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What is This?

Protest on the Fly: Toward a Theory of Spontaneity in the Dynamics of Protest and Social Movements

David A. Snow[a] and Dana M. Moss[a]

Abstract

This article reexamines spontaneity as an important, albeit neglected, mechanism in collective action dynamics, and elaborates on its operation and effects in protest events and social movements. We do not presume that spontaneity is routinely at play in all collective actions. Rather, based on our grounded analysis of historical and ethnographic data, we contend that spontaneity is triggered by certain conditions: nonhierarchical organization; uncertain/ ambiguous moments and events; behavioral/emotional priming; and certain ecological/ spatial factors. We conclude by elaborating why the activation of spontaneous actions matters in shaping the course and character of protest events and movements, and we suggest that spontaneity be resuscitated in the study of collective action and everyday life more generally.

Keywords

collective action/behavior, grounded theory, protest/protest events, social movements, spontaneity

[W]hen I read the personal accounts which the student leaders [of the 1989 Beijing student movement] gave in my interviews and in published memoirs, I found many of them in the form "I walked down the road and saw X (or, I woke up in the morning and thought of Y), and then I decided to do Z." In other words, many of their activities represented spontaneous and individualistic responses to events rather than conscious decisions arrived at collectively by their organizations. (Zhao 2001:147)

In the meetings prior to January 25th [2011], some activists did pose the question . . . "So when we reach Tahrir, what are we going to do?" And I think everybody was like, well,

when we reach Tahrir, we'll see. There was no plan. I mean, there was a plan . . . like, you know, "we're going to meet at some point . . ." but [the notion that] we'll be at Tahrir, we'll have a plan, there will be, you know, security committees . . . —it's all crap. I mean, this is all spontaneous and it evolved . . . [over] time. (Hossam El-Hamalawy, quoted in Al Jazeera English 2012)

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These statements are observations of two of the most widely observed collective action events in the past 50 years. In the first statement, sociologist Dingxin Zhao refers to spontaneity as a dynamic element in the Beijing Spring student protests of 1989; in the second, activist Hossam El-Hamalawy emphasizes the role of spontaneity in the 2011 Egyptian revolution. But aside from a few close-to-the ground observations of collective protest such as these, spontaneity is rarely mentioned in recent literature on social movements and protest. In this article, we reexamine the dynamic of spontaneity, arguing that it is often an important mechanism in the dynamics of collective action. Our objective is to bring spontaneity back into the analysis of protest dynamics and social movements by elaborating a set of conditions that specify when spontaneity is most likely to be activated in the course of these phenomena and by showing why its activation matters.

We begin with a conceptualization of spontaneity rooted in the intersection of symbolic interactionism and cognitive psychology; we then turn to a critical examination of the literature on social movements and protest to discern how spontaneity has been treated. After demonstrating the neglect and misconceptualization of spontaneity in relation to protest, we argue for its resurrection, contending that its inclusion in the conceptual and theoretical arsenal of scholars of social movements and protest will contribute to a more thorough understanding of the dynamics of these collective phenomena. We do not presume that spontaneity is routinely at play in the course of such events; rather, we contend that spontaneity is triggered by certain conditions. Based on a grounded analysis of ethnographic and historical observations, we specify a set of conditions that make the occurrence of spontaneous actions more likely, and we conclude by elaborating how spontaneity matters in shaping the course and character of protest events and movements.

SPONTANEITY AND ITS MISCONCEPTUALIZATION AND MISTHEORIZATION

Various synonyms for spontaneity include adlibbing, improvisation, winging it, extemporaneous, impromptu, off the cuff, off the top of one's head, and unplanned. Although most of these terms are associated with speaking, debating, lecturing, and performing, they all reference unplanned actions or events, in the sense that these actions or events are not thought through in a deliberative fashion in advance of their occurrence. This is not to say that spontaneous actions or events are random and unpredictable, but rather that they are not premeditated or part of a formalized system of action.[1] Nor is it to say that spontaneous actions, whether verbal or nonverbal, do not have calls for specific lines of action embedded within them. To yell out "run!" on the scent of smoke is a call to action and may thus be construed as strategic in the means/end sense. But such sudden and startling actions are spontaneous inasmuch as they were not planned in advance of the stimulus event. Thus, spontaneity may be best understood as a cover term for *events, happenings, and lines of action, both verbal and nonverbal, which were not planned, intended, prearranged, or organized in advance of their occurrence*.

Drawing on symbolic interactionism and cognitive psychology, we contend that conceptualizing spontaneous actions in this way does not imply a lack of cognition or rationality. Rather, if action is understood in terms of Mead's (1938) conception of an act, which consists of four elements—impulse, perception, manipulation, and culmination—we contend that spontaneous action can be characterized accordingly. The difference between prior deliberation and the cognitive process associated with spontaneous action is that the latter is compressed in time. However, this does not imply a cognitive "short-circuiting" of the kind Smelser (1962:82) conjectured in his theory of collective behavior. Rather, the

process is more akin to Simon's (1957) notion of "bounded rationality," with its emphasis on "satisficing" rather than "optimizing" in the face of limited information and time, and Kahneman's (2011) distinction between fast and slow thinking, with spontaneous decision-making being a case of fast thinking.[2] Finally, we want to emphasize that spontaneous actions may occur individually or collectively, and sometimes they may be interconnected, as when a spontaneous individual action stimulates a spontaneous collective action. In either case, we are interested primarily in spontaneous actions that alter the course and character of the encompassing collectivity in ways that were not previously planned.

Our orienting contention is that some collective actions occurring within the context of protests and movements are spontaneous and consequential for the larger collective actions in which they are embedded, and sometimes also for subsequent collective actions. If so, understanding the relationship between spontaneity and protest events is fundamental to understanding protest events' character and dynamics more generally. However, one will find little on spontaneity that is analytically instructive in the literature on protest and social movements since the mid-1970s. When there has been analytic reference to spontaneity, it is typically misplaced temporally in the life course of protest events, or misconstrued in the dynamics of those events and their sponsoring movements. Before turning to the evidentiary bases for incorporating spontaneity into our analyses of protests and movements, we assess the analytic treatment of spontaneity and its general neglect in recent theorization and research.

Treatment of Spontaneity in Collective Behavior and Protest Event Analyses

The concept of spontaneity has had a pendulum-like career in the study of collective action and social movements. Reference to the concept dates back to at least the Marxist debates regarding the origins of class consciousness

in the late-nineteenth century. One side of the debate, rooted in the revolutionary prognostications of the *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (Marx and Engels 1948), emphasized the spontaneous emergence of class consciousness. The other side, anchored in Lenin's (1969) championing of the revolutionary Social-Democratic party, emphasized the external organizational base for the development of revolutionary class consciousness. However, the less organizationally focused "collective behavior perspective," ranging from LeBon (1897) through Blumer ([1939] 1972), embraced the concept of spontaneity as a fundamental mechanism in collective action dynamics. According to Blumer ([1939] 1972:68), collective behavior in general, and its elementary forms more specifically, constituted behavior that "arises spontaneously and is not due to pre-established understandings or traditions." For Blumer, behavioral coordination occurred through contagion via the coordinating mechanism of "circular interaction" in contrast to "interpretive interaction." Blumer's thesis, as well as the contagion argument in general, were subsequently criticized (McPhail 1991; Turner and Killian 1987) and expunged from the collective action/social movement conceptual toolkit.

Turner and Killian (1987:58), however, viewed spontaneity as "an essential element . . . in collective behavior" and made it a cornerstone dynamic of their emergent norm thesis. In the third edition of their text *Collective Behavior* (1987), Turner and Killian refer to protests and other collective phenomena, such as public opinion, as spontaneous. The fate of Turner and Killian's emergent norm thesis has not been quite as dire as LeBon's and Blumer's contagion thesis, but it has been similarly criticized (McPhail 1991) and has largely fallen out of use. This is due, in part, to the changing context of contentious gatherings associated with changes in protest policing.

Research on protest policing in western democracies reveals that practices have historically clustered into two styles: "'hard' police styles, characterized by an escalated

use of force in order to implement law and order (with low respect for demonstrators' rights) versus 'soft' police styles, where negotiations (and protest rights) prevail" (della Porta and Fillieule 2004:219). The escalated use of force to control and disperse protesters was particularly prominent during the 1960s and the first half of the 1970s. The "softer" approach, involving negotiations between police and protesters to establish ground rules in advance of demonstrations, began to prevail in the 1980s.[3] Since then, the general trend in the United States and Europe has been toward development of public order management systems (POMS), in which protest demonstrations become increasingly standardized, thus reducing the likelihood of newsworthy tactical innovations and spontaneous actions.[4] The diffusion of POMS, wherein demonstrations are negotiated and scripted temporally, locationally, and behaviorally prior to their occurrence, may obviate the likelihood of emergent norms. However, it does not preclude the possibility of spontaneous action under certain conditions, which we identify and illustrate.

The relevance of spontaneity to social movements more generally has also been disputed. The debate has not been about whether spontaneity is sometimes at play in the operation of social movements, but about its locus in a movement's career. For example, Blumer ([1939] 1972) and Turner and Killian (1972) argued that spontaneity is more likely early in a movement's career than as movements develop and become more organized. However, Turner and Killian (1987:294) later moved beyond Blumer and the earlier collective behavior literature by noting the role of organization and calling attention to "the interplay between spontaneity and organization." This suggested focus on the "interplay" was ignored in subsequent commentary, however, as Marx and McAdam (1994:73) restated Blumer's initial claim even more strongly: "It is at the outset that social movements bear their closest relationship to other forms of collective behavior. To the extent that social movements can ever be described

as spontaneous or emergent, it is during this period."

This line of argumentation strikes us as conceptually and empirically misguided, in that it misapprehends and erroneously concretizes the place and function of spontaneity, treating it as a stage rather than as a dynamic element within the collective action process. But these issues have become largely irrelevant to scholarship on social movements since the ascendance of the resource mobilization and political process/opportunity perspectives, as spontaneity is rarely mentioned, a few exceptions notwithstanding (Auyero 2003; Fantasia 1988; Polletta 1998; Zhao 2001).

We contend that a central reason why spontaneity has been ignored lies in the tendency for scholars to think analytically about social movement dynamics in terms of binary oppositions. Binary juxtapositions are prevalent in movement theorizing and analysis, just as they are in much of sociological analysis (Zerubavel 1996). Some of the more common oppositions include rationality versus irrationality and emotion; solidarity versus breakdown; disorganization versus organization; and spontaneity versus organization. One problem with such oppositions is that they often become cognitively encoded, such that both our gaze—that is, what we look at and see—and how we think about what we see become one-sided and inflexible. We find a clear history of this encoded binary with respect to spontaneity versus organization that dates back to the Marxist debates, runs through much of the theorization associated with the subsequent collective behavior perspective, and culminates most recently with the dominance of the resource mobilization and political process/opportunity perspectives. In each period, spontaneity and organization were seen as essentially antithetical: the organized, revolutionary party trumped spontaneity following Lenin (1969); spontaneity trumped organization during the collective behavior era; and organizational and political contextual considerations relegated spontaneity to the historical dustbin during the current contentious politics era. The

neglect of spontaneity in recent compendiums on social movements provides further evidence of this cycle.[5]

However, dominant perspectives skewed toward one end of a binary continuum often invite unsettling questions or alternative points of view. For example, writing from prison between 1929 and 1935, Gramsci (1971:198–99) asked a fundamental theoretical question: "can modern theory be in opposition to the 'spontaneous' feelings of the masses?" By such feelings he meant those that exist in the absence of "any systematic educational activity on the part of an already conscious leading group." He answered that the difference between the two is a "difference of degree, not one of quality" and noted that "reality produces a wealth of the most bizarre combinations," arguing that "[i]t is up to the theoretician to unravel these," and that "[i]t is not reality which should be expected to conform to the abstract schema" (Gramsci 1971:159–200). Turner and Killian (1987:294) made a similar observation when they alluded to the "interplay between spontaneity and organization." In the U.S. civil rights movement, for example, McAdam (1982), Morris (1984), and others firmly established the centrality of preexisting organizational structures in facilitating mobilization. Yet Killian's (1984:772, 780) analysis of the 1956 Tallahassee boycott noted the interplay of spontaneity and organization:

> The precipitating incident was the consequence of what was clearly a spontaneous action by two students with no record of activism and no organizational connections outside Florida A & M University . . . [but] the importance of pre-existing structures—both organizations and networks—is inescapably evident.

We agree with the observation regarding the interplay between organization and spontaneity, arguing that spontaneity and organization are neither dichotomous nor oppositional, but are instead often highly interactive.[6] Drawing on these insights, we advance the elements of a theory of spontaneity in relation to protests and social movements, arguing that consequential spontaneity arises only under certain specifiable conditions.

DATA SOURCES AND PROCEDURES

The conditions we identify as associated with the occurrence of spontaneous collective action in the context of protest events and movements, as well as the consequences of these spontaneous occurrences, are derived empirically from three types of qualitative sources. One source consists of our ethnographic observations of protest demonstrations that we conducted independently at different points in our respective research careers. A second data source includes on-the-ground observations by participants in protest demonstrations. The third source consists of previously published materials by social scientists, historians, and government commissions investigating instances of protest events and demonstrations. The sources for all materials used to illustrate and ground the underlying conditions are indicated when the materials are introduced.

Our inquiry and analyses proceed inductively in a manner consistent with grounded theory methodology (Charmaz 2006; Strauss and Corbin 1990). The essence of this methodology is that it facilitates the derivation of theoretical principles and hypotheses from the phenomena studied; hence the appellation inductively derived or grounded theory. Proceeding in this fashion is especially appropriate when there is little relevant theorization, hypothesis generation, or hypothesis testing regarding the phenomenon of interest. Such is the case, as already noted, with respect to spontaneity in relation to protest events and movements. Curiosity about the role of spontaneity in relation to these phenomena grew out of our own ethnographic observations rather than through analytic discourses on the topic. It was after our independent observations of what we took to be spontaneous collective actions, and our joint discussions of

them, that we began to consider the phenomenon as a topic for analytic interrogation and to case the literature for empirical accounts of other instances of its occurrence in the context of collection action.

This process of "casing" the literature involved several steps. First, we searched for rich, on-the-ground, descriptive accounts of protest-related collective action events that included reference to what we conceptualized as spontaneous actions. This generated a relatively small number of historical cases, not only because of the rarity of detailed ethnographic accounts of protest events, but also because of the previously mentioned neglect of spontaneity by the dominant collective action/ social movement perspectives. Additionally, most protest event research over the past 25 years has not been well-suited for examining on-the-ground dynamic elements such as spontaneity. This research has been based largely on interviews with protest participants to account for their participation or analysis of media accounts, principally newspapers, of protest events. Although protest event research has become a dominant method for studying protests and movements and has advanced understanding of aspects of these phenomena (Soule 2013), it is limited in large part by the character of the media data analyzed.

These limiting factors associated with protest event research notwithstanding, we looked to studies of now well-chronicled protests (e.g., Ireland's Bloody Sunday, Kent State, and Tiananmen Square) compiled by ethnographic or qualitative/historical researchers and investigatory reports that provide detailed, first-hand accounts of the events examined. We identified a number of such studies and then examined them for conditions that appeared to precipitate or be associated with the occurrence of spontaneous actions. Consistent with the constant comparative character of grounded theory methodology and its associated principle of theoretical sampling, which involves searching for and zeroing in on data that elaborate and refine the categories or conditions associated with the emergent theory, we coded and then compared each

identified condition with the subsequent cases investigated. In this way, we proceeded to identify a set of conditions associated in a precipitating fashion with the occurrence of spontaneous collective actions.

In keeping with the strategy of theoretical sampling, one might proceed until no new category properties or conditions emerge, which, in principle, could be indefinitely. But eschewing methodological idealism for methodological pragmatism, we not only identified spontaneity as a sometimes important element of collective action dynamics, but we also identified and elaborated a set of associated triggering conditions. Moreover, we find that Katz's (2001:331) contention with respect to the overlapping strategy of analytic induction also applies to the grounded theory approach to which we adhered: "There is no methodological value in piling up data of a sort already determined to be consistent with" the revised or emerging theory.

CONDITIONS TRIGGERING SPONTANEOUS COLLECTIVE ACTION

Our orienting proposition is that spontaneity sometimes figures prominently in the dynamics of social movement demonstrations and protest events. We do not argue that spontaneity is routinely or randomly distributed across collective action events. Rather, we contend that the occurrence of spontaneous collective actions is most likely under specifiable conditions. In identifying and elaborating these conditions, we do not presume they are mutually exclusive or exhaustive. As we argue and illustrate, they may interact and combine. Conditions other than those we identify may also occasion the occurrence of spontaneous collective actions. Accordingly, this analysis is a first step, albeit a major one, in development of an empirically grounded theory of spontaneity within the context of social movements and their associated collective action events.

With these caveats in mind, we turn to an elaboration of four conditions we identified

as precipitants of spontaneous collective actions: the absence of hierarchical organization; uncertain/ambiguous moments and events with a number of associated sub-conditions; behavioral/emotional priming and framing; and ecological/spatial contexts and constraints.

Condition 1: Nonhierarchical Movements

Much has been made in the past 30-plus years about the organizational dimensions of social movements, including formal, professional, and hierarchical leadership (e.g., Andrews and Edwards 2004; Davis et al. 2005; McCarthy and Zald 1977). Yet, social movements are also populated by "varied and malleable organizational forms" (Clemens and Minkoff 2004:156), including movements characterized by anti-hierarchical, participatory, and deliberative democratic styles (Doerr 2013; Polletta 2002; Rothschild and Whitt 1986). These collectivities are wary of formal leadership and strive to treat participants as relatively equal contributors rather than as the "rank and file." We propose that nonhierarchical movements are more likely to produce spontaneous collective actions, because their cultures valorize openness, innovation, and experimental forms of collective action (Polletta 2002). As we will discuss, this does not mean hierarchical movements do not exhibit spontaneity, or that the rank and file do not sometimes act spontaneously (Fantasia 1988). This is also not to say that nonhierarchical movements are defined by spontaneity, as they are also characterized by routinized procedures and activities (Glass 2010). However, because nonhierarchical movements value and often rely on impromptu contributions by participants, we propose that these movements are more likely to produce unplanned actions and dynamics.

Concrete illustration of how nonhierarchical movements produce spontaneity during protest events is provided by grounded observations by the second author of Syrian-American demonstrations in 2011 and 2012 in the greater Los Angeles region, including one protest conducted jointly with activists in the Occupy L.A. movement, and participant accounts of Occupy D.C. After the onset of anti-regime protests in Syria and corresponding regime crackdowns in 2011, Syrian-American activists protested at Russian and Chinese embassies, held demonstrations and fundraisers, and put on "flash mobs," in which participants froze in scenes reenacting the regime's violence. These events were characterized by their nonhierarchical structure, being initiated primarily through informal calls to action on Facebook and by word of mouth, and participants frequently initiated unrehearsed actions over the course of the events. Although some individuals did volunteer to take on greater responsibilities, thus making them de facto leaders, impromptu coordination attempts by these participants were often overridden by other participants. For example, pleas for chants to be spoken in English were frequently overtaken by jubilant singing in Arabic; groups of protesters waved their shoes at pro-Assad counter-protesters despite the disapproval of de facto leaders; street-corner rallies transformed into marches without any stated purpose or preplanned timing; and chants were debated and modified throughout the demonstrations. At a protest at the L.A. Chinese Consulate, for example, a participant with a bullhorn yelled out, "down, down with China!" He was then interrupted by a debate; after negotiations, the collectivity modified the chant to "shame, shame on China's politics!"

Ethnographic observation of a joint Occupy L.A. and Syrian-American protest held at Los Angeles' City Hall in December 2011 further illustrates the importance of spontaneous, creative actions in shaping the character of nonhierarchical protest events. First, after a series of improvised speeches about Syria at the onset of the gathering, the group agreed on a demonstration route and proceeded to march around City Hall. As the gathering paused at an intersection, a participant pointed to the L.A. Sister Cities monument and suggested we declare Homs, a Syrian city facing regime bombardment, to be

a sister city. After this decision was voted on and approved by the group, several protesters suggested that a makeshift sign be attached to the monument itself. After participants scattered to assemble the necessary supplies, a discussion ensued about which other Syrian cities should be commemorated. In response to a chorus of replies, the sign's author announced they would include Homs, Hama, and Dar'aa; participants huddled at the base of the monument around the sign-writer and agreed that the city names should be in Arabic on one side and English on other. Once the sign was written, a young woman climbed the signpost and secured the sign to the loud applause and cheers of the group. At this point, participants initiated a series of improvised speeches dedicating the monument in English and Arabic. The mood of the protest was invigorated by the success of the symbolic dedication and the emotional solidarity it produced between Syrians and Occupiers, some of whom cried and thanked each other.

As the march continued, intermittently interrupted by additional improvised speeches, the protesters at the head of the march led the group back to the City Hall steps, where another group of demonstrators were holding banners describing the Chinese government's human rights abuses in Tibet. Upon approaching this group, the Syrian–Occupy demonstrators spontaneously erupted in exuberant chants of "Free Tibet!" and then, without instruction, moved to stand beside the pro-Tibet protesters on the steps. One of the de facto leaders of the Syrian group and several spokespersons for the Tibetan group initiated a series of unplanned speeches emphasizing the common struggle facing both groups against brutal dictatorships, adapting their messages on the fly to address the newly formed coalition. One of the pro-Tibet spokespersons announced that after marching to the Chinese Consulate, their group would demand that the government stop supporting the Assad regime, which produced loud cheers from the Syrian–Occupy protesters.

These unplanned actions produced numerous symbolic dedications, strengthened within-movement solidarities, and generated an incidental coalition opposed to Chinese policy. Rather than perceived as digressions from a preordained plan, such spontaneous detours were celebrated by the group as invigorating the spirit of the event. We suspect that analyses of the 2011 Occupy movements, for example, will likely find that the valorization of creative, spontaneous initiatives between equals—only loosely channeled by participant-moderators and emergent subgroups—frequently produced unplanned collective actions that reinforced deliberative democratic processes and shaped participants' daily experiences. As a founding member of the Occupy D.C. movement reported in an interview,[7] the movement began with just a handful of individuals excited about the happenings in New York's Occupy Wall Street, without the planning or involvement of Washington's known leftist community, whose members were "shocked" that the movement had formed without their resources or expertise. This founding member attested that participants volunteered in various capacities to distribute food, administer medical attention, and other such activities because "you *wanted* to do it. Nobody *told* you to do it." Yet, the fact that spontaneous actions, when condoned by group consensus, are regarded as a virtue within and across such movements has received only sparse analytic attention. In light of these observations, we propose that spontaneity is more likely to be found within nonhierarchical movements, because it is an integral part of their culture and operation.

Condition 2: Ambiguous Moments and Events

A central element in symbolic interactionist theorization about collective behavior/action is the concept of ambiguity. In his study of rumor, Shibutani (1966:23) asserted that the "basic unit of analysis" is "the ambiguous situation, and the central problem is to ascertain how working orientations toward it develop." Drawing on Shibutani in their approach to collective behavior and social movements, Turner and Killian (1987:58)

contend that when "faced with ambiguity, the actors must engage in the construction of a new definition of the situation," which they designate as the "emergent norm." However, this is an overstatement, particularly from the standpoint of continental philosophies such as phenomenology and existentialism, for which ambiguity is a frequent companion of everyday life at both the individual and collective levels but does not necessarily give rise to unpredictable, spontaneous actions. Smelser (1962:86–88) also noted that what he calls "structured ambiguity" is a routine feature of some aspects of social life. Yet, as Shibutani and Turner and Killian surmised, there is often a causal relationship between ambiguity and spontaneous collective action. The problem is that neither they nor others have clearly identified the conditions likely to link ambiguity and spontaneous collective actions. To this end, we identified three such causal sub-conditions: script breakdown, script dissolution, and non-scripted square-offs.

Script breakdown or disruption. As noted earlier, protest policing strategies have evolved and congealed into public order managements systems (POMS) (McCarthy and McPhail 1998). The general objective of these new procedures is to reduce the prospect of disorder and violence by standardizing policing practices in ways that control and manage protesters' access to and behavior in public spaces. POMS exhibit a number of "important principles in their operations," including "negotiation between affected parties" (McCarthy and McPhail 1998:91), such as social control agents and representatives of the movement organization sponsoring the event. The outcome of these negotiations is the development of what we call a *negotiated script,* which constitutes the ground rules regarding the timing, location, and behavioral repertories of the event. While there is no question that these negotiated scripts have standardized, and even conventionalized, much protest, they are often fragile and tenuous. This is due in no small part to the fact that pre-event negotiations seldom include all

sets of actors that populate the event field, which may include bystanders, counter-protesters, and the media in addition to the main protesters and control agents. The presence of these various actors can affect the flow and character of a protest event in unforeseen ways independent of the negotiated script. Moreover, there is no guarantee that protesters and control agents will behave as scripted, as evidenced in various studies of protest policing and "riots"[8] (Stark 1972; Waddington 1991; Walker 1969). Consequently, negotiated scripts are vulnerable to disruption or violation by various sets of actors. In some instances, the disruption or violation may be intentional and thus covertly scripted by some actors, as in the case of agent provocateurs (Marx 2013); in other instances, the disruption may be unplanned. In either case, we argue that script disruptions or breakdowns are likely to produce spontaneous adjustments and lines of action.

To illustrate, we turn first to ethnographic observations conducted in 1983 in Austin, Texas.[9] The event was a Ku Klux Klan march through downtown Austin to the state capitol grounds, around the capitol, and back to the Klan staging area. Several hundred Klan marchers, festooned in their traditional garb, were protected on all sides by phalanxes of city and capitol police who wore riot helmets and carried shields to protect themselves and the Klan from the stones and lunch bags of dog feces being thrown their way. The march was organized beforehand in accordance with the POMS in place. But, as suggested earlier, events do not always proceed as scripted; rather, sudden, unanticipated adjustments are likely to occur in response to script disruptions. As the parade of marching Klansmen, cordoned off by the police on each side and to the front and rear, approached the capitol grounds, spectators and counter-protesters fell in behind the parading entourage, making it increasingly difficult for the control agents to maintain separation among the different and conflicting elements of the gathering. As the head of the Klansmen parade arrived at a Y in the road just before reaching the capital

building, a throng of counter-protesters blocked the path marchers were scripted to take. This script disruption produced confusion as to what to do next, even by the police. At that moment, some counter-protesters broke through the police line, the Klan started running, and the police drew their clubs. Confusion and pandemonium broke loose for several minutes until the police regained control of the situation by surrounding the Klan, sealing them from the counter-protesters, and marching them back to the initial staging area, which was a parking lot where the Klansmen's cars were parked. Not only did this sudden, unscripted turn of events cut short the Klan demonstration, but it also precipitated a non-scripted square-off between a group of counter-protesters and the fleeing Klansmen upon their return to the staging area. Additionally, it affected how the capitol and city police subsequently organized themselves and scripted another Klan march the following year.

Northern Ireland's infamous "Bloody Sunday" of January 30, 1972, further illustrates script breakdown. During this event in Derry, 13 demonstrators were killed and about as many injured by the British army during a march organized by the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association (NICRA) and the Derry Civil Rights Association against internment without charge.[10] Authorities and organizers had negotiated a demonstration route before the day of the event. However, authorities changed the script, erecting Barrier 14 to prevent protesters from reaching the previously agreed on destination of Guildhall Square (Report of the Bloody Sunday Inquiry [BSI] 2010, v. 1:49–50). In response, the organizers planned for the march to culminate at Free Derry Corner, intending for participants to follow a lorry in a "disciplined fashion" to the new end point (BSI 2010, v. 2:72). However, only some of the stewards were informed about the change, no public announcement about the switch was made, and some marchers walked in front of, rather than behind, the lorry (BSI 2010, v. 2:81–83). When the march reached the intersection of William

and Rossville Streets, organizers intended for participants to turn right on Rossville toward Free Derry Corner. However, both those who came to the event "intent" on confronting authorities at some unspecified point in the march and those who did not intend to engage in disruptive conduct proceeded down William Street in the direction of Guildhall (BSI 2010, v. 2:89). Upon approaching Barrier 14, some participants threw stones at the security agents, after which several stewards attempted to get in front and prevent the unruly participants from confronting the soldiers. An announcement was made from the lorry for participants to continue to Free Derry Corner, but the street became "blocked" with people at the intersection of William and Rossville Streets, which pushed the demonstrators up against Barrier 14 (BSI 2010, v. 2:93): "There was thus at this stage very considerable confusion and a loss of control of the march." The stewards could not contain the swell of participants; soldiers used a water cannon and CS gas (a type of tear gas), which scattered participants into nearby streets and produced subsequent spontaneous confrontations at other nearby barriers. As we discuss further in Condition 4, the confusion caused by script breakdown significantly contributed to the unplanned use of lethal force by military forces against demonstrators.

Script dissolution. We have noted how changes in protest policing have altered aspects of the dynamics of collective action events, such that preplanned, scripted events have rendered the idea of emergent norms as generally irrelevant. Yet, certain moments in the career of a protest event or demonstration exhibit considerable ambiguity about what to do next. In some cases, this is the outcome of script disruption, as shown earlier; in other cases, it may be a consequence of script dissolution. That is, the event has ended and there is no additional script for subsequent action. In such cases, we hypothesize there will be increased probability of spontaneous collective action, particularly in the case of contestation over emotionally charged issues.

Illustrative evidence is provided by the first author's participant observations of a noon-time rally at the University of Akron in Ohio to protest and dialogue about the May 4, 1970, Kent State University campus shooting, in which 13 students were shot, four fatally, by Ohio National Guardsmen. The University of Akron is only a few miles from Kent State University. As with students at most universities at that time, many students at the University of Akron were angry about what had transpired at Kent State and were clamoring for the opportunity to discuss the shooting, as well as President Nixon's earlier announcement of the invasion of Cambodia, which an estimated 500 Kent State students were protesting when the shootings occurred. At the University of Akron and elsewhere, a "free speech area" was established to accommodate student demands for dialogue about the events. The following describes the first author's abbreviated observations of and experience with script dissolution and the associated ambiguity at one of these gatherings:

> A few days after the Kent shootings, around 150 students assembled at the free speech area at noon to listen to a couple of speakers. I attended that rally with several friends. Following the last speech, there was a pregnant pause, as students seemed to be waiting for another speaker or directions as to what to do next. But no one stepped up. So I whispered to one of my friends, as we stood at the back of the gathering, "watch this." And then I blurted out at the top of my lungs: "Strike! Strike! Shut it down!" Within seconds that keynote to strike was repeated among other crowd members, and then the entire gathering appeared to be chanting the slogan in unison. Within a minute or two most of the gathering was marching to the campus's main administration building to "shut it down." These actions were spontaneous by both me and the gathering as a whole. I had not planned to blurt out the "Strike! Strike! Shut it down!" slogan; nor was there a prearranged plan by the

participants to march to the administration building to shut it down.

One could argue there was a script for such action, as calls to shut down universities were occurring around the country. But both the keynote and the march from the free speech area to the administration building were emergent, spontaneous actions.

It is reasonable to wonder why such spontaneous actions do not occur at the end of all collective action events. We suspect the answer is that most events have a negotiated or planned ending to them, which lessens the prospect of ambiguity. This was not the case with the above incident, however, as the last speaker gave no indication that the rally was over and the gathering should disperse. Moreover, the designated time-span for the rally had not yet been exhausted. Thus, we contend that spontaneous collective action is more likely when there is ambiguity about whether an event has officially ended and the temporal window is still open.

Non-scripted square-offs. Spontaneous collective actions may occur in the aftermath of a completed rally or demonstration, as in the case of the previously described 1983 Ku Klux Klan march in Austin. By the time police had escorted the marching Klansmen back to the assembly area, a local activist and several adherents had already congregated there. This small group of counter-protesters was not involved in the initial, pre-event negotiations and caught the police and Klansmen by surprise. After a moment of ambiguity, during which counter-protesters heckled the Klan and police, a violent confrontation erupted spontaneously between the counter-protesters and half-a-dozen police officers.

We conceptualize such confrontational encounters as non-scripted square-offs because they typically are not planned beforehand and thus arise spontaneously. It is important to note that while such square-offs are sometimes themselves spontaneous actions, they may also generate subsequent spontaneity within protest events, either

altering an event's character or extending it beyond its initial planned dissolution. We observed a number of such square-offs between two or more individuals or groups occurring with script dissolution or the dispersion of gatherings at political rallies. Most square-offs probably have little consequence beyond the participants involved, but some can have important effects, as did the non-scripted violent skirmish between the Klan counter-demonstrators and the police trying to protect the Klansmen. This event, coupled with the larger march, was the basis for an investigation by Austin's Human Relations Committee and a report specifying recommendations for managing future "controversial parades."

Ambiguous moments leading to nonscripted square-offs can also provide protesters with opportunities, as one Tahrir Square observer noted, "to discover that they've got some power they didn't think they had" (Schneider 2011). The first day marking the 2011 Egyptian revolution, for example, began as another day of protest, rather than one of revolution. As activist Hossam El-Hamalawy reported to Al Jazeera English, "I thought Jan. [sic] 25 was going to be just another demonstration with a couple hundred people and a couple thousand central security forces, and that was the end of that."[11] Another participant, Mona Seif, observed that the numbers of demonstrators heading toward Tahrir Square grew within "seconds" to number in the thousands. As participants approached the square, they confronted the widely feared Central Security Forces. These agents linked arms to block the protesters, but the demonstrators broke through; Seif remembered "raising our arms and saying 'peaceful, peaceful,' and there was no resistance because we really outnumbered them." Dozens of security forces then began charging toward the protesters to dissuade the surge. "Usually what happens" in this circumstance, activist Gigi Ibrahim attested, "is the protesters . . . run away." However, when protesters on the front lines faced this challenge, a moment of ambiguity produced a spontaneous and

pivotal instance of resistance by anti-regime demonstrators. As Ibrahim reported,

> For a few moments . . . some tens of people at the front lines stopped—they kind of looked at each other and they started . . . attacking. Everybody started running at the officers and the officers actually ran away. This for me was just mind blowing . . . then [the protesters] started putting up barricades, and this was the initial sites of Tahrir being born . . .

Here, we can see that the role of spontaneity in the Egyptian revolution of 2011 is more than a narrative device. The non-scripted square-off with security forces on the streets of Cairo enabled anti-regime protesters to incite an unplanned confrontation with the security apparatus and launch the occupation of Tahrir Square, which contributed to the overthrow of then-president Hosni Mubarak.

The three mechanisms elaborated in Condition 2 help specify the kinds of conditions that link ambiguity to spontaneous collective action within protest events. However, they do not clarify the form spontaneous actions may take. To better understand the issue of form, we turn to the condition of priming.

Condition 3: Behavioral/Emotional Priming and Framing

In considering these instances of spontaneous collective action, it is reasonable to wonder why the actors took one line of action rather than another. For example, in the case of the keynoter blurting out "strike, strike, shut it down," why that particular keynote rather than another? And why did the students march directly to the administration building upon hearing the call to strike, strike, shut it down? A simple, straightforward answer is mimicry. But that implies a kind of mindless contagion explanation associated with early collective behavior theorizing that has been rejected empirically and theoretically (see McPhail 1991; Turner and Killian 1987). Moreover, to call such collective action

mimicry or contagion is to label it rather than to explain it. To answer such questions, we draw on the social psychological concept of priming and its connection to framing.

Priming refers to an increased sensitivity to certain stimuli due to prior experiences. It is a pre-sensitizing process that increases the probability of activating a concept, frame, emotion, or line of action based on exposure to an earlier, similar stimulus or experience. This experiential priming effect was theorized some time ago by Mead in *The Philosophy of the Act* (1938). Although Mead (1938:3) did not use the word priming, his discussion of the impulse stage of the act foreshadowed its operation: "there accompanies this attitude [by which he meant the reaction to a stimulation] of the response some imagery which is taken from past experiences in which the responses have been carried out." Psychologists have recently affirmed this priming effect by showing that words and mental constructs—traits, stereotypes, and prejudices—can elicit behavior without any awareness on the part of the individuals so affected (Bargh, Chen, and Burrows 1996; Kahneman 2011; Steele and Aronson 1995). Such word-based priming effects, which are consistent with the symbolic interactionist contention that symbols have lines of action embedded within them, are explained in part through what cognitive psychologists call associative memory and activation. But priming is associated not only with concepts and words. Research also shows that engaging in various actions can prime subsequent actions and emotions in ways not anticipated (Kahneman 2011).[12]

Drawing on such observations, we argue that in the face of script breakdowns and dissolutions and the associated ambiguities that result, the spontaneous lines of action that emerge are not random but are dictated, in part, by prior priming experiences or cues and their relative recency. The inclination to shout out "strike, strike, shut it down," and the associated action of marching to the administration building, can thus be construed as primed by an evolving prognostic master frame (Snow and Benford 1992) and by the

protesters having observed or heard about these activities on other campuses. The recurrent chant of "the people want the fall of the regime!" during the Arab Spring is another example. Mimicry may be involved, but we argue that the priming process makes the mimicry more likely.

Research on the "ghetto riots" of the 1960s and 1970s across U.S. cities further demonstrates the relationship between priming and spontaneous collective action. These studies found that the disorders were often triggered by a precipitating incident or event involving police action that was perceived as excessive and brutal by black residents. As the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders (1968:93) concluded in 1967, "almost invariably the incident that ignites disorder arises from police action." But it is also likely that during this period, excessive police actions in urban black communities far exceeded the occurrence of disorders. Although these civil disorders were generally spontaneous in the sense that they were unplanned, it is clear they did not combust spontaneously solely in concurrence with excessive police actions. Other factors were also necessary, as the riot literature makes clear.[13] One such factor, we submit, was priming. As Feagin and Hahn (1973:172) write:

> If the precipitating incident represents a problem that has been a long-standing or increasing source of discontent, local residents may be more likely to respond actively to the rumor and affiliate themselves with street crowds. Thus the recruitment of additional riot participants on the basis of information received about the precipitating incident is greatly facilitated by pre-existing sentiments and experiences.

Further illustration of the importance of preexisting sentiments and experiences as primers in relation to spontaneous collective action is provided by the Rosenstrasse and Grosse Hamburger Strasse protests in Berlin in 1943. These events involved several hundred gentile women whose Jewish husbands

and children had been locked in detention centers by the Nazis. The women protested against the likelihood of their loved ones being deported by staging defiant demonstrations and chanting, "Give our husbands back!" According to Stoltzfus's (2001) historical analysis of the women's biographies, they neither knew each other beforehand nor were connected via prior association. There was no publicized anti-Nazi protest to mimic, yet the women came together despite the absence of these standard organizational mechanisms or structures. As one participant said, "Of course there was an investigation to find out whether someone was instigating this. But nothing was found. . . . [The protest] wasn't organized but spread by word of mouth. It was a spontaneous reaction" (Stoltzfus 2001:244).

Stoltzfus's explanation is that the women had already been engaging in nearly a decade of individual resistance—what Mansbridge (2013) calls "everyday activism"—ignoring pressure from the Gestapo to divorce their husbands and harassment from neighbors. According to our reading of Stoltzfus, the women's ongoing individual-level resistance, coupled with their love and loyalty, primed them to take spontaneous action during their family members' incarceration.

Drawing on this case, Doherty (2013:1299) contends the following:

> It is useful to make an analytical distinction between two elements of tactical choice: first the decision to choose particular forms of action, which involves planning and calculation; and second, the relational moment when the tactic is put to action and others react. In the Rosenstrasse case, there was no collective planning, as this action was as close to spontaneous as a protest can be, and is thus similar to other examples that remind us of the importance of decisive but unplanned actions taken in the heat of the moment.

Hypothesizing further, we contend that a particular tactic may be present in a movement's repertoire, but the moment at which that tactic is enacted is often unpredictable and unplanned. Studies of wildcat strikes in labor protests describe this dynamic (Fantasia 1988; Stepan-Norris and Zeitlin 1996). While wildcat strikes have long been a part of workers' repertoires of resistance, the initiation of wildcat strikes is not always preplanned or subject to the control of union leadership. Workers often employ wildcat strikes when their moods sour over issues large and small. A former member of the United Auto Workers' Ford Local No. 600 describes this situation in Stepan-Norris and Zeitlin (1996:123):

> The very term wildcat means a spontaneous struggle. A spontaneous struggle is something that takes place at the spur of the moment, and [can] take place over the craziest issues that nobody could really anticipate. It will explode over anything. . . . I would wake up one morning and find out that a bunch of guys went out on strike because there wasn't toilet paper in the toilet.

Workers may be primed to initiate a wildcat strike by their resentment over poor working conditions, anger at their union bosses, or stress created by surveillance and the threat of violence (Stepan-Norris and Zeitlin 1996). The initiation of a wildcat strike itself, however, may be spontaneous. And because workers may have to convince their fellow workers to join unplanned strikes on the fly, this can lead to a variety of other improvised tactics, such as shouting keynotes, giving impromptu speeches, coaxing hesitant co-workers, and turning preexisting sentiments of solidarity into action (Fantasia 1988).

As a final illustration of the connection between priming and spontaneous collective action, we return to the Kent State shooting. The shootings occurred around 12:45 p.m. on Monday, May 4, 1970, when 28 National Guardsmen fired from the highest point on the campus (Blanket Hill) in the midst of a student demonstration that had shifted its focus from protesting the invasion of Cambodia to the presence of the National Guard on campus. While some reports claim the shootings

were the result of an organized conspiracy by some of the guardsmen, most investigations suggest a far more complex set of circumstances involving a series of spontaneous adjustments by sets of demonstrators and National Guardsmen.[14] Even the firing of guns by 28 guardsmen can be described as relatively spontaneous; little, if any, concrete evidence suggests the guardsmen received direct orders to open fire.

Among the contested reasons observers have given for the shootings, priming was unquestionably at work. First, tensions between student protesters and security agents were high because of the recurrent presence of the National Guardsmen on Ohio's various campuses. As an Ohio congressman stated in an FBI report:

> [B]y the first week in May, 1970, violence on Ohio's state supported campuses was an old story. Few institutions had been spared. Governor Rhodes had already acquired a reputation for prompt and firm response; he had called out the National Guard forty times. In fact, Ohio's expenditure for National Guard duty is said to have exceeded the total for all other forty-nine states during 1968–70. (Best 1978:7)

Locally, the tensions between Kent State students and the community were already boiling with in-town demonstrations and what some called "rioting." Further exacerbating the tension was the order for National Guardsmen to move from Akron, where they were monitoring a trucker's strike, to Kent State's campus on Saturday, May 2nd. With this move, the protesters' target shifted from the war to the armed guards themselves, which primed both sides for a confrontation. Given the confluence of these contextual and interactional factors, the fact that some guardsmen opened fire spontaneously is not surprising, especially in light of experimental research showing that the presence of guns can function as a potent cue that primes aggression, particularly when participants are angry and fearful (Berkowitz and LePage 1967; Turner

and Leyens 1992). In the following section, we describe how ecological and spatial conditions may further prime social control agents to react with spontaneous aggression.

Condition 4: Ecological/Spatial Contexts and Constraints

Ecological factors refer to spatial configurations and arrangements, whether natural or built, that affect patterns of human settlement and interaction. The importance of ecological factors in shaping everyday life and extraordinary events has been demonstrated in studies of architecture, crowding, and human vulnerability to various spatially produced dangers (Freedman 1975; Goffman 1971; Newman 1973; Sommer 1974). Sewell (2001) and Tilly (2000) argue that spatial arrangements also affect contentious events, but the physical environment's effect on protest was generally under-theorized until Zhao's (1998, 2001) in-depth analysis of the 1989 Beijing student movement and Tiananmen Square massacre.[15]

According to Zhao (2001:187), the ecology of Beijing's various universities significantly affected student mobilization. Among the most important ecological factors was the proximity of most of Beijing's 67 universities to each other, with most being less than 30 minutes apart by bicycle; separation of most universities from the outside world by large walls; the dense campus living conditions, with a half dozen or more students living in the same room; the "total institution" character of campus life; and spatial layouts that channeled students' routines and activities. Student dormitories also became temporary homes for thousands of students who descended upon Beijing from outside to observe and join the student movement.

Together, these spatial characteristics constituted an ecology that affected mobilization in a number of ways, including the generation of numerous spontaneous individual and collective actions. Central locations on campuses, such as Beijing University's "Triangle," became mobilizing locales for unplanned protests. Before the occupation of Tiananmen

Square, students who were "milling around" the Triangle heard a rumor that students from a nearby university had initiated street protests outside of their campus (Zhao 2001:253). Some students

> . . . became very excited and wanted to stage a demonstration at Tiananmen Square as well. Only around two hundred students followed them. These students marched inside the dormitory area first, however. As they shouted and made noise, more and more students were attracted and came out of their dormitories. The size of the formation gradually swelled . . . to between five and six thousand, and eventually they marched out of the campus. (Zhao 2001:253)

Zhao notes that many students spontaneously joined such demonstrations out of curiosity or excitement. He argues that students would not have successfully infiltrated Tiananmen Square on April 27, 1989, if not for the "marching and shouting" that took place on campus, which amassed thousands of students and "created an atmosphere of excitement and heightened the pitch of their anger" (Zhao 2001:261). Because of this, the students collectively overcame their fears of repression enough to leave the confines of their respective universities. Zhao's account makes clear that ecological factors not only affected the emergence and character of the student movement, but also made possible an array of spontaneous collective actions that later appeared to be preordained and coordinated. Because of these ecological factors, "many of their activities represented spontaneous and individualistic responses to events rather than conscious decisions arrived at collectively by their organizations" (Zhao 2001:147).

Just as ecological factors may give rise to spontaneous mobilization processes, they may also stimulate unplanned responses by members of the security apparatus deployed to curb mobilization. In the cases of the Kent State shootings and the Bloody Sunday protests in Derry, the ecological layout of the protest scenes exacerbated the effects of

unplanned repressive responses, leading to casualties. For example, in the Kent State incident, the fatality closest to the firing guardsmen was 20 yards away, whereas the furthest was about 250 yards away, with the remaining two somewhere in the middle. The answer to this puzzling pattern resided "in the topography of the area" (Best 1978:21–22). As explained in one analysis:

> The pagoda on Blanket Hill is the high point of the area and shots fired over the heads of people twenty yards away would carry in a downward trajectory and inflict mortal wounds hundreds of yards away to people at whom the guardsmen weren't aiming. Thus, the guardsmen who thought they were safely aiming over the heads of people nearby may have inflicted wounds on others quite some distance away.

If this account is correct, ecological factors accounted, in part, for the pattern of casualties at Kent State.

The Bloody Sunday incident further illustrates how ecological factors can exacerbate the outcomes of spontaneous confrontations with social control agents. After the breakdown of the negotiated script described in Condition 2, Brigadier MacLellan refrained from giving the go-ahead for soldiers to conduct a "running battle" to make arrests because of the inability of army personnel to distinguish between so-called rioters and peaceful marchers (BSI 2010, v. 2:267). However, in violation of the brigadier's order, Colonel Wilford ordered his Support Company to move into a designated "no go" area called the Bogside. Soldiers then chased civilians through the Bogside, shooting 20 civilians who were either fleeing or trying to help the injured. As described in the official Inquiry, the ecological layout of the Bogside contributed to the eventual use of lethal force:

> Soldiers of Support Company had been told by officers and believed that this was a particularly dangerous area for the security forces, with any incursion running the risk

of meeting attacks by paramilitaries using bombs and firearms. . . . When they disembarked in the Bogside the soldiers were in an open area where they had never previously been and which was overlooked by the large and high blocks of the Rossville Flats, believed by them to be in a place from which republican paramilitaries operated. (BSI 2010, v. 1:81)

The order for soldiers to enter what was believed to be open enemy territory prompted them to cock "their weapons in order to fire without delay" (BSI 2010, v. 1:81) in breach of the military's protocol for use of lethal force. The Inquiry reports that the commander of the Support Company was surprised to hear rifle fire and "had no idea what was actually going on" (BSI 2010, v. 1:97). In the Bogside, soldiers' fear and tension was exacerbated by the area's ecological arrangements, which led to heightened perceptions of threat. Additionally, the open space increased the protesters' physically vulnerability to being hit by gunfire.

Because the ecological environment shapes social interactions and the "nature and possibility" of social protest (Sewell 2001:61), spatial factors may operate in combination with other conditions, such as heightened ambiguity and priming, to increase the likelihood of spontaneous actions and confrontations. As we will discuss, these factors can exacerbate preexisting tensions between groups on the scene and lead to violent outcomes in spite of the implementation of public order management systems.

DISCUSSION

In this article we have sought to bring spontaneity back into the analysis of protest dynamics and social movements by identifying a set of conditions under which spontaneity is most likely to be activated. We began by assessing the analytic treatment of spontaneity in the scholarly literature on protest and social movements, concluding that its treatment is conceptually and empirically misguided.

Researchers have either temporally misapprehended and erroneously concretized the place and function of spontaneity, treating it as a static stage rather than as a dynamic element within the collective action process, or ignored it entirely. Our argument is that spontaneous collective actions can occur at various points in the career of protests and social movements, because the precipitating conditions with which spontaneity is most likely to be associated are not clustered at any single point in the career of these collective phenomena. Our illustrative cases demonstrate that spontaneous actions occurred at various points in these events, including after the disruption of a negotiated script, with the dissolution of the script, with the occurrence of non-scripted square-offs in the beginning of an event, during the dispersion process, and as a sideshow to the main event.

Importantly, we also observe that some spontaneous actions can be quite consequential for the ongoing dynamics of the collective actions in which they are embedded and for subsequent events. First, we find that spontaneity is a defining feature of some kinds of movements, such that it is woven into the movement's operational fabric and thus is integral to its ongoing functioning. This clearly is the case with nonhierarchical movements that espouse deliberative democratic participation, innovation, and creativity. Impromptu actions are understood by participants as necessary contributions to the movement's routines and its broader mission. The same is also true for membership in some religious movements, such as orthodox Quakerism, where spontaneous sharing by "friends" is determined by their God-given "inner light" rather than by authoritative invitation or prior planning. For both religious and self-help movements, such as Alcoholics Anonymous, for which testimonial sharing is a salient organizational feature, the opportunity to share is organizationally determined, but who shares, when, and what they share is often spontaneous. In this way, spontaneity is a defining and necessary feature of these movements' organized functioning.

Second, we submit that some kinds of spontaneous actions within the context of an ongoing protest event increase the probability of the occurrence of collective violence. Although research shows that interpersonal or intergroup violence is only an occasional concomitant of protest gatherings (McPhail and Wohlestein 1983), and although much of that research concludes that the violence that does occur is most likely due to interactions of police and protesters, little research inspects that interaction. However, a number of our observations shed some light on this puzzle, as they suggest that the occurrence of spontaneous actions associated with ambiguity-induced script breakdown, script dissolution, and non-scripted square-offs increase the probability of violence.

Third, we find that spontaneous actions often produced a subsequent, spontaneously altered script or plan of action, which occurred in an episodic, contingent manner. By this, we mean that an adjustment by one set of actors within the field of protest led to an unplanned but primed adjustment by another set of actors. This occurred, for example, when the free speech gathering in the wake of the Kent State shootings marched spontaneously to the Akron campus administration building with the intent of "shutting it down" in response to a keynote to "strike, strike, shut it down!" Also illustrative of this dynamic are the unplanned violent reactions to the actions of protesters or counter-protesters, as occurred on Bloody Sunday and during the 1968 Chicago Democratic convention (Walker 1969).[16]

A fourth outcome of spontaneous confrontations is that they may affect planning and negotiations for subsequent demonstrations, as we saw with the Klan rallies in Austin, Texas. Additionally, past collective actions, whether planned or spontaneous, may function as primers for future events. This occurred in the spontaneous "strike, strike, shut it down" march and in the civil disorders of the 1960s, and it is likely the case with convivial campus gatherings that may escalate into collective violence (McCarthy, Martin, and McPhail 2007).

Finally, spontaneous collective actions may also lead to the kinds of outcomes that generally have been thought possible only through highly organized strategic action. Particularly illustrative are eyewitness accounts of protester–police interactions in Cairo on January 25, 2011; the wildcat strikes described by Fantasia (1988); and Stoltzfus's (2001) accounts of the 1943 Rosenstrasse and Grosse Hamburger Strasse protest events in Berlin.

These outcomes of spontaneity are important and consequential for the dynamics of the collective action events in which they are embedded and for subsequent events. As such, this study highlights the importance of recognizing spontaneous actions as salient aspects of protest events and social movements. To dismiss or ignore their existence is to miss important elements of collective action dynamics.

In light of these observations, we suggest scholars of protest and movements have held to an "overly-organized" conception of these phenomena over the past several decades. Piven and Cloward (1991:436) have argued similarly that protest is often analyzed "as more organized than it is, as if conventional modes of formal organization also typify the organizational forms taken by protest." Thus, to paraphrase Wrong's (1961:191–92) erstwhile contention that humans are "social but not entirely socialized," we contend that protest events and their movement sponsors are organized but not entirely organized. This is not to dismiss the organizational dimension of protests and social movements. Rather, it is to acknowledge and call for a more dialectical and interactionist conception of the various factors at play in their unfolding dynamics—a conception that focuses on the interplay between spontaneity and organization, rather than on their presumed antithetical opposition.

Our findings and conclusions are not only consistent with the logic of grounded theory on which they are based; they also are in keeping with the logic of qualitative comparative analysis (Ragin 2000), in as much as we identify a set of conditions under which spontaneous collective actions are likely to occur

and show that these conditions are not mutually exclusive but may interact and combine to increase the probability of the occurrence of such actions. Identifying precisely the alternative pathways that can lead to different types of spontaneous collective actions remains to be done, but our analysis identifies empirically a set of precipitating conditions with which more refined empirical analyses might begin. Future analyses aside, our findings call not only for reconsideration of the role of spontaneity in protests and movements, but also for further recalibration of how it fits into theorizing about the dynamics of collective action more generally. Given our conceptualization of spontaneity as rooted in the intersection of symbolic interactionism and cognitive psychology, we believe our observations also apply to areas of inquiry beyond the study of collective action and thus call for empirical inquiry and theorization about the operation of spontaneity in the course of everyday life.

Acknowledgments

Notes

1. See Stinchcombe's (2001) analysis of formality and when it works or applies.
2. Kahneman (2011:13, 20) describes fast thinking as "spontaneous" and "intuitive" rather than deliberative and operating "automatically and quickly, with little or no effort and no sense of voluntary control." As such, it happens in a "blink," to use Gladwell's (2005) popularized metaphor.
3. For concrete examples of these protest policing styles, see McPhail, Schweingruber, and McCarthy (1998).
4. See della Porta and Reiter (1998) and McCarthy and McPhail (1998) for discussions of protest policing in Europe and the United States.
5. For example, spontaneity is neither discussed nor listed in the index of the *Dynamics of Contention*

(McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001), *The Blackwell Companion to Social Movements* (Snow, Soule, and Kriesi 2004), or *The Wiley-Blackwell Encyclopedia of Social & Political Movements* (Snow et al. 2013). Polletta's (1998:137) analysis of black student sit-ins in the American south might be taken as an exception to the neglect of spontaneity in movement studies, as she invokes spontaneity via the "metaphors of wildfire, fever, and contagion." However, the question of whether there were moments of spontaneity in the sit-ins is bypassed by attributing spontaneity to students' accounting practices. We do not take exception with Polletta's empirical observations, but we do think the analysis reflects the tendency for movement theorizing to be couched in binary terms: if there is evidence of planning and organization, then reference to spontaneity is antithetical other than as a narrating practice.
6. To accent the interactive interplay between organization and spontaneity is quite consistent with key organizing principles of symbolic interactionism (see Snow 2001, especially pages 369–71).
7. This interview was conducted as part of a separate project by the second author on the "Arab Spring Abroad" (human subject approvals #2012-8887 and #2012-8918, University of California-Irvine).
8. We place *riots* in quotation marks because it is not always clear that the collective actions to which the term is applied should be labeled as such. Even though "most social scientists have an intuitive sense of what constitutes a riot," Myers (2013:1124) notes that "the edges of the definition are fuzzy," often making it "difficult to determine whether or not some events are actually 'riots.'" Additionally, the term is sometimes used as a political label for contentious, unruly collective action engaged in by a challenging group or focuses attention on one segment of participants and implies something demeaning about them. Such concerns have been noted in relation to the "ghetto riots" of the 1960s in the United States (see Feagin and Hahn 1973: fn 4, vi–vii). Thus, we question the presumption that riots constitute a pure or unambiguous form of collective action and contend that the term should be used advisedly.
9. The researchers included the first author and then-graduate students Leon Anderson, Robert Benford, and Steven Worden.
10. Also referred to as Londonderry (see also Conway 2010; Murray 2012; Pringle 2002).
11. This and the following quotes are from the Al Jazeera English documentary *Tweets from Tahrir* (2012).
12. Gladwell (2005:114) provides an explicit example in relation to basketball: "Basketball is an intricate, high-speed game filled with split-second, spontaneous decisions. But that spontaneity is possible only when everyone first engages in hours of highly repetitive and structured practice—perfecting their

shooting, dribbling, and passing and running plays over and over again—and agrees to play a carefully defined role on the court."

13. See Lieberson and Silverman (1965) for analysis of precipitants of race riots from 1913 to 1963. For additional summaries and assessment of research on the ghetto riots of the 1960s, see Feagin and Hahn (1973) and McPhail (1994).

14. Of the many sources on the shootings and the flow of precipitating events, we draw from Scranton (1970) and Best (1978), which are primarily descriptive. For more analytic accounts, see the third section of essays in Hensley and Lewis (1978).

15. See also Feagin and Hahn (1973), Gould (1995), and Heirich (1971), although they do not accent ecological factors as does Zhao.

16. For an alternative view of the civil disorders associated with the 1968 Democratic Convention in Chicago, see Kusch (2008), whose post-hoc interviews with the police suggest they conducted themselves as ordered by their superiors. Even so, prearranged directives from above do not necessarily prescribe the exact form and intensity of behavior, which can become spontaneously volatile during the heat of conflict.

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