation. [They don't want to feel duped?] Right, they don't want to be merely our tool. It's OK if it's a two-way street; we're getting something and they're getting a good story, but if it's too clearly that we're just using them for our own purpose, then they don't much care for that (Sue).

Overall, Greenpeace fits the description of a movement organization whose substantial resources, organization, professionalism and strategic planning have given it media standing while enabling its preferred frame to be featured prominently. Nevertheless, Greenpeace faces ongoing problems and challenges. For all the concern about manipulation, the media retain an asymmetric power to select and to frame what is newsworthy. As one activist suggested, citing an adage of the 1960s,

> ... I definitely believe in that cute little saying that says "the revolution will not be televised." ... And I believe that when we finally got lots of media coverage is when we were out saving cute little whales. That wasn't threatening the US government or the Canadian government much so that's an OK thing; let them amuse themselves with that. As long as they stay away from nuke issues, that's OK. The media is just another big business and certainly there's always exceptions but ... we'll never accomplish what we want by depending on the media (Pam).

Even when actions are widely covered by sympathetic journalists the final product often gets packaged as infotainment — with postmodern fascination
supplanting the modernist quest for "truth". The increasing prevalence of this genre, particularly in television, increases the likelihood that the strong image of a direct action will be cleaved from the intended political message, with a consequent disparity between Greenpeace's standing and the prominence of its preferred frame.

_Sometimes the stunt can be neater than the issue and so the media will only talk about the stunt. "Wow, he just parachuted off that smokestack!" But what smokestack was it? (Pam)_

To some extent, Greenpeace has dealt with this problem by developing an internal division of labour of the sort that Gamson and Wolfsfeld (1993) discern in whole movements. Media events are launched as appropriate conjunctures arise, and coverage of them gives Greenpeace standing, even if the preferred frame is buried under the spectacle of infotainment. Yet since the 1980s Greenpeace has funnelled extensive resources into professional research, writing, and publication, developing in-depth analyses of ecological issues and policies—an initiative that trades off high-profile standing for the likelihood of getting a more substantive message out, through press releases, publications, etc. The two strategies—one oriented to opportunistic action in favourable conjunctures, the other toward a more long-term process of inquiry and education—have operated synergistically, so that "Greenpeace"

_is the first name the journalist thinks of when he thinks of particular issues... when someone says "pulp mills" they think Greenpeace; when they say "driftnets" — Greenpeace; "Antarctica" — Greenpeace (Henry)._ 

Through supplying the media with appealing copy and through cultivating friendly relations with key journalists, Greenpeace has positioned itself in a way that "the media will now come to Greenpeace for information or opinion without us going to them because we've established credibility" (Ken).

Even so, several of our respondents commented on the problems of elitism that go with both prongs of this strategy: Greenpeace does not engage in grass-roots organizing; its reliance on a vanguard of professional campaigners and analysts relegates most people to the passive status of conscience constituents

13. As Tetzlaff argues, an important mechanism of social control in late capitalism involves the mass-mediated construction of spectacularly superficial images, which fascinate without enlightening. Tetzlaff suggests that this postmodern sensibility seems to be growing with each generation, and concludes that "...as long as fascination fills just those cultural spaces where meaningful understandings of economic relations might otherwise go, capital is well served" (1991: 31).
i.e., donors. The heroic elitism of media stunts, for instance, can have both inspirational and disempowering ramifications:

...I think that seeing someone as a hero is rather disempowering ... most people can’t really see themselves driving a zodiac, stopping a warship, or something like that.... I think the majority of people put us up on a pedestal and say, “you’re Greenpeace; you’re doing the work ... it’s not me, I can’t do that.” But I don’t know; I think at least we inspire people to ask questions (Mary).

Other respondents pointed to limitations in the use of media stunts, which in an era of already heightened environmental consciousness have tended to become predictable and even ritualized, subverting their claim to be “news”:

We’ve gotten very stale in our actions ... and now we’ve gotten into this routine of hanging a banner — another banner hanging! Oh my god, half the employees don’t even come to attend the banner hanging; we’ve gotten so sick of it, and the media’s gotten sick of it too (Pam).

I think [Greenpeace actions] will lose effectiveness if we don’t adapt and change, because part of what made it effective has been the element of surprise and that’s gone... We’re getting a lot of tips from people inside the media and from our own media people saying “Listen, Greenpeace could get a lot more mileage now given our credibility, given also world consciousness of environmental issues, if you come out with a really well-researched new fact or something and give it to the media as a revelation, instead of just doing a physical stunt.” (Betty).

Thus, even as Greenpeace shifts away from a strategy focused on visual stunts, it continues to take some of its cues from the mass media, who now desire a different product, which Greenpeace is well positioned to deliver in the service of its politics of salvation. However, while its symbiotic relationship with the mass media gets redefined, Greenpeace is also pursuing opportunities opened by new networking technologies that displace media corporations from the central position they have held in mass communications. The group has increasingly used the Internet to bypass mass media — thereby reducing media dependency and eliminating asymmetry by ensuring that preferred frames reach an ever-broadening population of web browsers. Greenpeace International has had a homepage since March 1995, which over 174,000 users accessed in the week of April 27 – May 3, 1997. Greenpeace Canada’s homepage (which the Vancouver office helps produce) currently features extensive information about its campaign for federal protection of endangered species, complete with a “fax the feds” form letter that is sent free to seven key members of parliament when a user supplies his or her name.
Somewhat ironically, the problem Greenpeace faces is that of overcoming its own successes. Aggressive campaign strategies have given it the media coverage that has earned credibility and sympathy with the general public and enabled it to influence media discourse in its framing of environmental issues. But even incisive campaigns become hackneyed when disconnected from long-term educative strategies that must anchor a transformative politics of salvation. A public inured to visual stunts and imagery would soon lead to media disavowal or at least reduced coverage, thus foreclosing possibilities for an expanded “war of position” on the causes of ecological crises and their social consequences. To prevent a growing chasm between movement need and media response, Greenpeace will have to discover ways to remain innovative about its tactical performances, yet link them to an overall strategy of cultural change — no mean task, even for an organization of Greenpeace’s prowess.

The Centre

The Centre’s project has been preeminently one of community development among gays and lesbians and the pursuit of legitimate “recognition” by the heterosexual majority. This has involved the group in a service-delivery mode of praxis attuned to a specific though diverse constituency. Activists at the Centre understand their project to be focused around provision of programs and services in a positive and supportive environment to Vancouver’s gay and lesbian community. The Centre thus forms a nodal point in a “social movement community” (Buechler, 1993: 223) that is less oriented to strategic political action than it is to creating more egalitarian forms of participation. The original 30-odd groups that participated in the Centre’s formation sought to build a unified and cooperative gay community and to protect its members against discrimination on the part of police, employers, landlords, etc. An early issue of the Centre’s newspaper called for a mobilization “to build and maintain an organization whose goal is, among others, to help bring all elements of our community together in cooperative participation in order to fulfil and protect common needs and rights of our community” (VGCC News,

14. The Centre’s name has gone through a series of changes that reflect the widening inclusivity of sexual-identity politics. In the early years of the Centre, very few women were active participants. Founded as the Vancouver Gay Community Centre in 1979, the term “lesbian” was not initially included in the Centre’s name until 1985, when a general membership meeting voted unanimously to change the name to the Vancouver Gay and Lesbian Community Centre (GLC). Late in 1996, at another general membership meeting, the generic name “The Centre” was adopted in recognition of other sexual-minority identities such as bisexuality and trans-sexuality.
November 1980: 7). This liberal communitarianism has continued to provide a guiding frame to the Centre’s own self-understanding, inclining the group strongly toward what Fraser calls the “affirmative-multicultural” side of cultural politics, as opposed to the “transformative-deconstructive” alternative:

affirmative remedies for [cultural] injustices are currently associated with mainstream multiculturalism. This proposes to redress disrespect by revaluing unjustly devalued group identities, while leaving intact both the contents of those identities and the group differentiations that underlie them. Transformative remedies, by contrast, are currently associated with deconstruction. They would redress disrespect by transforming the underlying cultural-valuational structure. By destabilizing existing group identities and differentiations, these remedies would not only raise the self-esteem of members of currently disrespected groups. They would change everyone’s sense of belonging, affiliation, and self (Fraser, 1995: 82-3).

The Centre’s affirmative project is to play a central role in uniting diverse sectors of the lesbian and gay community in a single, powerful voice capable of contesting the barriers to equal opportunity that are thrown up by heterosexist attitudes and practices. This project can be described as a long-term war of position — a program of moral and intellectual reform to win space for gay, lesbian and other sexual-minority identities and practices in civil society, in the state, and at the workplace. In contrast, wars of manoeuvre — media splashes or otherwise — play little part in this group’s politics.

From its inception, the Centre’s project has included a media strategy of education, according to which the group has tried to improve media and public attitudes toward homosexuals (Sturmanis, 1980: 78). This educative initiative has been aimed not only at the mainstream media but at a host of publics; the Centre has maintained a panel of experienced speakers as an educational service based on the premise that homophobia is primarily the result of ignorance (VGCC News, June 1982: 6). This focus on politico-cultural change through popular education — a war of position — contrasts sharply with the Greenpeace commitment to mass-mediated bearing of witness in a war of manoeuvre. Whereas the Centre has espoused an Enlightenment rationality in its commitment to educate people away from prejudices based in ignorance, Greenpeace direct actions have been geared to construct emotional loyalties in the face of environmental or militaristic atrocities. The Centre thus engages in lower-key media work; and its practices yield much less attractive copy for the local media industry — indeed, as we shall see, the mainstream media’s “strong visuals” in depicting gays and lesbians typically invoke stereotypes which may reinforce the homophobic attitudes that the Centre seeks to change.

The Centre’s community-development thrust is evident in its recent practice. In the early 1990s, it functioned as a configuration of six relatively autonomous programs, run by volunteers, coordinated by a single paid staff person, and directed by a board elected by its then 350 members. The programs
— a gay and lesbian youth group, North America’s largest gay library, a weekly legal advice clinic, a food bank, a men’s Coming Out Group, a municipal free outreach clinic for STD and HIV testing, and the Gay and Lesbian Switchboard\(^{15}\) — represent a wide range of community needs, from material subsistence through legal and intellectual resources, to personal transformation and empowerment. Beyond these ongoing programs, the Centre has been instrumental in developing alternative media for the gay and lesbian community\(^{16}\) and in supporting affirmative events that carry strong political resonances — such as the annual celebrations of the Stonewall Riots and Gay Pride Day, as well as the 1990 Gay Games, which were organized out of the Centre’s offices. Other visibly political actions include the “Partners in Pride” and the “Pink Slip” campaigns — the former to recognize gay-affirmative businesses, the latter to boycott discriminatory ones. Such actions are about as close as the Centre comes to resembling a classic movement organization oriented toward strategic collective action in a war of manoeuvre.

Most of the group’s energy is invested in a multiplex politics of everyday life dedicated 1/ to building and enriching the kinds of “submerged networks” that Melucci (1994) emphasizes in his analysis of new social movements, and 2/ to contesting heterosexism in micropolitical contexts (discrimination) and in subjectifying practices of self-definition (coming-out work, etc.). Unlike Greenpeace, much of this political work does not require the media’s gaze, nor would it be particularly well served by it. The Centre’s media strategy, then, is relatively marginal to its politics. The Centre mobilizes its own constituency without mass-mediation, and its various community-development efforts do not require media validation for their success. It is mainly with respect to scope enlargement that the Centre has pursued a media strategy as it endeavours to reach broader publics in its educative initiatives. It is in this area that the Centre has pursued a conscious strategy of mainstreaming, moving with, or more precisely slightly ahead of, the cultural tide which has tended to legitimate homosexuality as a “sexual preference”, pressing successfully for protection on gays and lesbians in provincial (1992) and federal (1996) human rights law, but keeping some distance from the more

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15. The Switchboard is the Centre’s oldest program. It operates an information line which directs callers to lesbian and gay oriented businesses and community resources as well as one-to-one peer counselling with trained volunteers and referrals to free professional counselling. More recently, the food bank was closed in 1993 (in part because the great number of users began to hamper the operation of other services) and a free outreach clinic that offers STD and HIV testing has been established at the Centre.

16. This includes the monthly newspaper *Angles* as well as the weekly Coming Out Show on Vancouver Cooperative Radio, with which the Centre shared office space until the late 1980s. See Hackett et al (1986: 282–283) for an analysis of Vancouver Cooperative Radio as a counter-hegemonic cultural agency.
flamboyant strains of gay and lesbian activism exemplified by Queer Nation and Act Up. Such groups — arguably the most dynamic and radical section of gay and lesbian politics today — are not without their informal ties to the Centre. However, visible connections have been eschewed on the grounds that they could alienate the group’s more conservative supporters, and agreement has generally been maintained around the goal of appealing to the needs and desires of the broadest possible base of support, even if that means maintaining an explicitly apolitical profile. One of our respondents described the most consciously used media strategy as “not to appear to be very political — we’re not a political organization” (Frank). This mainstreaming strategy has met with some success in that journalists and politicians occasionally solicit the Centre’s input on issues and events — especially crimes in which the victims are gay — so that the Centre has achieved a certain standing in news discourse as a recognized “voice” for the gay and lesbian community.

Even so, that voice is a strikingly muted one. The Centre remains peripheral as an object of media attention, partly because in contrast to Greenpeace, its community-development project claims the lion’s share of its relatively meagre resources. For instance, in the early 1990s, talk of putting together a video to show at public education forums came to nought when cost estimates came in at an unmanageable $4,000. The group does have a board-appointed media officer with training in public relations, and its community affair’s committee serves as a sort of watchdog “sensing what issues are coming up and trying to be prepared for them before they actually become media news” (Jill). It has also lobbied on many occasions

against a certain newspaper or certain columnist ... in conjunction with other social change groups, because of the individual’s or publication’s editorial policies or ... viewpoint. ... (Bob).

But compared with Greenpeace, although the Centre’s project is far less dependent on media coverage, its relationship with the media is extremely asymmetrical: its regular press releases are almost always ignored by mainstream outlets, and local journalists sometimes treat it not as a “voice” but simply as a source of background information. As Alan recounted,

CBC has done a few things on us, Marie LaRose in particular, but I found her research lacking because they phone us up and they want us to give them all this information, but they never really want to hear from us; and I just found that insulting for the most degree. You can’t say you want us to do your homework and look for all this information from our library for you, but you never ask us what we really think of the situation.
With Greenpeace, the media have been known to complain of manipulation; with the Centre the roles are reversed: the media — with little marketable copy to gain from the Centre — can afford to be by turns negligent and sensationalistic. In Gamson and Wolfsfeld’s terms, the Centre has rather peripheral standing, its activities rarely receive mainstream validation as social realities, and it has difficulty using the media to enlarge the scope of political discussion.

In part, this no doubt reflects the heterosexual normativity that infuses the world of mainstream media; in part it stems from the cautious stance of Centre activists who are aware of that heteronormativity and its implications.

*I tell my switchboard people and all of the volunteers at the centre that come in, “Never talk to the press.” That’s interesting. It’s not “Are you suitable as a volunteer? Are you capable of making decisions?” but “Never talk to a reporter.” So we’re very keenly aware of the power of the media. We do try to use it when the opportunity comes up, but we’re also very, very suspicious* (Jim).

The media’s appetite for spectacle — key to Greenpeace’s success — presents a threat to the Centre, whose project, in a culture still marked by sedimentations of homophobia, is to represent the gay and lesbian community in all its diversity and in a morally positive light. From the Centre’s standpoint, direct-action groups like Act Up gain visibility in the media by becoming the exotic objects of heterosexist media copy:

*What attracts media’s attention — I’m thinking about Act Up who do outrageous demonstrations and of course that goes into the media. Whatever is offered is off the wall ... and there’s almost an underlying message, “Look how weird they are; look how wrong they are.” That’s all they get.* (Ted)

The hegemonic project of representing the “whole community” in an affirmative way ties the Centre to a strategy of avoiding positions that may be controversial within that diverse community. In effect, the Centre endeavours to represent the mainstream of gay and lesbian life to the mainstream of straight life.

*We will always include an element of education in our dealings with the mainstream media. If there’s an issue ... if we’re going to say something controversial ... we will say it from a personal point of view as opposed to officially from the GLC [i.e., the Centre].... We cannot come out and*
take a stand one way or another because we represent to the mainstream... the gay and lesbian community... We are not going to take a Queer Nation viewpoint when we go and talk to the Vancouver Sun, because [then] we are not representing our community in its entirety. (Bob)

As a form of cultural politics, the Centre is, as we have mentioned, inclined more in a gay-affirmative than in a deconstructive direction, and this accounts for some of the tension between Queer Nation and the Centre. The latter’s politics of liberal communitarianism, embodied in practices of community development and educational programs directed at “straight” communities, resembles a sort of multiculturalism that celebrates diversity yet insists that underneath the differences, we are all as one. One of our respondents, recalling the media’s focus on the “freaks” within the annual Gay Pride parade, longed for a mass media that would normalize its representation of gay and lesbian life:

... that’s not fair for you [i.e., the media] to say this is typical of our community. We’re a huge diverse community, treat that as “Here’s a spectrum of us” or “Here’s a certain colour of us,” but don’t treat that as being the whole rainbow itself. And that’s why I feel ... our biggest job is to educate the media to say we’re no different, we have the same values, we want families — maybe not children — but we still want families. We want a stable home life; we want a career with stability; we want to have relationships and grow old together. Those are the things that we want that everyone else wants and I think it’s time [the media] reflected that idea. (Alan)

Yet such a multicultural politics also has its limitations. In narrowing its political horizons and tempering its actions to avoid hostilities with heterosexist (and intermittently homophobic) mainstream media, the Centre is able to wage only a circumscribed “war of position”, one that requires accommodation to dominant institutions and thereby confines struggle within the limits of what Gramsci called a “passive revolution”17 In this respect, the absence of overt

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17. The manner in which economic constraints play into the narrowing of political horizons is evident in the controversy over the Centre’s food bank, which was not easily accessible to impoverished lesbians, most of whom lived on the east side of the city. Under some financial pressure and in competition with the more successful AIDS Vancouver Food Bank, the Centre executive decided to close, rather than expand, its own food bank operations. This decision upset many women members, who then left the Centre to join the Vancouver Lesbian Connection, believing that the Centre had trivialized women’s concerns. Their departure significantly weakened the influence of women in the Centre, increased the profile and conservative
strikes against cultural hegemony can undermine the general strategy of a war of position and permit a reconstituted form of heterosexist dominance — this despite apparent gains under the veil of pluralist affirmation.

**End Legislated Poverty**

Compared to the other two groups, ELP is noteworthy for its pursuit of a recognizably left agenda of redistributive justice for the poor. Its project has been framed neither as one of subaltern community development — it refuses to undertake "service work" — nor as one of bearing witness to atrocities through mass-mediated direct action. ELP’s commitment is to a transformative coalitional politics of class struggle against immiseration. Formed in 1985 in the wake of the Solidarity Coalition — itself a broad alliance of labour and other moments that mobilized in 1983 against Canada’s first comprehensive neoliberal initiative (Carroll and Ratner, 1989) — ELP’s goals have been threefold:

- to encourage cooperation and unity between working and non-working people;
- to assist organizations representing low income and unemployed people through information sharing, the development of joint campaigns and actions, and education on the need to eliminate poverty and create decent jobs; and
- to assist in organizing unorganized low-income and unemployed people (ELP Society Act Constitution)

Founded by six groups, ELP had enlisted 19 member organizations by 1987, 27 by the early 1990s, and over 40 by 1996, by which time it had expanded beyond the Lower Mainland to secure a presence in other cities and towns in British Columbia. ELP is also a member of the National Anti-Poverty Organization — the major lobby group in this field, whose former president is a longtime ELP activist. Core funding — a crucial resource for a group whose constituents are mostly without discretionary income — has been provided by labour unions, particularly the BC Teachers’ Federation, from the Law Foundation, from the municipal government, and most recently from the NDP provincial government, whose ministry of Human Resources

tenor of its white, middle-class male members, and lowered the level of concern that the Centre would have expressed on social issues (e.g., women’s rights, poverty) had women stayed in the organization. This incident underscores the extent to which politically unfocused and economically driven strategies border on the effete and can alienate more socially conscious members.
contributes $175,000 annually. The coalition is directed by a volunteer board that includes one delegate from each member group and that uses consensus decision-making to ensure the benefits of a unified voice. Individual campaigns are mounted by committees — some ad hoc, some relatively permanent — which consist of Directors, volunteers and staff members. Significantly, most ELP activists — whether Directors, volunteers or staff — are living or have lived in poverty. In contrast to some groups that speak on behalf of the poor, the coalition is not dominated by “conscience constituents” but by the people for whom it speaks. ELP’s commitment to grassroots empowerment is evident in the broad thrust of its mobilization strategy discussed below, but also in the finer details, such as daycare and transportation to enable the poor to participate in activities, and workshops to empower people with the information and skills to speak for themselves when addressing media and the state.

As a coalition, ELP has placed priority on building alliances with other groups — justice-oriented churches, people with disabilities, tenants, etc. — in an effort to create a broad movement for economic justice. Unions, as mentioned above, have been key benefactors, and in turn ELP’s support for unions is basic to the class-struggle framing of its project, which emphasizes bringing together the unemployed, non-union and unionized workers into a united fight for higher wages and welfare rates — a class-centred war of position charged by episodic war of manoeuvre tactics.

The state has figured very prominently in ELP’s politics; the group’s name in itself highlights the complicity of the liberal democratic state — and particularly neoliberalism — in perpetuating widespread immiseration. ELP’s political discourse has been in this sense state-centric: the founding groups consciously rejected the predominant “charitable” view of poverty as an individual trouble and recast the problem as a legislative issue, calling on the federal government to “reverse the trend to growing poverty and a two-tier society” (Nov. 25, 1985 letter to Liberal MP Douglas Frith) and organizing a letter-writing campaign to persuade the provincial Minister of Human Resources to raise welfare rates to the poverty line. As an ELP spokesperson stated in 1987,

the rich are getting richer ... the poor are getting poorer. And more middle-class people, especially women and youth, are getting poorer.... Why is all this happening? We think it’s because government, controlled by right-wing politicians, are ‘legislating’ poverty.

Yet this core “legislative” frame has from the early days onward been extended in the direction of more comprehensive analysis and practice.

In its inaugural year, for instance, ELP organized a demonstration in protest of Expo 86 (its construction had caused the eviction of many poor tenants), co-sponsored a rally against Canadian involvement in the Reaganite
Star Wars project, and organized voter registration drives among low income people. By 1986 ELP had released its “Poverty Curriculum”, a classroom resource unit produced in cooperation with the BC Teachers’ Federation, which placed emphasis on the unequal distribution of wealth in Canada and the extent and effects of poverty and unemployment. Later that year ELP began to organize frontline advocates to inform welfare recipients of their rights and to assist them in obtaining entitlements. 1987 witnessed a new initiative around child poverty which stressed the connection between hunger and poor academic performance. ELP’s subsequent campaign for hot lunch programs in schools was successful both municipally and provincially, and spawned a number of new allies and volunteers.

It was also in 1987 that ELP began to play a major role in the emerging opposition to continental “free trade”, helping to form a Vancouver node of the Pro-Canada Network. ELP activists participated heavily in the PCN (later renamed Action Canada-BC), and these experiences helped shape one of ELP’s major initiatives for the 1990s — the Corporate Agenda Workshop. Designed as an organizing tool to educate and mobilize the poor, the Workshop uses select mainstream media — six panels of newspaper clippings — to introduce participants to the forces which cause and perpetuate poverty. Connections are drawn between provincial, national, and global economic and political policies which impoverish increasing numbers of people. In 1993 the group also used a workshop format in its 3-day activist training sessions, modelled on union-sponsored labour schools, which have been subsequently held on regional bases since 1994.

As a result of its progression to a more comprehensive analysis of poverty issues, ELP has in recent years put increasing effort into popular education, directed not only at the poor but at the general public. This has involved both the production of alternative media and interaction with mainstream media. In addition to the Corporate Agenda Workshop, alternative media produced by ELP include “Fighting Poverty Kits” and a continuing series of monthlies directed toward people in foodbank lineups and low income neighbourhoods (the ELP Newsletter), toward frontline advocate workers (FLAWline) and toward ELP members (ACTIONline). In 1994, ELP moved to consolidate these publications into a “new alternative paper”, *The Long Haul*, with an enlarged print run of 5,000 and a distribution network through union allies and other member groups.

Compared with the Centre, End Legislated Poverty has adopted a more proactive media strategy focused around popular education as well as newsworthy collective actions. This greater emphasis is partly grounded in ELP’s commitment to building a broad coalition — whose potential members extend far beyond ELP’s immediate constituency of “the poor” and can only be mobilized through diligent outreach. Like the Centre, however, and in
contrast to Greenpeace’s focus on the mainstream mass media, ELP has often relied on smaller media — neighbourhood or regional newspapers, cable channels — which are more willing to run stories that can be framed around “local” community issues.

In its efforts to “get the message out” to the media mainstream, ELP has followed the standard practices of issuing constant press releases and letters to editors, cultivating sympathetic journalists, and designating knowledgeable spokespeople for specific issues; and it has gained considerable standing as a “left-wing” voice to be consulted when welfare, unemployment or poverty become salient news topics. ELP activists generally view the media as part of the system of domination, yet they also recognize the openings in media practices that afford opportunities not only to reach a wide public but to embarrass and constrain adversaries:

We’ve used the media to mobilize around the food program and the forced employment, and it’s been a big component of our campaigns ... mostly because we have some allies [in the media] ... not because the overall media is on our side. And so we use the print coverage and the TV coverage as weapons when we step up a campaign ... they [ELP’s adversaries] know that ELP can get up some media so they better be prepared, and so we can’t be ignored.... (Judy)

Even so, the media provide at best an unpredictable communication channel for ELP, as for other movement groups. Sympathetic reporters do not control the editing process, and an in-depth political framing of the causes of poverty and unemployment can be whittled down to a clip in which unemployment gets reframed as a problem requiring charitable action:

... they [the media] can totally shmooze our stories, like, they interviewed me once on unemployment and what’s causing it. And so we talked extensively, but we got 30 seconds on the news, and then it becomes a pro-charity story at the end. (Judy)

Indeed, the standard media frames that ELP struggles against are heavily inflected with moralizing messages. On the one hand is the “deserving poor” frame: a personalized and de-politicized portrayal of poverty conveyed through tear-jerking stories bereft of any analysis of underlying causes — what activists aptly call “poor-nography,” particularly when it verges on middle-class voyeurism. On the other hand, this “deserving poor” frame, emphasizing personal misfortune, is played off against a neo-conservative framing of the poor as “welfare cheats”, emphasizing personal turpitude. Among the responses ELP has made to this second media frame has been its 1995
meeting with major Vancouver and Victoria newspapers to challenge their poor-bashing coverage.

ELP's struggle to *politicize* poverty in news discourse contrasts sharply with the Centre's mainstreaming efforts to frame its project in *apolitical* terms. The Centre's media strategy is informed by its larger project of affirmative cultural politics, which in turn is grounded in its attempts to represent to the mainstream a diverse but marginalized community embracing a firm collective identity. ELP's media strategy is informed by its more transformative politics of redistribution: its constituency shares only the common ground of poverty and immiseration — of material privation. The poor have no psychological or cultural stake in their own poverty; hence ELP's collective identity must be *politically constructed*, not elaborated on the basis of a vibrant though marginalized sense of community.

Like Greenpeace, ELP devotes considerable attention in advance of each action to strategizing about media coverage, right down to creating visually appealing "hooks" that do not compromise the group's message. As Arnold observed,

> *when ELP organizes an event, a demonstration, one of the questions that has to be asked is, "is the media going to come? How do we get the media to come? How do we get the right message across to the media?" And that's not only demos; it's whatever action they're planning.*

But unlike Greenpeace, ELP resists the tendency for the media to "hierarchalize" social justice movements by focusing on individual leaders. One of ELP's organizing strategies is to empower poor people to speak for themselves, whether to media or to the state: "When you educate the people to have the analysis so they can be the spokesperson instead, that works good" (Margaret). In their successful campaign against forced employment for welfare recipients, for instance, ELP's key spokesperson was not a director or a staff member but a single mother who waged a court battle for the right to be at home with her young children.

In sum, ELP has the problem of mobilizing a vast but disorganized and impecunious constituency in the face of media mis-framing and trivialization of its redistributive objectives. The difficulty in extending the range of its constituency forces ELP to rely upon a restricted number of donors. Currently, the bulk of its funding comes from one ministry of the provincial government that has already issued warnings to ELP about the extent of criticism of its policies that it is prepared to tolerate — an ominous reminder given that the ELP grant is on a 30-day cancellation notice. In view of its radical transformative agenda, ELP is in position to be readily deviantized and forsaken by its benefactors. The corporatized media are no less quick to
withdraw favour from groups that defy their own institutional masters, even if the latter be the very guarantors of poverty that cause groups such as ELP to emerge.

This comparison highlights the different approaches that the groups take regarding the conduct of a cultural war of position. For ELP it is strategically crucial to mobilize its constituency as vocal political activists: reliance on either the ideologically complacent mainstream press or the good graces of conscience constituents is considered a poor substitute for direct empowerment of the dispossessed. For Greenpeace the strategic priority is mobilization of public opinion around a secular politics of salvation, through news discourse. Their project is neither to affirm an identity rooted deeply in everyday life — as in the relatively insulated world of Centre activism — nor to construct a more overt politicized identity grounded in lived experiences of privation, but to call attention to a looming environmental crisis that threatens the dream of a green and peaceful world in which notions of citizenship and identity must span global boundaries.

Conclusions

At the most general level, the relationship between social movements and the media warrants such cliché observations as that offered by Johnston et al.

Particularly important in today’s movement environment are the information media and the role of the media in shaping a movement’s image (1994: 19).

More specifically, social movement organisations must overcome or at least cope creatively with their asymmetrical dependency upon the mass media if they are to be successful. In this respect, our study of the media strategies and political projects of three conceptually distinct types of social movement organizations (representing a wide spectrum of SMO types) attests to the value of Gamson and Wolfsfeld’s sensitizing framework.

End Legislated Poverty, driven by its overriding “redistributive” concern with income equity in efforts to challenge state neglect and to educate the wider public about “legislated poverty”, adopts a rounded strategy of long term “war of position” punctuated by tactical “wars of manoeuvre”. Its trenchant critique of capital and state institutions precludes mass media support and invites periodic media trivialisation, thus widening the asymmetry between media and movement and forcing ELP to turn to alternative media (such as its own monthly newspaper). Unable to obtain desired standing, preferred framing, and little more than misplaced sympathy from the mainstream media, it must rely upon its own limited resources, state handouts from a sympathetic regime, and, at best, peripheral and inconsistent main-
stream media support to achieve some measure of mobilization, validation and scope enlargement.

On the other hand, the Centre, pursuing its “recognition” mandate of community development, engages in a relatively diffuse “war of position” intended to erode mainstream opposition, leaving “war of manoeuvre” tactics to commando units (e.g., Act Up, Queer Nation) within the larger social movement. Anticipating little support from the dominant heterosexist media, the Centre reduces dependency on mainstream accounts through sponsorship of independent alternative newspapers that circulate widely in the gay/lesbian community, offering internal support and sympathy to gay/lesbian denizens and contesting the systemic mis-framings of the dominant media that otherwise invalidate claims for cultural affirmation.

Greenpeace, linking the threat of ecocide to common sources of social and environmental exploitation, launches a holistic politics of salvation, emphasizing glaring “war of manoeuvre” tactics complemented by the more palatable intervention strategies of other environmental SMOs involved in ecological campaigns that seek limited legislative remedies or promote attitudinal shifts favouring environmental preservation. Contrary to ELP, which has difficulty countering media indifference to structural inequality, and the Centre, which seeks to avoid mass media recriminations, Greenpeace creates the very events that draw the media coverage that enables it to project its agenda in broad strokes, capturing public imagination and obtaining for itself the standing and support required to build resistance to the exploitative programatics ingrained in the agendas of corporate capital. Thus, Greenpeace’s artful manipulation of the mass media succeeds in mobilizing a large bloc of constituents, rationalizes the extended scope of its “salvation” ethic, and collaterally provides an umbrella of validation over the related claims of other environmental SMOs steeped in the cultural trenches of a “war of position”.

At a more theoretical level, our analysis of three SMOs suggests that in the context of contemporary capitalist democracies the distinctive projects of redistribution, recognition and salvation present SMOs with different opportunities for addressing the general problem of asymmetrical dependency in movement-media relations. As we have seen, SMOs exercise considerable creativity in deploying various tactics aimed at reducing asymmetrical dependence, but one key contrast we have observed is that between Greenpeace’s ability to command media attention by the apparent universality of its appeal — which dovetails with commercial media interest in attracting mass audiences — and ELP’s and the Centre’s more peripheral media standing, which both motivates and is reinforced by their resort to alternative media. Theoretically, this contrast suggests that the political projects of SMOs lend themselves to two distinctive strategies for dealing with the problem of
asymmetrical dependency — one addressed to the *asymmetry* of the movement-media relation, the other addressed to the *dependency* itself:

1. The *asymmetry* of the movement-media relation is reduced by the universality of a SMO’s appeal and the consequent mobilization of resources that permit staging the dramatic events that command media attention. This has been Greenpeace’s notable success, but more generally the political project of secular salvation seems to invoke a powerful body of universalist imagery — as in “the web of life” and “spaceship earth” — which itself affords opportunities for reducing asymmetry. In part as a cumulative result of ecological campaigns and in part due to deepening environmental crises, there is a growing sense of ecological interdependence upon which to base a universal appeal. Media attention is commanded — and asymmetry reduced — precisely to the extent that mass-mediated images of resistant direct action resonate with such a widespread sense of entwined fates. Of course, SMOs pursuing projects of economic or cultural justice can also shift their media relations away from asymmetry by cultivating or tapping into universalist imagery (e.g., the discourse of universal human rights) in a manner that renders themselves “newsworthy”. But such imagery may be in conflict with dominant cultural values, (e.g., heterosexism, possessive individualism) upheld by mainstream media, thus increasing SMOs’ vulnerability to media mis-framing. Indeed, in a political context conditioned by two decades of neo-liberal hegemony, the grounds for universalism are less immediately evident in the specific grievances of economically oppressed and culturally marginalized groups — each of which can be framed (and dismissed) as a “special interest group” (Teeple, 1995). As Beck (1992) has noted in a somewhat different context, smog may be democratic but poverty is hierarchic.

2. In any case, reducing asymmetry does not alter the dependent character of the movement-media relation, and the risks of mis-framing it entails; therefore SMOs are still in the predicament of reducing *dependency* on mass media by making use of alternative media outlets or developing their own, provided that they can mobilize sufficient resources from within their own ranks. This tactic, however, usually restricts the target population and is therefore most effective for “affirmative” SMOs engaged in the politics of recognition and community development (e.g., identitarian movements such as the Centre). Still, cultivation of alternative media forms part of the cultural war of position for groups like ELP, whose transformative political project requires a continuing program of popular education, which cannot be mounted through the mainstream media. Moreover, as Greenpeace’s homepage illustrates, the recent proliferation of the internet presents interesting possibilities for movements pursuing various political projects
to circumvent dependence on mass media by developing openly accessible interactive communication networks at relatively low cost. Such a strategy not only bypasses the mass media; it converts mass audiences into more engaged communicative agents and reaches beyond the regional and national markets which typically delimit media audiences. These may be crucial preconditions for transformative politics in a globalized world.

Such reflections on the dilemmas and changing shape of movement-media relations underline the need to extend the purview of our study beyond the specific cases that we have examined. These cases are, after all, exemplary of only certain combinations of the theoretical categories that have informed our analysis of political projects and media strategies. Table 1 summarizes more fully, but schematically, key differences between various SMOs framed by the theoretical categories employed in this article. Following the logic of our analysis, forms of movement intervention (affirmative and transformative “remedies”) are cross-categorized with the type of political project pursued by a SMO (recognition, redistribution, salvation).

Interventions on behalf of “affirmative” remedies (i.e., enhancing the group’s identity/condition within the existing polity) involve “war of position” tactics that are mainly palliative and non-structural. In terms of media strategy, this means either the development of constituent-targeted alternative media (exemplified in community-development projects by the Centre and in the episodic “salvation” campaigns of wilderness-preservation groups) or assiduous cultivation of mainstream media standing and sympathy in order to win wide support for moderate “redistributive” objectives (the essence of welfare-state politics).

Recognition projects that entail “transformative” objectives (i.e., deconstructions of culturally normative identities) are carried out in the flamboyant “war of movement” tactics of such groups as Act-Up and Queer Nation, risking public disapprobation through media spectacles intended to jolt public complacency. Recognition projects pursuing “transformative” goals through non-confrontational “war of position” tactics (e.g., “mainstream” Aboriginal pro-sovereignty groups) rely on long-term media cultivation to generate public support, although the irregular access to organs of the mass media (stemming from continued asymmetry and dependency) renders the benefits of that strategy dubious and insubstantial.

Holistic “transformative” movements that entail broad structural consequences, not merely selective cultural deconstructions, involve political projects of redistribution and salvation. Groups such as End Legislated Poverty and Greenpeace illustrate these forms of intervention and encompass both war of manoeuvre and war of position tactics. ELP is committed to a long-term, class-centred war of position, but this does not preclude fomenting demonstrations and job actions, with an eye partly on media reception.
Table 1. Movement Organization and Media Strategies*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Form of intervention</th>
<th>Recognition</th>
<th>Type of political project</th>
<th>Redistribution</th>
<th>Salvation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>W of M</td>
<td>W of P</td>
<td>W of M</td>
<td>W of P</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affirmative</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>welfare state politics</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>The Centre</td>
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<td>– reformist accommodations</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>– non-disruptive</td>
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<td>to dominant power</td>
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<td></td>
<td>liberal communitarianism:</td>
<td></td>
<td>structures</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>community development</td>
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<td>– mainstream media</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>– alternative media</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Transformative</td>
<td>queer politics</td>
<td>“mainstream” aboriginal sovereignty</td>
<td></td>
<td>End Legislated Poverty</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>– direct-action</td>
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<td>– prolonged mobilization of</td>
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<td>challenges to</td>
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<td>dominant codes and</td>
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<td>allies, using mass</td>
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<td></td>
<td>discourses</td>
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<td>protests, media events</td>
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<td>– non-violent advocacy</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

* 3 x 2 x 2 matrix – 12 cells. Note that three cells are null (as marked with “x”) since “affirmative” politics seldom involves a “war of movement” (W of M) as opposed to “war of position” (W of P) tactics. Note, also, that End Legislated Poverty and Greenpeace encompass both war of manoeuvre and war of position strategies. Five of the nine substantively interesting cells have been illustrated in this study. For the sake of comparison, other examples (such as wilderness preservation as a contrast to Greenpeace and queer politics as a contrast to the Centre) are suggested in the table. SMOs that utilize “alternative” media focus on a target population; those that attempt to attract “mainstream media” address the general public.
Greenpeace engages in acts of civil disobedience to gain standing through the mass media, but this tactic is complemented by a sustained focus on scientific inquiry and public education.

While this summary table highlights the conceptual distinctions we have made throughout our analysis, clearly, we have only begun the task of developing an understanding of movement-media relations that parsimoniously describes the shifting dialectics in the examples considered in this paper, not to mention the activities of other SMOs to which this analysis might be extended. Our study does clarify that in an era in which mass media occupy a central position in the cultural field, oppositional movements deploy distinctive media strategies for getting their messages out. To comprehend these strategies, they must be properly situated within a complex configuration of political practices that (1) demonstrates how a movement organization’s media strategy — whether oriented to problems of asymmetry, dependency or both — fits within its larger political project, (2) reveals how the niche that a particular SMO occupies within a broader movement resonates with that larger project or is discordant with other movement SMOs, and (3) shows how a group’s media strategy is affected by changes in the overall terrain of politics and culture (including the media’s own organizational dispositions), releasing or restricting opportunities for advancing new claims and identities — as in the emergence of an ecological universalism in the former case or the marginalization of a socialist universalism in the latter.

Finally, our research raises an important political issue that is implicit in Nancy Fraser’s analysis; namely, whether various affirmative identity, human rights, and green social action groups can deliver on a real social change agenda should they remain unalloyed to their transformative counterparts in groups such as Queer Nation, End Legislated Poverty, and Greenpeace. Indeed, Fraser’s analysis underscores that the challenge for progressives is to attempt to resolve the dilemmas of recognition and redistribution in ways that promote transformation both of constricted or disparaged identities and of exploitative relations. In a similar if more didactic vein, Gramsci argued that “war of position” strategies were not pitched solely to “affirmative goals, but were part of a wider revolutionary plan to subvert the existing hegemonic order. Failure to fulfill that expectation brought, at best, the limited reforms of “passive revolution”. If this be the case, then movements that are not explicitly committed to transformative goals may succeed in achieving provisional gains, but will fail to alter hegemonic constraints through their predominantly affirmative politics.
Appendix I

Questions on media strategy asked of phase 2 respondents

What roles do you think the mass media play in promoting or inhibiting the kinds of social changes you want to see come about? [probe: why do you think they play those roles?]

Can you think of examples of how the media have shaped or influenced the activities and profile of [organization]?

Do members of [organization] use any particular strategies in relating to or making use of the mainstream media, and have these strategies been effective? [probe by asking for examples and for explanations of outcomes — why (in)effective?]

Are there any alternative media that [organization] makes use of in order to promote its objectives? If so, what are they and how effective have they been?

Are there any alternative media that [organization] has created in order to promote its objectives? If so, what are they and how effective have they been?

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