

CAMERAS, COPS, AND CONTENTION: THE POLICING OF INDEPENDENT  
MEDIA AT THE 2008 REPUBLICAN NATIONAL CONVENTION

HUMBOLDT STATE UNIVERSITY

By

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## ABSTRACT

### CAMERAS, COPS, AND CONTENTION: THE POLICING OF INDEPENDENT MEDIA AT THE 2008 REPUBLICAN NATIONAL CONVENTION

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Master of Arts in Sociology

This thesis is a qualitative examination of the events of the 2008 Republican National Convention in St. Paul Minnesota. Specifically, I examine the detainment, harassment, and arrest of ten independent journalists before and during street protests surrounding this convention. Independent media represents an ideological counter hegemonic production and distribution of content that closely aligns with social movements. The journalists' stories serve to illustrate how independent journalists organize themselves within the contentious environment of large protests as well as describe the phenomenon of political repression in the form of pre-emptive detainment, mass arrest, and surveillance. Also discussed are a variety of concepts closely related to the two main themes including the role of technology and the public sphere. With this research I connect literature on social movement repression with literature and ideas about independent media and contentious politics. This analysis describes how social movements and independent media have become altered organizationally by the political repression and strategic incapacitation of their members.

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## INTRODUCTION

As I sit quietly in the audience listening to independent journalist and author Amy Goodman addressing a substantial crowd at Humboldt State University, I have several questions regarding her experience in St. Paul, Minnesota during the 2008 Republican National Convention. The arrest of Ms Goodman and two other staff members of *Democracy Now* originally brought my attention to the issues in this thesis. In total around forty journalists were arrested at this event along with between seven and eight hundred others. The video of Goodman's arrest became the most watched clip on the website Youtube.com for two days straight in September and to date has been watched over nine hundred thousand times. While the arrest of peaceful activists at large summit like protests such as the Republican National Convention are shocking, they are nothing new. However, the arrest and intentional detainment of journalists seemed like overt repression of a supposedly free press. I began to ask myself- what are the impacts of protest policing on media activists and journalists? How do independent journalists who cover demonstrations organize in a climate of protest and repression? These questions are the focal point for this research.

Historically the media have been gatekeepers of the marketplace of ideas, especially in the United States. It was the repression of the printers, along with other wordsmiths in colonial America that led to the widespread slogan "no taxation without representation" (Starr 2004). The political origins of communication help to understand the motivation of independent media in today's society. In order to keep the balance

between capitalism and democracy on an even keel, a new media based on certain ideological and organizational principles emerged to put a check on the narrowing of ideological diversity. This is independent media. Many different approaches and angles constitute the independent media marketplace of ideas. What binds this diverse array of journalism is their commitment to what Amy Goodman calls “going where the silence is.” When thousands of national and international press were inside The Excel Center covering the speeches of John McCain and Sarah Palin, there were thousands of protesters in the streets calling for radical social change, and independent journalists were in the thick of it, tear gas and all.

At the 2008 Republican National Convention it became clear that the policing of protesters extended to media personnel who were covering the action as well. Before the convention began there were raids by police and federal authorities on the places where independent media journalists were being housed as well as on their convergence spaces. Many of these journalists were present and active at the previous (2004) RNC in New York City where footage captured by journalists was used to exonerate many who were arrested. It appears that these pre-emptive raids were an attempt to strategically incapacitate independent media groups before they had a chance to take up their cameras for the events at the 2008 RNC. In the next few paragraphs I will define independent media and also give an overview of the events at the 2008 Republican National Convention.

## Independent Media

Independent media includes newspapers, radio, television, movies, and websites operated by individuals or groups who are based on a non-commercial model of journalism. The defining element of this type of journalism is their independence in message and finances from large conglomerate news corporations (sometimes referred to as corporate or mass media). Often independent media are linked to social movement organizations or considered a reform movement in themselves (Napoli 2007).

Information produced by independent media often counters the hegemonic message that many mass media organization distribute (Croteau and Hoynes 2006). This information provides diversity along an ideological spectrum concerning any number of topics. In a book titled *Challenging Codes* Melucci (1996) argues that “the emerging power is increasingly based...on the production and circulation of information” (p.176). He goes on to claim that this shift towards information as power “render[s] it open to multiple interpretations and into something that is never under full control.” (ibid) In a fast paced society where information is a resource as precious as bread and water, informing the public becomes a political act where individuals and groups are allowed to construct their own identities and versions of events, instead of remaining tied to a unidirectional form of communication.

Sometimes labeled as “alternative” or “activist”, these individuals and groups comprising independent media are organized and controlled by ordinary citizens or their grass roots organizations. Regarding function, independent media will aim first and foremost at serving the informational, cultural, and other communications needs of

members of the public, including diverse or radical ideologies, which the traditional mass media discredit or ignore altogether. Some of the independent media present at the 2008 RNC are self described anarchists that organize in a non-hierarchical, decentralized fashion.

The label of independent media is somewhat broad, and does not easily lend itself to clear typologies. For the purposes of this research I define independent media as groups or individuals contesting a dominant account of the world through non-commercial democratic means. The ubiquity of new information technology in the twenty first century allows near instantaneous communication and fosters a related large online audience. This research looks at the cross section of independent media with social movements and political repression at a specific time and place.

Since independent journalists are closely aligned with social movements, or can be considered a social movement (Napoli 2007), the information they provide often aligns closely with the collective action frames of contentious political ideologies. This places them in confrontation with authorities and they are often subject to similar political repression as that experienced by social movement actors. Scholars such as Jackie Smith (2001) describe movement oriented independent media as “an innovative repertoire which seeks multilateral arenas and often are linked closely with transnational social movement organizations” (p.4). Rodriguez (2001) highlights the power of language and information in people’s lives, claiming that “alternative media spin transformative processes that alter people’s senses of self, their subjective positioning, and therefore their access to power” (p.18).

The use of repressive tactics on independent media individuals and collectives calls for shifts in their own organizational and tactical repertoire. A search to identify these shifts in organization and tactics became the focal point of my research. Because of the high degree of police proactive surveillance and pre-emptive detainment of independent media at the 2008 RNC, I chose to focus my study on the protest events and media experiences at this particular time and place. .

### The 2008 Republican National Convention

Held in a different city every election cycle, the Republican National Convention is a major gathering point for social movements of all stripes. For the purposes of this study I will not discuss activities on the convention floor; this study concentrates on the events that occurred in the streets before, during, and after the convention. The convention itself took place from September 1 through September 4, 2008 at the Xcel Energy Center in Saint Paul, Minnesota.

Before the convention began there were several raids on the homes of social movement organizers and independent media journalists. The I-Witness video collective was detained for several hours “to search the premises for firearms, weapons, hazardous materials, computers, cell-phones and the like. The police did not seize any items during the execution of the warrant” (Hefelfinger and Luger 2009). Although the police gave the official reason for this search warrant as a search for firearms, this research, along with allegations from the video collective, suggests that the motivation for this search was more political. I-Witness video is a group of independent documentarians that

record the policing of protest. Their experience is referred to throughout this research as one example of the strategic incapacitation model of protest policing.

Unexpected preemptive raids before the start of the convention were the first incidents of political repression. They were initiated by the local sheriff of Ramsey County Bob Fletcher, and in coordination with the Federal Bureau of Investigation<sup>1</sup>. Six persons who were a part of the organizing group, the RNC Welcoming Committee, were arrested during five police raids on homes in Minneapolis and Saint Paul during the weekend preceding the convention. Hundreds more were detained<sup>2</sup>. Subsequently the RNC Welcoming Committee was charged with conspiracy to commit riot in furtherance of terrorism.

The first three days of the RNC saw police arrests of more than 300 individuals including journalists, health-care workers and lawyer observers<sup>3</sup>. Some were released, but nearly half received felony charges. Of these felony arrests, many cases were dropped or reviewed, sometimes for lesser charges. Twenty one cases were found to be prosecutable. About 102 persons were arrested for unlawful assembly at a “Rage Against the Machine” concert in downtown Minneapolis.

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<sup>1</sup> Greenwald, Glenn (August 31, 2008). "Federal government involved in raids on protesters". Salon. <http://www.salon.com/opinion/greenwald/2008/08/31/raids/>. Retrieved on 2008-09-02.

<sup>2</sup> Nelson, Tim and Stachura, Sea (August 30, 2008). "Police conduct raids in preparation for RNC". Minnesota Public Radio. [http://minnesota.publicradio.org/display/web/2008/08/30/rnc\\_raids/](http://minnesota.publicradio.org/display/web/2008/08/30/rnc_raids/). Retrieved on 2008-08-31.

<sup>3</sup> Demko, Paul (September 3, 2008). "Prosecutors detail protest charges". The Minnesota Independent. <http://www.minnesotaindependent.com/7293/prosecutors-detail-protest-charges>. Retrieved on 2008-09-04.

In total, more than 40 journalists were arrested while reporting on the protests<sup>4</sup>. Progressive news sources have criticized the arrests as unlawful and a violation of the freedom of the press. They warned of the "chilling effects" of such measures. The independent media groups that were detained, arrested or harassed were unable to perform the journalistic activities. These groups included I-witness video, branches of Indymedia from all over the US, Democracy Now!, the Glassbead Collective, The Uptake, The Tin Can Comm Collective and Mobile Broadcast News. This is not an exhaustive list but it includes the groups that are part of my research sample. Because some of these media groups are closely aligned with radical ideologies such as anarchism, they were specifically targeted by law enforcement because of sweeping generalizations about their suspected intent.

On the first day of the convention, September 1<sup>st</sup>, approximately 10,000 largely peaceful protesters marched against the war in Iraq on a predetermined route in downtown St Paul. Groups attending the marches represented a number of organizations opposed to the Republican Administration including the Poor People's Economic Human Rights Campaign, Veterans for Peace, Iraq Veterans Against the War, Military Families Speak Out, the Teamsters, Code Pink, the American Indian Movement and the RNC Welcoming Committee. Several thousand journalists were also among the demonstrators.

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<sup>4</sup> "List of Journalists Arrested at the RNC". Free Press (organization). September 10, 2008. <http://www.freepress.net/node/44232>. Retrieved on 2008-09-16.

Also on the first day of the convention two University of Kentucky students along with a journalist from the Kentucky Kernel were arrested as part of a mass arrest<sup>5</sup>. They were charged with felony riot and were placed in Ramsey County Jail instead of being released immediately, as has been the usual practice with past mass arrests related to protest actions. This lack of protocol has been a consistent criticism of the way that police conducted public order management at the RNC in 2008 (Heffelfinger and Luger 2009). The Editor in Chief of the Kernel stated that “If journalists are being arrested and the police are not separating them from the rioters, who is going to be there to report on the event itself? Journalists being arrested for doing their job is a form of censorship.” (ibid)

On September 1<sup>st</sup> Matt Rourke, a journalist for the Associated Press, was arrested after he snapped several pictures of police arresting other journalists. He was held in jail for over ten hours. Arrested journalists who worked for large mass media outlets such as the AP were much less likely to face legal charges. Rourke was never charged with any crime<sup>6</sup>.

On September 2<sup>nd</sup> the aforementioned arrest of Amy Goodman took place. Goodman was attempting to free a photographer and producer from custody after they were swept up in a mass arrest. The journalists she was attempting to free had been

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<sup>5</sup> Cicerchi, Ali and Jill Laster. 2008. “Two students and Kernel photo adviser arrested at RNC”. Kentucky Kernel. <http://kykernel.com/2008/09/02/two-students-and-kernel-photo-adviser-arrested-at-rnc/>. Retrieved on 2009 -04-02.

<sup>6</sup> Brauer, David. 2008. “AP photographer's last pre-arrest shot is a stunner”. Minnesota Post. [http://www.minnpost.com/stories/2008/09/03/3320/ap\\_photographers\\_last\\_pre-arrest\\_shot\\_is\\_a\\_stunner](http://www.minnpost.com/stories/2008/09/03/3320/ap_photographers_last_pre-arrest_shot_is_a_stunner). Retrieved 2008 12-11.

injured in their arrest and Goodman was attempting to ensure that they were released when she was arrested for crossing a police line and charged with obstruction of justice. The independent journalists who were arrested were not so lucky, some faced felony riot charges, which were all eventually dropped.

When a permit to march expired at 5 p.m. on September 4<sup>th</sup>, the final day of the convention, bridges were closed and police used tear gas, smoke bombs, pepper spray, flash bangs, mounted police, 40 mm paint rounds, 40 mm sponge rounds and all-terrain vehicles. These tactics and arsenal were used to prevent an anti-war march organized by the Anti-War Committee from reaching its destination. The march had begun at 4 p.m. at the State Capitol and was intended to end at the “public viewing area” of cordoned off space outside the convention in the Excel Center. To dispel any confusion about the intent of the marchers, march organizers stated from the podium during the pre-march rally that the marchers proposed to violate the permit and to avoid the permitted route and time. Between 300 and 400 persons were arrested or detained including 19 journalists, among them AP reporters Amy Forliti and Jon Krawczynski, reporters from Twin Cities Daily Planet and The Uptake, and Paul Demko of The Minnesota Independent<sup>7</sup>. All together there were nearly 800 arrests made at the 2008 Republican National Convention, more than 40 of them included journalists. Several lawsuits were filed in U.S. District

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<sup>7</sup> Turck, Mary (September 4, 2008). "Over 300 arrested at RNC protests, including reporters from the Daily Planet and the Uptake". Twin Cities Daily Planet. <http://www.tcdailyplanet.net/article/2008/09/04/day-four-protests-arrests.html>. Retrieved on 2008-09-05.

Court, claiming civil rights abuses by the St. Paul police<sup>8</sup>. Search warrants were still being granted into 2009 in relation to the events that transpired during the 2008 RNC. The treatment of journalists at this convention has been criticized by several groups including the National Lawyers Guild and the Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press. The actions I have described above constitute the social context of this research.

### The Structure of this Study

Throughout this research I address both repression in the form of protest policing, as well as journalist innovation to avoid this repression. While I started this project interested in the more general organization of independent media, my focus on police repression and media innovations crystallized during my interviews with , I also explore the role of technological advancement, its role for organizing protest and its potential role for repression. In my discussion of the findings I explore the role of independent media at protests, how they function and how they represent a social movement in themselves.

In the next chapter, the literature review, I place the 2008 RNC in the context of existing research literature on social movements and cycles of contention, media studies, protest policing, and political repression. In the following chapter I introduce my research methodology. The fourth chapter details my findings. The discussion in the

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<sup>8</sup> Demko, Paul (February 27, 2009). "Lawsuits filed alleging police misconduct around the RNC". The Minnesota Independent. <http://minnesotaindependent.com/27788/lawsuits-filed-alleging-police-misconduct-around-rnc>. Retrieved on 2009-02-28.

fifth chapter places concepts from my research back into the context of the existing scholarly literature.

Finally in my conclusion I consider the significance of my findings in the current political culture and suggest directions for future research.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review explores scholarly work that pertains to social movements, media studies and repression. These subjects are all vital to the understanding of past protest events and the evolution into the current manifestation at the 2008 Republican National Convention in St Paul, Minnesota. I position together social movements, media and the state to better explain a) how the state and social movements form a cycle of contention b) how mass media coverage affects political opportunity via hegemony c) how independent media become intertwined with movements and facilitate a counter hegemonic message and d) explain repression of social movements over time.

This chapter begins by describing social movement interactions with the state. I then look at the coverage of social movements by mass media. Next I connect the Gramscian notion of hegemony and link it to the mass media coverage. Following hegemony, I explain independent media as counter hegemony. I show how protest events have been policed in decades past. Next I move on to the more recent past and look at events between movements and authorities at the 2008 Republican National Convention in Minnesota. Because it is critical to understand the genesis of independent media and its relation to mass corporate media, I offer a comparison of the two. That discussion also makes relevant the place of independent media at protests alongside demonstrators. The actions by police amount to what is known as strategic incapacitation (Noakes and Gillham 2007), influenced by a shift in penology toward a less rehabilitative approach that focuses on the use of strategic arrests, surveillance, and other tactics used

to tie up the organizers and leaders of protest, or in this case journalists. A significant concept that came from the social movement literature is the coevolving dynamic between social movement organizations (Oliver and Myers 2007). With this research I have noticed a coevolving dynamic that exists between independent journalists who document protest, social movement organizations, and the authorities. The organization Indymedia began “for the purpose of providing grassroots coverage of the World Trade Organization (WTO) protests in Seattle.”<sup>9</sup> The intersection of media and movements at protests also involves actions by police. Altogether the three groups provide a rich dynamic for sociological analysis. The police in turn use surveillance, inter-city communication, and paid informants in order to gain the legal leverage to repress movements and media.

### Social Movements

Social movements are defined as collective challenges to the state, elites, authorities, other groups or cultural codes by people with common purposes and solidarity in sustained interactions with elites, opponents and authorities (Tarrow 1998). *Power in Movement*, a concise analysis of social movement history, analyzes the cultural, organizational and personal sources of social movements' power, emphasizing the rise and fall of social movements in what Tarrow describes as cycles of contention. The ebb and flow of political struggle triggers a contentious cycle based on political opportunities and constraints (ibid).

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<sup>9</sup> <http://www.indymedia.org/en/static/about.shtml>

Tarrow suggests that "social movements attempt to replace 'a dominant belief system that legitimizes the status quo with an alternative mobilizing belief system that supports collective action for change,' movement leaders proffer the symbols of revolt to gain support and mark themselves off from opponents" (p.106). While symbols must be "new" (otherwise they are simply in agreement with the status quo that contentious politics are trying to change), they cannot be so new that they do not resonate with the individuals they are intended to mobilize. With the advent of modern print media potential activists became aware of one another and began share common grievances. The politicization of modern communications, combined with the hegemonic message of corporate mass media, allowed for movement leaders to construct "collective action frames" that accentuate grievances in order to mobilize by magnifying injustice and creating emotional pivots. Magnifying injustice is an important aspect of media historically and not part of the agenda of most mass corporate media today (Croteau and Hoynes 2006). The magnification of injustice is a mobilizing tool for social movements and independent media serve this function. It is this relationship that I focus on next.

#### Movement networks and media

The media can be used to transmit symbols and frames, in a move towards constructing consensus (at least among those taking part in the action and who are meant to be mobilized). Still, Tarrow (1998) mentions that newly created cultural frames and "inherited cultural frames are combined with strategic choices within the process of contention" (p.117) to evolve within contentious acts themselves. To move beyond one-time contention into social movements, lasting frames and symbolisms must be

constructed that maintain those already mobilized and mobilize new adherents; these frames must amplify shared values and goals, while papering over differences that could lead to demobilization. Tarrow states that print and association are complementary channels of development for social movements. Historically groups in America such as the Sons of Liberty were pioneers in the utilization of print for publicizing grievances and creating mobilizing networks “loose ties created by print and association, by newspapers, pamphlets, and informal social networks, made possible a degree of coordinated collective action across groups and classes that the supposedly ‘strong ties’ of social class seldom accomplished” (p.51). The use of media for coordinated collective action and mobilization across groups is still used today, only in different forms. Next I will look at how mass media become gatekeepers of opinion through a bureaucratic tendency toward hegemony which can detract from movement mobilization.

### Corporate Media Coverage of Social Movements

Movements and media often have distinctive and evolving culture that may in various ways conflict with mainstream corporate media and the dominant political culture. Social movements serve as a sustained challenge to hegemonic authorities and cultural codes. If the cultural codes, economic policies, or political orientations that movements are criticizing are embraced by mainstream media, their coverage of social movement demonstrations become less than favorable.

This is often a problem for movements in terms of visibility, movements need media far more than the media needs movements. The media are ultimately only accountable to owners and shareholders, not citizens (or even consumers of their product

for that matter). The market model of media (Croteau and Hoynes 2006) encourages viewers and consumers of mass media to enjoy themselves through infotainment, view advertisements, and buy products. Success is solely measured by profits in this model. The public are seen as consumers and the media become agenda setters in this model. This represents an unequal power balance between media and social movements (Gamson and Gadi 1993). Social movements must convince media gatekeepers that they are worthy of coverage and influence the nature of media coverage they receive. Proactive planning is a necessity if movements are to do all they can to develop favorable media coverage. Movements that wish to communicate with the broader public must either have internal resources to perform protest or use the media to do so. “The media provide a diffuse source for consensus formation that movements on their own cannot easily achieve” (Tarrow 2002 p.116). If this source of information is closely aligned with political elites, coverage of protests becomes sensationalized and the media will highlight negative aspects of protest in order to keep the general public from becoming part of the contention.

The corporate mass media and social movements have a tumultuous history. To begin, the transaction between these two complex systems produces conflict and opportunity. Corporations such as Disney who own a cross section of media venues are inherently going to follow the market model. In fact most major corporations follow this model, so it is no surprise that when movements threaten the status quo of contentious subjects such as globalized trade, war, and transnational poverty the long arm of the media will frame them in a negative or damaging light. This type of blatantly biased

coverage is important for Smith et al (1996) as they note how mainstream media focused only on the events of protest activity in Washington DC rather than the motivating grievances behind the contention. Boykoff (2007) similarly notes how stigmatization is a mechanism of repression that serves to isolate dissidents. The media serve to constrain movement consensus formation and mobilization through a process of framing. Tarrow (2002) also states that in addition to media, existing cultural frames also serve to inhibit movement growth. I wonder however if the cultural frames might be simply an extension of the power of mainstream media in shaping a hegemonic collective consciousness?

### Cultural hegemony

Hegemony is a concept previously used by Marxists such as Lenin to indicate the political leadership of the working-class in a democratic revolution, but developed by Antonio Gramsci (1971) into an analysis to explain why the 'inevitable' socialist revolution predicted by Marx had not occurred by the early 20th century. In *The Prison Notebooks* (1971) Gramsci suggested that capitalism maintained control not just through violence and political and economic coercion, but also ideologically, through a hegemonic culture in which the values of the bourgeoisie became the 'common sense' values of all. Thus a consensus culture developed in which people in the working-class identified their own good with the good of the bourgeoisie, and helped to maintain the status quo rather than revolting (ibid).

Gramsci argued that the failure of the workers to make an anti-capitalist revolution was due to the successful capture of the workers' ideology, self-understanding, and organizations by the hegemonic (ruling) culture. In other words, the perspective of

the ruling class had been absorbed by the masses of workers. In advanced capitalist societies hegemonic cultural innovations such as compulsory schooling, mass media, and popular culture had indoctrinated workers to a false consciousness. Instead of working towards a revolution that would truly serve their collective needs, workers in "advanced" societies were listening to the rhetoric of nationalist leaders, seeking consumer opportunities and middle-class status, embracing an individualist ethos of success through competition, and/or accepting the guidance of bourgeois religious leaders. In such a layered hegemony, individual common sense, which is fragmented, is effective in helping people deal with small, everyday activities. But common sense also inhibits their ability to grasp the larger systemic nature of exploitation and hegemony. People focus on immediate concerns and problems rather than focusing upon more fundamental sources of social oppression around the globe or even locally. The corporate media is implicated in this focus by cultivating and perpetuating a hegemonic consciousness.

### Independent Media and the Public Sphere

The preceding hegemonic qualities of the corporate media and the market model of information dissemination help illustrate what independent media journalists find wrong with the current model of information dissemination. Phillips (2003) defines what having an independent media brings to the public: they offer a diversity of news and information, maintain active democracy, contribute to and empower the sociopolitical understanding of a majority of working people, inform and empower the populous, challenge the top down profit driven news system, and finally independent news media serves to stimulate grassroots activism in social movements. The interaction of

independent media centers and activists in movements has become a central component since the 1999 WTO protests in Seattle. Some mass communications scholars have highlighted the conceptual difficulties in alternative independent media. For instance, the structure of advanced capitalist society does not lend itself well to widespread diffusion without compromise. Hamilton (2000) maintains that there is an inherent difficult limitation when critical alternative media try to organize in a professional mode. In order to be optimally participating in a democratic public sphere, there must be no strings attached to disseminating your message. Hamilton's emphasis is the need to create widespread public media empowerment, which occurs with non-professional volunteers, activists, and citizens. The exchange of information between activists and independent media leads to the airing of grievances and expands the public sphere. It is this relationship which I now focus on.

### Independent Media and Social Movements

When movements are challenging mainstream norms they are at a distinct disadvantage because they face well funded opposition (governments, corporations, and corporate media). Therefore movements have often fostered alternative or independent media to promote their messages (underground press of the sixties, and punk rock zines which promoted do it yourself politics). The use of alternative media for counter-hegemonic purposes is not a new phenomenon; Frederick Douglass founded The North Star to promote abolition of slavery, education of slaves and former slaves. The publication of the North Star was a considerable step in giving African Americans a voice

in the abolitionist movement by providing an open forum for African American leaders in the community.

Independent media as a whole serve as a marketplace of ideas within which a wide range of movement participants cooperatively create and maintain space for the discussion of issues. Participants within independent media define an audience, and provide alternative viewpoints (hence the 'alternative media' label which is commonly used interchangeably with independent media). Independent media is not a singular phenomenon, and cannot be analyzed as such, for there are a multitude of diversity in messages, forms of organization and focus of ideas just as social movements have a plethora of agendas (Atton, 2002; Downing, 1984; Downing, et al., 2000; Rodriguez, 2001). Grouping together independent media organizations based on their roles and practices helps give a categorical definition upon which they can be classified.

Two forms of organization can be seen in how media outlets practice, centralized and decentralized (Toft and Cunningham 2007). Organizational forms in traditional corporate media outlets can be understood to be centralized in that the actions of the news reporters and editors are based on hierarchical structure around content and editorial decisions are made in a top down fashion. In this regard, corporate media and some independent media maintain centralized production, with editorial control at the center and news is distributed in a package like way. There could be several reasons for centralized media structures, including: the success of this model in corporate media outlets, and the logistical restraints that accompany distribution mediums like newspapers, magazines and broadcast programming.

The use of non-hierarchical structure in some social movements has led to a more decentralized organizational form. The technological developments in modern communication have allowed decentralized media models to flourish as well. The use of the internet for publishing has led to an endless amount of reports, photos and video to be uploaded while corporate media are limited by television or radio airtime, space on the printed page, and often ideological bias. This is not to insinuate that groups such as Indymedia do not have an agenda, the difference here is that advocacy journalism such as Indymedia are open about their policies and do not disguise themselves as objective (or “fair and balanced” as Fox News likes to call it) journalism. Decentralized organization also allows journalists to work and produce “on the spot,” since technology has become ubiquitous and open source publishing allows continual content uploads. Open source publishing is a feature of some independent media websites which allows user content to be uploaded without overt editorial selectivity. The open publishing forum of Indymedia has been criticized because of its allowance of virtually anyone to upload their coverage or ideas. Atton (2003) describes the potential pitfalls of open publishing.

In practice, this striving for transparency, ‘openness’ and freedom of expression has brought with it problems of offering access to viewpoints antithetical to the Indymedia project. For some, though, the ‘freedom’ that Indymedia’s journalistic practices seek to promote is a freedom that floats free of any explicitly ideological basis. It is as if in its rush to privilege non-hierarchical, ultra-democratic and non-professionalized ways of doing news work, the Indymedia project has ignored the threats to its independence that come through its open-publishing technology. When racists and homophobes can ‘publish’ on its sites as easily as can the human rights campaigner, the environmental activist or the social anarchist, are we truly seeing a socially responsible journalism in action? (p.270)

As mentioned before there are a wide variety of agendas for independent media and there are only loose requirements for what constitutes independence. The agenda of media outlets whether corporate or independent, is generally what sets them apart from one another, along with organizational structure, and content focus (Toft and Cunninham 2007). A counter hegemonic content focus, non-traditional organizational structure, and a non-profit or non-commercial emphasis, are typical indicators of independent media.

### Counter hegemony

Counter-hegemony refers to an alternate interpretation of the functioning of social, economic, and political institutions. If counter-hegemony grows large enough it is able to subsume and replace the historic bloc it was born in, although the dialectical relationship varies to certain degrees. The movement-counter movement banter and mobilization is often along hegemonic and counter-hegemonic lines. In a war of culture, a counter-hegemonic movement attempts, through persuasion or propaganda, to increase the number of people who share its view on the hegemonic order. Thus the media represent the dominant paradigm of hegemony while independent social movement media represent a counter-hegemonic position (Downing et al 2000). Social movements participants at the WTO protests showed a strong disdain for the market model type of media hegemony, especially the coverage they present of protest. More and more independent media organizations have begun to cover protests since the 1999 Seattle WTO (Atton 2003). The genesis of Indymedia allowed a decentralized venue or clearinghouse for video footage of police and protester activity. Next, I explore some of the repressive interaction that has taken place between the state and social movements.

## Repression

State growth and consolidation has led to a significant link of fear associated with contention, especially at protest events (Tarrow 1998). The continual professionalization of police forces has led to a significant presence of authority at protest where large numbers of people gather to demonstrate or conduct direct action. The deliberate use of force to keep political opportunities in check is how Tarrow describes repression. Tarrow also maintains that the fear of uprisings led to nations strengthening police forces and passing legislation which restrict the right of assembly and association. Repression is defined as “any actions taken by government authorities to impede mobilization, harass and intimidate activists, divide organizations, and physically assault, arrest, imprison, and/or kill movement participants.” (Earl 2003 p.44) Protest policing when used aggressively against a predominantly nonviolent demonstration can be considered repression.

During the previous century there was an evolving relationship between social movements and police. I will be describing how protest events have changed and styles of policing have evolved with them in order to give a clear picture of this transformation and enrich the understanding of recent events.

## Protest Policing

The literature suggests several styles of police protesting which have existed since the civil rights struggle of the 1960s. These styles include escalating force, negotiated management (McPhail, Scweinburger, and McCarthy 1998) strategic incapacitation

(Noakes and Gillham 2007) command and control and the Miami model (Vitale 2007). I explore these models of policing in order to tease out some of the subtle differences over time regarding police tactics and methods. In the next few paragraphs I will describe each and give examples in order to provide a clear understanding of how protests were handled in the past. It is crucial that these forms of policing are understood so that one can see how the dynamic between protesters and police have evolved. Sociologists McPhail, Scweinburger, and McCarthy (1998) in an article titled “Protest Policing in the United States” contrast the policing strategies in the 1960’s which they characterize as “escalating force” to those in the 1970’s, 1980’s and 1990’s, which they describe as “negotiated management” by explaining how the two differ on five dimensions of policing practices. Next I will give more details in regard to the existing models of protest policing described in academic literature.

### Escalating force

Police use a continuum of force when dealing with protests and arrests in general. The use of deadly direct force marks the most severe end of the continuum, illustrated by the 1967 attacks on Chicago Black Panther headquarters, the 1968 shooting of students at South Carolina State (in Orangeburg), at Jackson State (Mississippi) and Kent State (Ohio) in 1970. The violent and occasional deadly response to protest characterizes the escalating force model. First Amendment rights are limited or ignored altogether. The Escalating Force doctrine is a violation of First Amendment rights, and leads to the injury and death to many protesters. Zero tolerance for disruption, heavy use of force, and almost no communication between protesters and police characterize escalating force.

This type of policing is likely to raise the costs of protest mobilizing. However there are some negative consequences for authorities as well. Traditionally, media coverage for law enforcement agencies that injured or killed civilians have had negative political consequences for police. These consequences, along with government recommendations led to the transition to a more negotiated management style of policing.

### Negotiated management

The transition to a more negotiated interaction between police and protesters occurred as a result of court decisions, the development of public forum law, and the development of a protest permit system that protected the rights to demonstrate guaranteed by the First Amendment McPhail, Scweinburger, and McCarthy (1998). “Protest Policing in the United States” describes the historical development of negotiated management style including the contributions of several federal agencies in the diffusing of tactics which are part of the current U.S. Public Order Management Systems. The authors described the transition to “negotiated management by analyzing how riots and demonstrations were handled during the late 1960s. U.S. Presidents as a way of learning how to best handle contentious political protest appointed three national commissions.” (p.52) The Kerner Commission, The Eisenhower Commission, and the Scranton Commission all provided recommendations that contribute to the transition to what the authors refer to as negotiated management.

The recommendations ranged from the elimination of “abrasive policing practices” including the use of deadly force, redress of grievances against police, and further training for officers from new recruits to on going training for senior officers. All

three commissions emphasized that the excessive use of force is an unwise tactic and serves to magnify disorder not diminish it. The court cases following protests are central to the article by Mcphail et al (1998), for the decisions are important to shaping the dimensions of the shift between the two forms of protest policing. The court decisions mandated the shift to negotiated management. These decisions were then turned into a formalized protest permit system. In 1965 the first informal protest permit system was put into place by the Department of the Interior. By 1970 the Department of Justice published *Demonstration and Dissent in the Nations Capitol* which set the stage for procedures for cooperation and negotiation between protestors and authorities. The authors claim that as of 1996 negotiators representing government entities are representing status quo interests of the Federal Government, but far less than would be the case without a formal permit system. The corpus of the public forum and First Amendment law since 1970 set the terms for protest permits and are more rigorously decided among First Amendment Law. After the 1967 urban riots the Department Of Justice directed the US Army Military Police School to develop a civil disturbance orientation course which emphasized minimum force required to accomplish order.

#### Command and control

During the 2004 Republican National Convention, Vitale (2007) describes the command and control approach to public order management. Policing demonstrations in this model are aimed at the micromanagement of protest activity. Police become inflexible and have a willingness to use coercive force for even modest infractions. In this model police manage social movements through barricades and police lines and

limited communication with protest groups. This approach is closely associated with the broken windows theory of criminology which argues that minor crime and disorder when left unchecked, can lead to a socially permissive climate. Authorities take action against small violations in order to drive off so called troublemakers, and to restore confidence in order. Protest permits are restrictive and tightly managed by large numbers of officers (Vitale 2007).

### Miami model

The actions taken during the 2003 Free Trade Association of Americas meetings in Miami have become identified as distinctive features of protest control techniques, which included large scale pre-emptive arrests, heavily armed sometimes unidentifiable law enforcement, the collection of intelligence from surveillance, mass arrests, extended detentions, and high levels of force. It is important to note that the Miami police department received around eight million dollars for this particular event from the federal Iraq war budget, allowing them unprecedented access to weapons, transportation, and helicopter patrols. Both the Miami Model and Command and Control model seem to have overlapping and somewhat confusion differentiations. The distinction between the two made by Vitale comes across as arbitrary but it is important to note that the Miami Model has become common nomenclature when activists recount particularly heavy political repression. The next model developed by Noakes and Gillham (2007) is more nuanced and presents a clear distinction from negotiated management or escalating force. It includes elements of command and control model including micromanagement and pre-emptive arrests. It also includes the intolerant atmosphere of the Miami Model.

### Strategic incapacitation

In 1999 there was a transformative event that shaped the policing of protest in a profound way. The negotiated management style of protest policing showed its limits as meetings for the World Trade Organization were shut down on the first morning by protest activity and direct action in the streets. In order to regain control of the situation the Seattle Police used tactics that were more forceful and containing than had been used under negotiated management. Since then there has been an iterative innovation of tactics by police and protesters (Noakes and Gillham 2007). Tilly (2000) categorizes protests that are staged by demonstrators familiar to authorities and who employ familiar tactics as *contained*; on the other hand, protesters who are not familiar to police and employing innovative tactics are categorized as *transgressive*. Tactical innovations by protesters include the lack of negotiation with police, a non-hierarchical organization, and consensus based decision making. The non hierarchical nature of these groups leads to a decentralized structure. Without leaders there are no visible targets to arrest that will disrupt the activities of activists.

A new type of policing has emerged to respond to transgressive protesting which has been called “strategic incapacitation”. This style of policing is influenced by a new penological approach to protesting (Noakes and Gillham 2006). Specific characterizations of this style of public order management include “the establishment of no protest zones, the increased use of less lethal weapons, the strategic use of arrests, and a reinvigoration of surveillance and infiltration of movement organizations.” (p.98) This new penology is a transition from the penal modernism which was a more reform based

approach. Since the election of George W. Bush the United States shifted government orientations across a range from economics to social issues including the criminal justice system. The new penology that Noakes and Gillham (2006) write about is one of these shifts and it is based on a more punitive and less tolerant approach to potential threats. Managing what are considered risks of crime at protests, new penology includes the control of suspect populations which the government identifies as threats to public order. This new approach is centered on a rejection of reform of the arrestee in favor of a strategic incapacitation (keeping the potential perpetrator tied up in jail and litigation for as long as possible so as to deter possible criminal activity).

Police also seek to rearrange and incapacitate protesters for as long as possible without incurring the costs associated with punishing the offenders. By rearranging we mean creating obstacles to participation in demonstrations. This can be done by arresting protesters or by use of physical barriers to control protesters' actions. So, for example, large no-protest zones demarcated by fences, mobile barriers and police in riot gear work to rearrange protesters. Incapacitation is also achieved when force is used to disable protesters temporarily or otherwise make it impossible for them to participate in demonstrations. The most obvious example of incapacitation occurs when police use less-lethal weapons against demonstrators." (Noakes and Gillham 2006)

The intolerance of disorder of any kind has been put into legislation in the form of the Patriot Act, which gives unprecedented powers to authorities and limits the rights of citizens in the name of national security. The Department of Homeland Security has become an all seeing panopticon, targeting individuals and groups with little or no oversight or transparency. While penal modernism emphasizes punitive action as a deterrent, new penology does not have faith in deterrence. Instead, the state utilizes

micromanagement of the actions of perceived threats through isolation and constant surveillance ala Foucault (ibid).

Surveillance plays a major role in the new penology of strategic incapacitation. Groups are targeted for their potential to disrupt order, especially those who wish to shut down whatever meeting or convention is taking place. The use of surveillance is not a new tactic per se, COINTELPRO (counter intelligence programs) used surveillance extensively to monitor groups such as the Black Panther Party and the American Indian Movement (Churchill and Vanderwall 1990). COINTELPRO was a series of covert and often illegal projects conducted by the Federal Bureau of Investigation aimed at investigating and disrupting dissident political organizations within the United States. The FBI used covert operations from its inception, however, the formal COINTELPRO operations took place between 1956 and 1971(ibid). The disruptive counterinsurgency surveillance of pacifist groups has been shown to threaten mobilization and inhibit organization (Starr, Fernandez, Amster, Wood, and Caro 2008).

#### The 2004 Republican National Convention in New York City

The Presidency of George W. Bush pushed the boundaries of government tactics when dealing with potential threats (Klein 2002). When the laws prohibited the government from investigating a group or individual, or taking questionable actions, those laws were amended, ignored, or broken in the name of national security (Jamail 2007). In August of 2004, the Republican Party held their convention in New York City. This made midtown Manhattan into a focal point for many social movements with various causes. Like the 2004 Democratic National Convention in Boston,

Massachusetts, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) officially declared the 2004 Republican National Convention a National Special Security Event (NSSE). As such, the United States Secret Service was charged with employing and coordinating all federal and local agencies including the various bureaus of DHS, the FBI, and the NYPD to secure the venue from “terrorist” attacks. The security budget reached \$70 million, \$50 million of which was funded by the federal government. The demonstrations made the New York Police Department stretch its resources to new levels. More than 250,000 people protested at the largest demonstrations (Vitale 2007).

The NYPD used a variety of methods for dealing with potential direct action aimed at shutting down the convention similar to the WTO in Seattle. The tactics used by the NYPD include: the use of mass arrests, intelligence gathering and surveillance, preemptive raids and detentions, and the cordoning of space to prevent marches and rallies. The tactics were separated by the author into two different Vitale (2007) observed the demonstrations and subsequent reports in order to discern the style of policing used in Manhattan. The extensive measure to prevent disruption by the NYPD included illegal methods and nearly all charges of the 1,800 arrested were later dropped (ibid).

The 2004 Republican National Convention saw over 1,800 arrests of demonstrators (Vitale 2007). The dropped charges were attributed by Vitale to the use of illegal activity by authorities. The saving grace of many activists from the 2004 RNC was the video captured by independent media. One such group is I-witness video. This group was responsible for the exoneration of people arrested at the 2004 convention who were not involved in illegal activity or who were merely trying to get from one place to

another and were caught up in the mass arrests. Eileen Clancy is a member of I Witness video and she described her work on Democracy Now!

I-Witness Video coordinated a large project to gather video material for criminal cases to help defend people who were arrested during the Republican Convention. We did this in partnership with the National Lawyers Guild. So, what we have been doing is reviewing the videotapes with the defendants to try to see if we can find them on it, so we can establish the circumstances of their arrests and what happened at these scenes.<sup>10</sup>

The 2004 Republican national Convention serves as an example of how multiple models of policing can exist in a single event (Vitale 2007). The same convention four years later also had elements of both negotiated management and strategic incapacitation but the police had learned some lessons from New York City and included them in their repertoire. In the same Democracy Now program where I-witness video talk about their experience in St. Paul, attorneys from the National Lawyers Guild assert that the New York and St Paul Police departments shared information regarding independent media groups which could cause problems for police. This would explain the pre-emptive detention of both I-witness video and the Glassbead Collective in St. Paul since both media groups are based out of New York City and both were involved in documenting the policing of the 2004 RNC in New York.

The relevant literature I have presented thus far offer the reader an understanding of complex social issues such as the place of the independent and corporate media regarding social movements and the dynamics of contention including state repression in the form of protest policing. It is intellectually imperative to carry forward the counter

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<sup>10</sup> [http://www.democracynow.org/2005/4/14/ny\\_law\\_enforcement\\_caught\\_doctoring\\_video](http://www.democracynow.org/2005/4/14/ny_law_enforcement_caught_doctoring_video)

hegemonic focus of independent media, for it helps to understand why police would want to incapacitate them. The transformation into the current state of policing, including its past trajectory, help to understand why independent media and social movement networks would structure themselves in a decentralized organizational form in order to avoid arrest or detainment. The organizational adaptation and restructuring of these movements and media are intimately linked to how they are policed.

Although the literature on social movements, and media studies are wide and vary by topic, I chose scholarship based on certain theoretical considerations that would be best fitting to describe the events of the 2008 RNC. This event was an intersection of contentious activism, protest policing, media organization and the public sphere. It is necessary to understand the content focus of mass corporate media in order to understand the organizational structure and content focus of independent media. The organizational structure of independent media is similar to that of many global justice movements and helps journalists to navigate the confused and chaotic atmosphere in the streets. The protest policing in the past helps to understand the actions of police in St Paul. Policing, like activism, follows a cycle of contention and iterative innovation. In my findings I describe the themes from my interviews including organization of independent media and repression. In my discussion I consider the implications of strategic incapacitation along with the role of independent media at protests and in the local public sphere. I focus on how this analysis contributes to the growing emphasis on repression, social movements, and independent media.

## RESEARCH METHODS AND DATA

I began this project with intellectual curiosity about a topic but with limited access to people and settings from which I could collect data. The social movement organizations that I identified to approach included video collectives which fit Lofland and Lofland's (2006) description as "consciously formed collectives with formal goals that are pursued in a more or less articulately planned fashion" (p.128). My own reasons for examining organizations were to investigate social control, reactionary innovation, and repression issues. I simply wanted to inquire into the dynamics among those people affiliated with independent media, their experiences with repression, and their reaction to it.

### Participants

My sample was derived purposefully from a non-probability snowball sample. Babbie (2004) has stated that purposive or judgmental sampling lets the researcher select the units observed based on a judgment about what will be most useful (p.183). I picked the ten individuals who were included in my sample purposefully because I knew that they fit the criteria for my research and from them I would elicit some rich material. All of my respondents were involved with the 2008 RNC in some way, most of them were detained, and all of them have some capacity within independent media. Noakes and Gillham (2007) state that the exclusive focus on police action is limiting and only gives a one sided perspective of protest events. For that reason I sought out the perspective of journalists who bore the brunt of police action. Ideally I would have liked to perform

face to face interviews with activists involved in the 2008 RNC. I was unfortunate in that it took longer than I had anticipated for potential interviewees to respond to my request for interviews. I resorted then to the use of telephone interviews with my respondents due to geographical limitations. My first interview happened to be with a well-connected gatekeeper to other potential respondents within affiliated networks or collectives. This person supplied me with names, email addresses, and even an introduction in order to help facilitate my credibility. Therefore my non-probability, purposive sample used a snowball technique. Snowball sampling according to Carol Warren (2001) means “One respondent is located who fulfills the theoretical criteria, then helps that person locate others through his or her social networks” (p.87). Important to gaining more interviews were social networking sites such as Facebook.com. My site included information such as school affiliation, political and religious views, and music taste along with pictures. This tool helped to literally give a face to a name when requesting interviews. It established my identity as a student, and allowed potential respondents to become familiar with me before they even spoke to me.

I used semi-structured interviews to help get my respondents to provide full and rich responses. I employed the use of probes and other techniques such as long pauses get my respondents to continue their thoughts and sentences. I avoided using names and places in my writing in an attempt to protect my sample’s confidentiality. Considering the sensitive nature of political repression already experienced by everyone in my sample, I decided not to include the demographic characteristics of interviewees in order to further conceal their identities. I employed a verbal consent statement that I read aloud

to everyone in my sample based on my use of the information and their complete voluntary role in my research.

### Role of the Researcher

Since I had an established rapport through facebook.com and what Lofland and Lofland (1996) call “deep familiarity” with the organization, I could merely call my gatekeepers up and ask for an interview and it was granted. This is because I was established as a “known researcher” within this community of collectives. Lofland and Lofland (2006) have stated that the “known researcher” (p.40) has less problems gaining entry. Being a student also helped establish credibility since most of the sample were educated and empathized with the plight of student research. During the process of gaining entry with potential respondents, I conveyed some of my experiences with political activism and police experience. The “badge of membership” (Lofland and Lofland 2006) also makes entry into the research setting easier, and it seemed that having some similar familiarity with the activist community allowed me a temporary membership badge when snowballing for later interviews. It also made the respondents act more relaxed, and elicited more full responses. I took part in some interviewer self disclosure due to my knowledge of the situation.

### Interviews

Although Berg (2007) states that qualitative data collection doesn't lend itself well to telephone interviews, he also states later in the text that “telephone interviews may provide not only an effective means of gathering data but also in some instances –

owing to geographical locations – the only viable method” (p.108). Therefore, I found that conducting telephone interviews was the appropriate method considering time, my personal finances, and geographical proximity. The telephone method of interviewing in this case produced limitations such as: time zone differences, and limited accessibility due to the nature of having to be near a phone when I called for an interview. Many situations occurred where the time zone differences (pacific to central or eastern - a two or three hour difference) impeded my progress because I had to wake up at 5:00 a.m. in order to be at the office and ready to interview at a time convenient for my respondents. None of these disadvantages fit exactly with Berg’s (2007: p.110) stated disadvantages including: unlisted numbers, and screening problems. My sample was not impeded by these disadvantages because the respondents numbers were given to me by the respondents themselves (hence a snowball sample) and respondents were contacted before the interview for an appropriate scheduling time. Conversely, the advantages of telephone interviews also helped certain aspects of my research, such as geographical convenience, no travel costs, and since I am a research assistant to a professor with telephone interviewing equipment it helped make for not only a quiet, convenient setting to interview but also a quiet, convenient setting to transcribe immediately after I conducted my interviews.

I found the length of my interviews slightly compromised due to the time and location constraints of respondents. However, Berg has stated that not all interviews need to be lengthy (2007, p.107). In fact if there is a set of questions that is focused on certain topics it may be appropriate to have less lengthy interviews when the certain

experiences I was looking to examine had been recounted. This is not to say however that my intention was to conduct a short interview. On the contrary I would have loved to conduct lengthy in depth interviews face to face, but the time constraints of both the project and the time constraints of the respondents (busy people associated with a complex social movement organizations that cannot spend too much time on the phone) led my interviews to consistently last 30 minutes to one hour.

### Questioning

Lofland and Lofland (2006) state that having too many assumptions built into the questions is an ineffective method because it is self fulfilling or leading. I found that I had a few instances of leading questions because when I started, I wanted to portray the journalists as activists; this was a representation or identity that I thought would be favorable to the journalists. However, this was an erroneous assumption as some of them did not identify with the term activist since they saw it as a dichotomous and exclusivist term. This is an example of how my novice skills as a qualitative interviewer made question wording somewhat awkward. It serves as an example of how all researchers bring particular lenses into the field and must remain diligent in reflecting on how their own positionality requires ongoing reflection and analysis. Additionally, I had some double-barreled questions that may have made the questions confusing or difficult to answer.

Given the problems I was finding with my questions, I restructured my method of eliciting information to a more inductive grounded approach that let my interviews flow more easily. This allowed my probes and questions to have a more conversational feel

about them. I reworded questions mid interview in a more improvisational method so as not to sound stiff, or jargon filled and to elicit a richer response. In order to establish legitimacy I also used my knowledge of the event and subject material to let the respondents know that I am not just an outsider looking in. Charmaz has stated in the *Handbook of Interview Research* (2002: p.681) “Any competent interviewer shapes questions to obtain rich material and simultaneously avoids imposing preconceived concepts on it.” Originally I had questions that predominantly asked “why.” Berg (2007) maintains that questions with “why” have a punitive connotation and should be avoided (p.104). Therefore I structured my questions and probes with a “how” in order to elicit explanations of process rather than justifications for action often associated with “why.”

#### Data Analysis

In developing an analysis of my data, I found it at times very daunting. I conducted analysis of my transcripts via NVivo, a qualitative methods computer program that helps code, organize, analyze, and report materials for the researcher. I found this program to have several useful functions including a built in memoing system, modeling system, and convenient links of both internal and external documents. Babbie (2004: 376) states that qualitative data processing involves as much art as science, and instruction can only take the researcher so far. Babbie continues with “The key process in the analysis of qualitative social research data is coding-classifying or categorizing pieces of data-coupled with some kind of retrieval system” (p.376). The retrieval system is especially useful in Nvivo with the use of databytes, and nodelinks to help fully illustrate what is being analyzed. Personal computers have greatly simplified the task of

coding from what used to be a predominantly manual coding task employing the use of three by five cards, colored pencils, and folders.

Coding is the process by which the researcher sorts data into meaningful categories from the perspective of frameworks or sets of ideas (Lofland and Lofland, 2006: 200). I mainly employed the process of open coding- the initial classification and labeling of concepts in qualitative data analysis, which are shaped by the close examination and questioning of data (Babbie, 2004: p.377). During the open coding process the data are broken down into discrete parts, or “nodes,” closely examined, compared for similarities and differences (Strauss and Corbin 1990). I say I mainly employed the process of open coding because a few of my nodes were generated from previous theory. In this sense my research was not completely grounded because I had pre-established ideas about what to look for in coding. I did ground my research in the sense that as a researcher I remained very close to my studied world and according to Charmaz this helps to “develop an interrelated set of theoretical concepts from empirical materials that not only synthesize and interpret them but also show processual relationships” (p.508). Staying true to the grounded theory approach, my analysis occurred in two stages. When I had done initial coding on all of the data I went back and began focusing my concepts by sorting all of the free floating concepts into larger categories while noting which concepts appeared most frequently within and among all of the interviews (Charmaz 2002 p.684). This is called axial coding and is detailed by Strauss and Corbin (1990)

The axial coding process was utilized in this research by relating subcategories to a category through a paradigm model. In grounded theory Strauss and Corbin (1990) describe this process as “denoting causal conditions, phenomenon, and context” (p.99). Phenomenon refers to the central event around which a set of actions are directed. To give an example: in this case one of the phenomena is the strategic incapacitation of independent journalists. For this phenomenon we must consider the causal conditions (which are the events or incidents which lead to the development of a phenomenon, often there are multiple causal conditions) (ibid). The causal conditions for the use of strategic incapacitation are the new penology approach to crime management, and the lack of protocol on the part of law enforcement for media relations on the street. The properties of the causal conditions combine to create the phenomenon. In this case the properties of new penology include the rejection of rehabilitation in favor of incapacitation and the intolerance of disorder. The properties of the absence of media protocol include the lack of foresight on the part of police, city administration, and media, and the stated unexpected use of mass arrests by police.

Next I considered the context, which refers to a specific set of properties regarding the phenomenon. The specific contextual properties of strategic incapacitation include the proactive policing of key individuals or groups, surveillance, and mass arrests. The use of axial coding is geared toward discovering and relating categories in terms of a paradigm model. The use of axial coding in this research extended not only to the phenomenon of strategic incapacitation but also the organizational phenomenon in

reaction to it; therefore this process of axial coding was repeated for each identifiable phenomenon.

### Limitations

My interviews occurred over a short period of time. Ideally I would have liked to interview more journalists, but there were two factors that played a significant role in my collection of data: time and location. If I had more time I could have sought out more people who were connected with this convention. I would have liked more time between the interviews to reflect on the themes emerging from the data and to consider how I might adapt my interview guide to elicit richer responses from the remaining interviewees. I would have also liked to have had the opportunity to conduct multiple interviews with each journalist in order to follow up on missed concepts or underdeveloped testimonies found while reviewing the transcripts, but again due to constraints that arise from a limited timeframe to complete the requirements of a thesis, I was restricted in my ability to reconnect with the activists. I also would have sought journalists with a wide array of experiences at protests in order to give rich comparisons of events. My location also limited my ability to interview respondents face to face. Most independent journalists are quite busy and travel frequently as I noticed when trying to match schedules. With limited sample size I cannot make significant generalizations, but I can offer some descriptive insight into the activity of police, activists, and journalists at the Republican National Convention.

## FINDINGS

Through a careful analysis of my ten interviews I was able to discern themes which emerged from my data. Although my respondents had different experiences and opinions I came up with three recurring themes: *repression*, *organization*, and *technology*. There are several facets that I discovered within these two broad themes, but essentially these are the main concepts which prevailed. I begin with repression since it was a major factor that was taken into account by interviewees when organizing. Understanding the nature of repression helps to comprehend some of the protective measures used by activists and independent journalists on the streets and in convergence spaces (these are places where activists and journalists gather to share ideas, information, or footage). Networking in the context of repression for independent media sometimes entails the pooling of resources. I found networking to be a subtheme of organizing. The decentralized nature of organizing was a recurring theme in organizing and I give some accounts of how and why this tactic is used. Technology was especially important in how individuals and groups kept in contact and coordinated action at the Republican Convention. While technology could be considered an organizational tool, and it most certainly was used in this way, it was also used as a tool of repression. Therefore, technology emerged as a separate theme unto itself.

With these interviews I asked questions regarding the experience of detainment and arrest. Important to this experience are the descriptive accounts given by independent journalists which help to give a detailed testimony of political repression.

Several of the statements given by respondents describe the strategic incapacitation model of protest policing. The use of mass arrest in St Paul led to the detainment of more than forty journalists, although half of the journalists I spoke with had already been arrested, or at least detained, before the convention even began.

### Repression

Each interview elicited details of political repression which these activists felt were impeding their First Amendment rights. Their accounts describe several aspects of the recent forms of police activity that Vitale (2007) determined constitute a “new regime of protest policing.” In my research I have found support for the model of policing Noakes and Gilham (2007) have aptly termed “strategic incapacitation.” Additionally this study also uncovered some new tactics and subtle differences than have been previously mentioned in the study of social movements and social control. For example, the interviews suggest that police intentionally went after media persons, or at least were negligent in their protocol concerning the media both corporate and independent.

The political repression at the 2008 RNC was a force that was somewhat anticipated by groups who seek social justice causes. One person I interviewed anticipated the activities of police before the convention even began: “We knew there was going to be repression; the whole Bush Administration was basically a middle finger to most of the American public who were aware of what was going on so we knew there would be repression. But I was still surprised at the extent. It was such a super militarized force on the streets of St Paul.” Most of the people I interviewed were

prepared for the general experience of protesting but were taken off guard by the use of force and extent of the police presence at the 2008 RNC.

A report investigating conduct by St. Paul police during the 2008 Republican National Convention faults the police over their handling of journalists (Heffelfinger and Luger 2009). Co-chaired by former U.S. Attorney Tom Heffelfinger and former Assistant U.S. Attorney Tom Luger, the commission's 82-page report to the St. Paul City Council criticized the St. Paul Police Department for failing to heed journalists' requests before the convention to develop a protocol for how they deal with reporters working during tense and sometimes violent protest events. But the St. Paul Police Department's response to the report raises questions over how the department will respond to journalists, including those from independent and corporate media outlets, who cover similar future events. More than 40 journalists were arrested in St. Paul while covering events related to the Republican Convention in 2008

The Heffelfinger and Luger report also gave credence to journalists' assertions that "media present during disturbances were treated no differently than those engaged in the disturbances" (Heffelfinger and Luger 2009 p. 15). The report further noted that "journalists were critical of the uneven and disparate treatment received by them from police, both when comparing different days (of the convention), and when comparing one journalist with another" (ibid). The report also documents the destruction of property that was alleged to have been perpetrated by an unspecified anarchist contingent in town, although they never arrested anyone in the act and cannot link the actions to any one individual or group. Throughout the report the "anarchist" activity is referred to many

times, and the report reads like the police were merely reacting to property destruction by anarchists. However, this would not explain the use of mass arrests instead of the “surgical” use of arrests for those who have actually been involved in criminal activity. The mass arrest experience creates confusion and contradiction. This is the facet of repression that we will be exploring.

### Mass arrests

The strategic incapacitation model of protest policing is a more recent form of repression and includes mass arrests as part of the new approach to criminal justice. Mass arrests are how most journalists at the RNC were arrested or detained. One activist told me

On the fourth day, September fourth, the mass arrests of 396 people on the Marion Street Bridge where the police herded everybody onto this interstate overpass and then sealed it off and arrested everybody and they arrested pretty much all the journalists who were caught up in that group including journalists from the Minnesota Daily, (the University of Minnesota paper) channel 11, the city pages, a local alt paper, and several others too.”

Another independent journalist stated that in comparison to other large events including the 2008 Democratic National Convention, the use of mass arrests were quite common.

(At the 2008 RNC) there were way more mass arrests, you couldn't go anywhere. It was supposed to be permitted and these older people, candle light vigil people who were not intending on being arrested, and they were walking on sidewalks and then everyone was corralled and arrested. The critical mass they arrested some 250 people. Everyday of that convention there was at least one mass arrest.

Another journalist I interviewed had this to say about the mass arrests:

There was a mass arrest every day, on day one on Sheppard Road, Day three at Rage Against The Machine in Minneapolis and the Marion Street Bridge mass arrest and the only thing that saved day two was because I don't think the cops were quite as organized and people found ways to get out but they were doing the same thing like getting them at both angles and shooting at them from both angles

and telling contradictory things from both ends of the street. The only reason that it didn't end in a mass arrest is because downtown there are so many alleys and they weren't organized at that point. But 75% of the people arrested of the 800 plus were mass arrest situation.

St. Paul Police Chief Harrington defended the arrests of journalists on different days of the convention. "We recognize that media folks...are there doing the job," he said, according to the St. Paul Pioneer Press. But, he went on, "the media isn't exempt from a legal order and have to move when ordered by police." But several journalists in their interviews said that arresting police gave them neither a warning nor an opportunity to move before being arrested. Journalists who were mass arrested on the aforementioned Marion Street Bridge were explicitly ordered not to move. The report mentions that there were problems with discerning who is a "journalist" when it comes to covering organized and unanticipated marches, and demonstrations at a political convention. In an interview a long time journalist had this to say

You certainly shouldn't be mass arresting people, and city page journalist Matt Schneider certainly shouldn't have overheard on the Marion Street Mass arrest on day four some cop saying "oh no we are arresting the media too tonight," as if he had been instructed to do so, which he probably had. There were fifty thousand dollar cameras with journalists whose faces you see on TV who were being arrested, they were clearly not rioting, that is just insane. In the Palestinian West Bank I covered clashes, I used to go to the photo journalists in armed clashes and cover that stuff I covered probably thirty of such instances in the four years I lived there, ranging from stone throwing and rubber coated metal bullet stuff to full on shooting at each other and its changed these days but as a journalist you were pretty much not targeted. In those days it was pretty screwed up but it's not hard to figure out who the journalists are.

The use of mass arrests was discussed in every interview. The journalists I spoke with had seen people being rounded up in groups and had filmed quite a large portion of the mass arrests. One journalist I spoke with described it this way

It was crazy, it felt like I was just filming a group of people getting attacked by police. People were running away from the police the whole time. People were literally just running through this huge expanse of a city that just kept getting shut off at intersections and bridges and they just kept getting cordoned off and cornered and arrested, or picked off individually or mass arrested.

This particular respondent had detainment experience before but still had little preparation for what was in store in the streets of St Paul.

Honestly I was surprised how hardcore it was, we were preparing for the worst, but we were barely prepared for what happened - They really challenged us. They challenged our infrastructure, it was very hard to finish shooting completely covered in pepper spray like your whole skin is burning off and you have to go in and edit the video to get it out, it became problematic actually.

### Detainment

The experience of detainment was a common experience among most respondents. Out of ten interviews eight had been detained in St Paul at the RNC. The use of detainment is a strategic tool used by authorities in order to intimidate potential targets. In addition, the detainment experience serves to keep individuals and collectives caught up instead of going about their organizing or in this case getting coverage of the protest. The total number of people arrested at the RNC is at around 800 (Heffelfinger and Luger 2009). All but two of the 15 charged with criminal acts have been overturned at this point (ibid). The Ramsey County Sheriffs Office conducted at least four pre-emptive raids before the convention began. Although this is not a new phenomenon in itself it does seem significant that several of the detainments were of independent journalist convergence spaces, another component of strategic incapacitation. The experience of detainment is described in several interviews. One detainment experience is as follows:

I was in a raid prior to the convention. I was in the convergence space on \*\*\*\* Avenue just south of downtown St Paul when the cops came in unmarked vehicles at night, this was Ramsey County Sheriff's office, completely unprovoked, people sitting around eating and there was a movie being played and people were socializing and the cops came in guns drawn had everyone get down on the floor. I was outside so I was probably the first person to see them coming and unmarked vehicles cops dressed in all black, at night, and you have to ask yourself at this point - who are the terrorists? There was at least one child in the space - everyone got detained. It was so heavy handed that you almost get giddy about what is happening and people just start singing to calm ourselves down. The repression that was going on was intense, everyone down on the floor, cops with guns drawn bashing in doors taking political literature and computers. They were going into the kitchen looking for things, bashing in closets and bathrooms. They didn't find anything because there was nothing to find. People that were there were just laughing and saying these guys are taking this way too seriously.

The I-Witness video collective is a group of journalists who are well known to police in New York City. A raid on their rented space in St Paul is one of the well documented pre-emptive efforts of authorities to strategically incapacitate journalists. On August 30, 2008 St. Paul police detained 7 members of the group (along with an assortment of other individuals) for several hours. The NYC-based video collective was in St. Paul to document the policing of the protests at the Republican National Convention.

The incident began when an FBI agent and a Ramsey Deputy Sheriff showed up on the doorstep of the house in which members were staying interrupting a collective planning meeting. Two hours later, around 30 police surrounded the house. Two people who left the house were detained in handcuffs; several others, who were inside, were told that if they left, they would be also be detained. Around the same time, three other I-Witness Video members who had left the house on bikes and two others who were riding in a car across town were also detained by police.

After the search warrant arrived, police at the house stormed in with guns drawn. They handcuffed all the individuals inside, collected their personal information, and corralled them in the back garden. While police held the media activists and their friends there, members of the media, who had gathered in an adjoining backyard, interviewed I-Witness Video member Eileen Clancy from behind a fence. After completing their search, the police finally uncuffed everyone and departed. Within about two hours, the other I-Witness Video groups--who had been detained on bikes and in a car, all of whom also had their identifications verified and had undergone searches of various kinds--were also released.

Among those individuals detained was Democracy Now! producer Elizabeth Press, who had her camera with her throughout the incident. Democracy Now! ran a news segment on the many preemptive raids that police have launched against activists in St. Paul that month, including the raid that I-Witness Video suffered on Saturday. According to the group this was a clear effort to intimidate and undermine the work of I-Witness Video

I Witness video was remarkably successful in exposing police misconduct and outright perjury by police during the 2004 RNC. Out of 1800 arrests made in 2004, at least 400 were overturned based solely on video evidence which contradicted sworn statements by police officers. Several of my interviews mentioned this incident. Clancy is quoted in the documentary *Terrorizing Dissent* as saying:

They've been detaining people for days around here. And they photographed us. They look through our materials. They copy our materials and don't return them to you. And then you're merely detained, so you don't have the same situation

where you have police officers swearing out affidavits, which we could prove was false. This seems to be a new technique.

Two of my interviews mention this incident specifically

I-witness had a much harder time because they have a hierarchical group all run by Eileen with 30 or so people who just showed up and they had problems. Eileen was really targeted I mean she was targeted throughout the whole thing. She almost went crazy, she couldn't deal with it. This woman is hard as nails. She used to do this stuff in Northern Ireland. They did a number on her. She came under tremendous pressure." A different interview mentioned "I think that I witness had a lot to do with the cases in NYC in 04 getting dismissed because they had video footage that reputed the cops claims of protester wrongdoing and surely they would have been on the streets much more had they not been targeted in advance.

Twin Cities Indymedia and the Tin Can Comm Collective also experienced pre-emptive raids and detainment. Two interviews I conducted with members of these organizations describe this experience

I was caught up in the pre-emptive raid on the convergence center on Aug 29 and it just so happened that at the time I had with me a digital camera, my laptop, a digital voice recorder, all stuff I had been planning to use during the convention for Twin Cities Indymedia. Also, ironically the same bag that had all that stuff also had a big stack of about 20 twin city Indymedia press passes that we were going to give out to other independent media activists within the next couple of days.

As the interview continued this person stated:

The purpose of the raid was an attempt to put a big chill on organizing in general and disrupt everything that was going on in that space. The number one thing that they took from the space was simply literature, political guides, zines, simply political literature. Anything that was sitting around the convergence space they took. They also seized people's laptops and personal belongings and so I am not positive if the officers knew at the time that the things that I had there were going to be used in a media capacity and I don't know if they cared either. They didn't provide a receipt for all the items that they took at the time as required by Minnesota state law to do um but afterwards I have been able to look at the inventory list of everything that was taken and I could see in that list that they had inventoried all that equipment and they also specifically noted the Indymedia press passes. Later they did realize that they did take all this media equipment but

nonetheless they made no effort to remedy the situation and I haven't been able to get any of it back as of yet.

The Tin Can Comm Collective was also detained and eventually arrested. This group was not only detained but arrested and held in custody for more than 48 hours. One member of this group recounted this experience to Bay Area Indymedia. I transcribed the interview and this is some of what this person revealed<sup>11</sup>:

During the 2008 RNC we were operating a communications network that provided journalists, and protesters, anyone in attendance with real time information about what was actually happening in the streets. This was primarily done through a phone system to receive reports in and through a text message system using Twitter to provide activists and others with real time news. From all accounts the system had been working pretty well in terms of getting folks information and getting folks to quickly respond to what was happening in the streets until we were raided at 3:30 on Monday the 1<sup>st</sup>. The police knocked on the door, announced they were the police, and kicked it in. At that time police came in guns drawn ordered us to get down on the ground. We were zip cuffed, we were detained for quite a considerable amount of time. Some people speculate that the police did not intend on arresting the amount of people they arrested. There were nine of us who were arrested. The police rifled through our equipment, took photos of it. And finally we were arrested and taken to Ramsey County Detention Center. The pretext of the raid it turns out there was no warrant, we continually asked to see a warrant and at first it was like "oh we are going to get one it is on its way", but it quickly became apparent that there was no warrant. The police reason for the raid was that a member of the RNC welcoming Committee was present at our space which was patently false and obviously became apparent when they arrested us so what they have claimed in the affidavits of some of the Welcoming Committee members is that this person jumped out the window of our office as we were arrested and that is why they didn't arrest this person with the rest of us. We were officially charged with being in possession and use of police scanners. On Wednesday we were released with no charges whatsoever.

The detainment process seems to be nothing more than an attempt at incapacitating those who could possibly stand in the way of or contradict the police

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<sup>11</sup> <http://rnc08report.org/archive/853.shtml>. Retrieved 2009 4-02.

during protests. Incapacitating also serves to disrupt the organizational capacities and infrastructure of organized protest. As the experience of Tin Can illustrates, the networking infrastructure that Tin Can provided was the target of their arrest and detention:

In terms of the intent of the police obviously there were multiple intents. We were not the only group that was raided; journalists like I-witness had been specifically targeted. It was a specific strategy that targeted infrastructure; they were trying to disable the infrastructure before the protest or as soon into the protest as possible. I came to believe after I was released from jail that there was another goal they had, which was really a public relations goal. For example the police were more interested in acquiring all of the things from our space that they could make to look incriminating in a photo that they could release to the press. That was more important than examining what we were doing or trying to come up with legitimate charges on us. They were more excited to roll out our maps on the floor and put our computers next to them and any little thing they could find to lay out and photograph.

The public relations aspect of policing has also been a major focal point for those that I interviewed. Many state that the media games that the police used helped to shore up public support for their actions, and the corporate media played right along with their narrative.

Importantly, several journalists interviewed mentioned that the Ramsey County Sheriff Bob Fletcher was a direct influence on the repression they experienced. Despite the reported “soft” presence that the St Paul City Council stated was their intent, the Ramsey County Sherriff’s department spearheaded the pre-emptive actions on journalist convergence centers. It also seems that most of the local activist community in St Paul feels they were treated with unfair accusations of violent intent. Fletcher it seems had close ties to the local corporate media and used this as a platform to justify the actions of

authorities, even if those actions were criticized by groups such as the ACLU. The label of anarchist was given as a justification for the detainment and arrest of several people who had no violent intent at all, and some did not even subscribe to the political ideology of anarchism. Since seven out of the ten interviewees were residents of the Twin Cities, I noticed that the local residents I interviewed had a particularly negative perspective of Sheriff Fletcher. The inflation of danger is a common theme in most of my interviews.

One journalist had this to say:

Bob Fletcher, the Ramsey County Sheriff held this big press conference about all the items that he claimed to find in the convergence centers which were all household items but if you have the mind of the sheriff you can interpret those into being things you can construct Molotov cocktails out of or things to hurl at the police and Bob Fletcher is really a wiz with the media and he was able to concoct the story of violent anarchists even before the convention began despite the work we had done prior to the convention to dispel this myth.

The Heffelfinger and Luger report includes pictures of the items that this quote referenced. The report insinuates that the items would have been used as Molotov cocktails, but if this had been provable in court, this person would still be incarcerated. There is an entire federal case against two protesters from Texas surrounding the intent to use Molotov cocktails at the 2008 RNC<sup>12</sup>.

This claims making and rhetoric used by all levels of the Minnesota government pertaining to protesters at the RNC in 2008 has been used for centuries to justify the use of lethal or coercive force. People in position of authority will often mislabel political threats in order to make the actions of government seem warranted. People such as

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<sup>12</sup> <http://www.freethetexas2.com/blog>

former Senator Joseph McCarthy come to mind when this sort of rhetoric is used. Also, many I spoke to equated Bob Fletcher's statements with that of the Republican Party insinuating that Fletcher was influenced by the political rhetoric about the threat posed by anarchists. One interview with a long time resident of St Paul told me

Bob Fletcher put himself out as the great knight in shining armor to save St Paul and I am hoping most people didn't go for it and saw him for what he is which is someone who is out to play political games and you know basically wage class war by picking on anarchists who generally have no money and very little political power within the community and roll out the red carpet for Republicans, international war criminals, so I think most people are catching on.

According to the Minnesota Star Tribune the Department of Justice handed over fifty million dollars in a security grant to the City of St Paul<sup>13</sup>. "About \$4.6 million will go toward equipment. That includes a \$560,000 command post vehicle filled with computers and communications equipment, \$612,000 for radios and \$900,000 for fencing and metal detectors. About \$5 million will be spent on supplies that include \$1.9 million for chemical irritant, \$308,500 for fuel and \$1 million for chemical masks." A point of interest for this study is that the majority of the money, \$34 million, was spent on overtime salaries for officers on loan from other jurisdictions, as well as other contracts such as for satellite and cell phone service. One interview uncovered a possible explanation for the amount of police presence at the convention

I think two things are happening here, for one there is an ongoing investigation so other people may be charged, and two the fifty million dollars in security money , I think there is still a pool of it and if you are doing RNC related stuff you can justify doing it. That is why they had 20-30 cops and three vans and squad cars for a bike ride, they are making money out of it still. It was interesting because

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<sup>13</sup> [http://www.startribune.com/local/stpaul/26295559.html?elr=KArksDyycyUtyycyUiD3aPc:\\_Yyc:aUU](http://www.startribune.com/local/stpaul/26295559.html?elr=KArksDyycyUtyycyUiD3aPc:_Yyc:aUU)

the summer before the police federation were on strike and protesting because of wages and I think the RNC was a great way the state could turn around and pay them off because everyone got so much overtime that week and apparently a lot of people got it beforehand, and Fletcher spent a third of a million dollars on the RNC 8 investigation which he only admitted a month ago.

This particular resident of Minnesota has a hypothesis that the use of the fifty million dollars from the Justice Department was used for paying the salaries of police who had been previously underpaid. This would make sense if the money was used for the investigation of RNC related cases and events. One such event that the previous respondent mentioned was a day of solidarity bike ride commemorating the pre-emptive raids and detainment that was particularly heavily policed.

The bike ride concept was super simple it was going to the houses that were raided in Minneapolis and stop at Walker Church for lunch and then they were going to bike to St Paul and do the convergence space and it was called the tour de Fletcher and from what I understand about forty people showed up it was advertised as a legal thing. Essentially it was a bike ride of the people who were raided and their friends riding to their own houses that what makes the whole thing so crazy. What right do you have to tell people that they can't go on bike rides between their own houses? Because they were certainly trying to do that. From what I understand the police thought that 400 people were going to show up but even so whatever it is supposed to be legal to ride a bicycle and they did comply with traffic laws and they used the greenway which is set aside for bikes and pedestrians off the road and its ironic because that is where the first person got arrested they were on the greenway and this guy left because he wanted to go somewhere else and the second he left and got off and went to the regular street he got arrested for disorderly conduct. He overheard one cop saying one down thirty nine to go. When he was taken in to be booked he heard the desk sergeant say oh I thought you were getting more than that- you only got one? They had planned some sort of mass arrest situation, there were two police paddy vans following the whole ride from the beginning, three squad cars four bike cops and an unmarked car with the FBI or something. There were maybe one hundred people in the church maybe less, and at that point basically the police were stalking them outside the church, they were stalking a church lunch.

The repression experienced at the RNC came in many forms. The findings on repression give some support for the strategic incapacitation model. Next we look at the second major theme from these interviews which is organizing.

### Organizing

My central research question is “How does protest policing including the targeting of journalists, affect media organizations and their coverage of protests?” With this study I sought to find out what reaction (if any) the journalists and activists have to this model of policing and how they organize with this in mind. The different facets of this research theme include networking, the decentralized model of tactical independent media, and the use of technology as an organizing tool. In the next few paragraphs I will describe these concepts and illustrate them with quotes from my ten interviews. The following quote from one of my interviews gives an idea of what I mean by organizing.

What I strive to with organizing is to create a more united front around people who at least share some of the goals that I have. I think it is something we have been pretty successful at doing here in the Twin Cities in recent months, building coalition, reaching out to groups that haven't been included in popular movements in the past. So that short term goal is to build this movement and create this capacity to allow the participants in that movement to organize as they see fit and to take back control of their own lives using whatever tactics they see fit.

The use of networks and affinity groups has been an organizing technique for social movements for quite some time (Staggenborg 1991). What can be learned from the next section is that social ties in both activism and independent media teach us about ideology and political opportunity.

## Networking

The use of networks and affinity groups has traditionally been a major factor in the implementation of protests (Staggenborg 1991). Since the Seattle WTO protests this is especially true (Graeber 2002). For independent media specifically, networks allow for increased production and efficiency in regard to coverage. . Independent media networks help the organizational structure stay intact in times of repression because media folks share footage or knowledge in convergence spaces. At the 2008 RNC there were several networks of independent media that came together in order to pool resources, share convergence space, share video footage, and keep groups informed of potential police raids. I asked my interview respondents questions that specifically regard organizing because it seemed that there were tightly knit groups that banded together for solidarity in order to minimize the chilling effect of the repression that was described above.

In one interview a video journalist from New York described to me the intricate nature of how groups organize for protest coverage:

We film Critical Mass bike rides and there was this guy who was tackled, and he is a friend of mine, and he happened to be riding near us during Critical Mass and we were filming, we being just a loose network of people with cameras that care about the issues of civil rights. And all these people get together and we start having a real tactical video documentation of what was happening on the ground and we could show from beginning to end what it was like to be part of the ride, to see how the cops approach people to see the sort of treatment and how they would set up barricades at different streets and just push people off their bikes.

This person described to me what it was like to be part of a protest, see repression, and form loose networks in order to document the event. She later commented “so that has really had a big affect on the way that alternative media people in New York City at

least came to know and work with each other. It is because we sort of have to become each others allies in the streets because one journalist was arrested or the other guy's film was smashed, but we are all trying to get out a story of our experiences in this sort of hard truth." The journalists in this particular group were especially organized. One interviewee told me about the use of Critical Mass bike rides in NYC as a training ground for larger protest coverage.

We have been doing a lot of tactical media stuff for the last 5 years and we were preparing for something like the RNC during the summer in terms of recruitment of around a dozen people and we started taking to the bases of doing like hardcore shooting under duress situations and our training projects became the Critical Mass in Times square that was our class basically, we were practicing tactical media at Critical Mass.

The use of networks is essential to the production of documented footage. A majority of my sample knew each other and worked together on producing a film about the RNC titled *Terrorizing Dissent*. The use of convergence spaces by media folks and activists are useful organizing tools since they are spaces where dialog and exchange of ideas and footage occur. Organizationally convergence spaces are the places where footage is exchanged and uploaded.

Just to give you an idea of how it was setup we had a safe side and a public side and the public side is where all the Indymedia people come and hang out and two computers were there and we basically hung out and got to meet each other and there was a hard side that was top secret only a few people knew where it was and that is where we did all the editing and that is where all our stuff was released through and that had a lot of editing equipment in it.

Although networks are essential to most activist organizations, there is an interesting facet which is a sort of antithesis to networks: the decentralization of organizational structure.

### Decentralization

Decentralization in the context of social movements is the tactic of delegating decision-making authority down to the lower levels in an organization, away from a central authority. A decentralized organization shows fewer tiers in the organizational structure, wider span of control, and a bottom-to-top flow of decision-making and ideas. The organization is likely to run on less rigid policies and wider spans of control among each member of the organization. In the context of this study it is important to note the decentralized nature of the groups which constitute my sample. This is likely because of the ideological stance of many I spoke with. Nine out of ten of the interview respondents classified themselves as either anarchist or anti-authoritarian. This type of political position brings with it a certain aversion to hierarchies. In the following few pages I wish to give a descriptive account of some of the decentralized organizational aspects of the journalists I interviewed.

One of the interviews detailed some of the ways that these independent media groups avoid the confiscation of their footage. Since most of the independent journalists which I interviewed have been targeted and detained, they maintain a tightly knit system of keeping up with footage so that it can be edited and uploaded onto the internet. This quote exemplifies this practice “We prepare a massively decentralized shooting system to document this. All the teams were basically independent. People were trained to shoot, edit, and distribute on their own so even if they were locked up, separated from everybody else, they could put it online. It is part of the training.” These media folks are

organized so that if a member is arrested or detained the rest of their collective can still maintain the task of documenting what is happening at a protest or other event.

If a group has a hierarchical structure and the police utilize a strategic incapacitation model of policing, law enforcement will generally look for the leader or head organizer in an attempt to disorganize and confuse the group. However if they remain decentralized, authorities would have to hunt and arrest every member in order to effectively quell the action of the group. One journalist told me “the decentralized nature of working with this stuff is probably the key to ever being effective because it's hard to take a non-hierarchical structure out completely. Especially in this day and age where everybody is out there with a camera and if something happens, somebody is going to get it. Somebody is going to get that footage.” What these groups rely on is the action of other people. When one person is taken away, another is ready to fill that role and complete the coverage. Another person I interviewed elaborated on the structure of decentralization

We constantly update each other and are a decentralized all seeing eye, and that comes across in the video I think. You really see how there is this sort of perspective of the collective eye, if you look at the first day of the RNC the video shows the streets from a million different angles and the only reason is that we all know each other or came to know each other because we had shared this experience or had information we could give each other and it is amazing. This model is really effective and I think it is spreading because people are realizing how effective it is.

Yet another interview mentioned the decentralized model:

Because of the birth of Indymedia model after Seattle, people were really trying to use the Indymedia model of decentralized independent journalism. That really set the groundwork for a lot of future networking of alternative and independent media people and so since 2007 we have had to step up our networking abilities

even more because of these news means of repression that we see coming from the state.

So this quote seems to make a case that the decentralized model is a reaction to the repressive tactics of the government. This dynamic between movement media and the police is reflected in the technological advances from both sides. Next I elaborate on how technology is used by the authorities and independent media as a tool of repression and a tool of organization. Although technology is closely tied to the two most prevalent themes in this research, the complete immersion of technology into most aspects of social life make it an independent factor when considering nearly any context. For that reason technology emerged as its own theme.

### Technology

If the goal of a decentralized model of organizing is to work in a way that is effective, clear communication is needed. The use of the internet has been a well established means of communication for activist groups (Phillips 2003). As newer means of communicating emerge, groups begin to adapt these means and use them in order to maintain a direct line of communication. Technology is a two way street however. While activists and journalists can use technology for communication, storage of footage, and coordination, the internet and other technological advances can also be used for surveillance. First I want to explain how the use of technology furthered communication and coordination, next I want to explore how the state can also use technology for repressive purposes.

A perfect example of the use of technology for organizing purposes would be the use of the website Twitter. Twitter is a free social networking and micro-blogging service that enables its users to send and read other users' updates known as tweets. Tweets are text-based posts of up to 140 characters in length which are displayed on the user's profile page and delivered to other users who have subscribed to them (known as followers). Senders can restrict delivery to those in their circle of friends or, by default, allow anybody to access them.

To give readers a sense of how this is utilized, this very recent news story was just released: On April 10, 2008, James Buck, a graduate journalism student at University of California, Berkeley, and his translator, Mohammed Maree, were arrested in Egypt for photographing an anti-government protest. On his way to the police station Buck used his mobile phone to send the message "Arrested" to his 48 "followers" on Twitter. Those followers contacted U.C. Berkeley, the U.S. Embassy in Cairo, and a number of press organizations on his behalf. Buck was able to send updates about his condition to his "followers" while being detained. He was released the next day from the Mahalla jail after the college hired a lawyer for him<sup>14</sup>.

My interviews produced some interesting accounts of how Twitter was used at the 2008 Republican National Convention. One of my interview respondents was responsible for Twitter updates for the group that he worked for and told me

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<sup>14</sup> "Student "Tweeters" his way out of Egyptian jail". CNN.  
<http://www.cnn.com/2008/TECH/04/25/twitter.buck/>. Retrieved on 2008-04-25.

If you go to the website you can find quite a lot of information about the day to day actions. One of the things we did was put up a breaking news feed, similar to a Twitter feed but it was dispensed on to the front page of the website with minute by minute updates and we made it into a zine pamphlet. That feed also includes a lot of the instances of the journalist's repression like we followed the situation surrounding Amy Goodman when she was arrested and other folks who were arrested.

The use of these feeds becomes a very handy organizing tool for groups who want to stay coordinated with one another.

The use of Twitter by Anarchist groups who sought direct action protests in the city of St Paul was especially organized. One person I interviewed had this to say

The twitter feed use by the anarchist sector people during the RNC it was insane man I should talk about that. They split it up into different sectors and I was getting twitter feeds to my phone on the three sectors around my building and it was like on day one when all those reports started rolling in from the sector tweets it was like having anarchist helicopters in the air. It was like having the bird's eye view like they do. Suddenly twitter seemed a lot more useful.

Although Twitter can be used as a tool for organizing, it is also subject to intelligence and surveillance by the government. More than one interview expressed the coming cooptation of this tool:

Speaking of the twitter feeds there were a lot of analysis of the twitter feeds after the convention and how they were used, not just for people blogging about what they had for breakfast like the twitter folks had envisioned as a tool. There was an article where the Department of Defense had identified twitter as a possible terrorist threat because they identified a number of groups using it. You have a number of groups among them including anarchist, socialist, communist, and they include vegetarians, atheists, they listed all these groups who they thought were subversive that were using twitter. It is amazing how a simple tool has turned into a threat. We have people in the St Paul government looking after the conventions and saying these anarchists were super organized they had almost a military precision they had up to the minute communication system and it is because we were using Twitter.

Technology represents a double edged sword. Several of my interviews produced this dichotomous perspective on technology. I asked my respondents how the role of technology has been transformed over the years. One person I interviewed who is a long time activist with years of international experience on the ground in contentious areas described for me the transition and evolution of technology in the context of alternative independent media.

In those days we didn't have digital cameras and you had to encode video it wasn't just downloading and it was always buggy in those days too. It was a pain to do many things which are simple tasks today, it was like climbing mountains to do something online but now a ten year old with an IMac and a DV camera can do it. That is what has changed is the ubiquity of it. That is kind of cool because it brings accountability and undermines impunity and that gives people power back which is super important when a state is out of control and it has never been easier than today.

The ubiquity of technology seems to be a liberating aspect of the way in which people can organize or spread information. But as I mentioned before there is also the potential threat which was put to me this way "Technology levels the playing field but again it's like (corporations and government) are always going to have way more resources than we do and that unfortunately at some point makes a huge difference." He goes on to tell me about the use of cell phone back doors

There is certainly a lot of technology in our life which isn't good, specifically cell phone back doors. Cell phones have something called a diagnostic mode that you can fire up remotely like if you are AT&T and you were fixing someone's phone you could fire up diagnostic mode and have all the features of the phone and change software. (The government) can do that too, and one of the things they can do is turn on the phone's microphone so anyone who is speaking within the microphone's area can be heard and recorded and you can turn your phone off but it can still be activated and used it when it's off. Data Mining by the government is also becoming an issue "I am on contact lists, pretty much all my email, which I also found out was being read, all my IM's are read, this phone call is being

recorded right now. I am just one of the people who are being watched because of what I have done.

The use of surveillance is part of the new penology that is part of the tactical shift to strategic incapacitation (Noakes and Gillham 2006). The use of pre-emptive raids presupposes the use of surveillance technology; otherwise police and federal authorities would not have known locations of activist convergence spaces. The RNC Commission Report admits the use of surveillance as a means of gathering intelligence (Heffelfinger and Luger 2009). One interview specifically mentioned the use of surveillance as a means of pinpointing location for detainment “They were tapping our phones and were completely open about it. In this day and age you have to operate completely legally with established rules and you have to assume that everything you say, everything you do is recorded or taped.” Additionally this interviewee mentioned some innovative tactics to try and avoid some of the repressive measures.

We had a special system of getting in and out (of their convergence space) in order to avoid all the security cameras positioned around the city. So we stayed in that space for too long afterwards, for like three or four days afterward and they probably found us or they tracked us with their cameras because the cameras were on all the time and they identified us and they raided the studio at like two o'clock in the morning. When they came in what they saw was this hardcore operation. I guess they also saw our cameras in the ceiling four cameras.

One point of interest was that this particular video collective also used surveillance technology as a means of protection against potential brutality or invasion by police. “They didn't take anything because the studio was wired with surveillance cameras and the stuff was streaming to the web and they were completely freaked out when they walked in because they saw that everything was very organized, all the tapes

were in special envelopes that were marked evidence and stuff like that so the people who raided us weren't very sophisticated.”

To conclude, my findings indicate support for the new penology approach of strategic incapacitation. Additionally the findings also show how organizing has used technological innovation as a means of coordination and communication. Technology is also seen by many in my sample as a potentially repressive tool if used in certain ways. The federal and state authorities at the St Paul Republican National Convention used hard hat tactics resembling the Miami Model as well as strategic pre-emptive arrests and harassment in order to keep certain people off the streets. Aspects of the command and control approach were also prevalent in St. Paul. Police were restrictive with marching permits, and even went so far as to use a golf cart along the permitted march route with a “follow me” sign attached to it. Although I have no police testimony or interviews, the RNC Commission Report (Heffelfinger and Luger 2009) serves as the official position of local and federal authorities and it resolves most queries regarding actions by the state. The interviews I conducted serve to describe some of the experiences of repression. These interviews also elaborate on the use of organizing by independent media who cover protests. In the following chapter I shall discuss these findings in relation to some of the social movement literature and offer some considerations for future theory regarding protest policing, media, and social movements.

## DISCUSSION

Having presented the major themes that emerged from my interviews I would now like to offer some theoretical considerations that relate to my findings. As I have mentioned before this research is exploratory. Very little has been written about independent media organization and repression. The data I have collected covers a variety of topics aside from the two major themes, several of which are considered below. Since there is little published work on independent media and its role at demonstrations, I will discuss some of the points made by independent journalists from my interviews that concern the public sphere and social movements. The strategic incapacitation model is central to this research so I will elaborate on my findings and relate them to this policing model. Finally, I would like to situate my findings concerning anarchism alongside the literature on this ideology and how it relates to my research.

### Strategic Incapacitation

Evidence for the use of this model of policing is provided by further observation of large summit protests and also smaller community demonstrations. While transgressive groups, which include anarchists, may potentially pose a threat to order in cities, there is a pattern of transgressive and contentious politics that have been brewing since the WTO in Seattle. Noakes and Gillham (2007) state that a new cycle of contentious politics has found its moment in Seattle. If St Paul in 2008 teaches us anything it is that the authorities are prepared and willing to go to questionable tactics, which further this cycle of contention rather than quelling it. The iterative innovations

between social movements and police forces suggest that “models” of protest policing will continue to change. This research shows support that the strategic incapacitation model has indeed been implemented and added a few tactical innovations of its own. One aspect that has not yet been considered when theorizing about protest policing is the budget of law enforcement at each event. Since the police forces of St. Paul and Minneapolis along with the Ramsey County Sheriff’s Department were given fifty million dollars from the Federal Government as part of a National Security Special Event, the respective police agencies were given fresh capital to pay salaries and provide overtime. The allocated funds from the federal government gave police the resources to continue surveillance of groups who were part of the RNC protests months after the convention had ended. The strategic incapacitation model of policing in St. Paul depended upon the capital up front from the state. In other cases this should be considered.

The use of mass arrests is a common feature of the strategic incapacitation style of policing. However, to sweep up journalists into the fray with or without prior intent is alarming to a nation that touts a free press. Also, the pre-emptive detainment and arrest of both activists and journalists is equally as troubling since they amount to what science fiction author Philip K. Dick termed “thought crimes”. The use of paid informants is also a phenomenon, which was heavily relied upon in St Paul. The RNC welcoming Committee were raided and arrested with information provided by paid informants. I-witness video was raided on multiple occasions in the Twin Cities, the reports reflect that a paid informant told police that I-witness were holding a hostages inside its office.

When police officers stormed into their offices for the second time the police claimed they were investigating reports of anarchists holding hostages in the building. Members of I-Witness Video accused the police of blatant harassment and of using the bogus hostage claims to seek entry to their office<sup>15</sup>. The continual harassment to deter the activities of journalists is a recent tactical innovation that can be seen as strategically incapacitating.

### The Role of independent Media at Protests

It has been well established that police repression affects the activities of protesters (Wood 2007). What has not been well established is how independent media presence affects the behavior of police at a protest. While it may be true that police can confiscate or destroy the camera in someone's hand, the simple presence of a camera could prevent certain harsh tactics from taking place. As one interviewee put it

I think as a general rule there are numerous examples of the cop watching phenomenon, where if you have a camera or a legal observer, if you just have a pair of eyes with a pen and a notepad um police are more likely to restrain their conduct. It is more important to document police conduct from an independent viewpoint and it has proven to be effective in restraining their conduct.

Granted the purpose of law enforcement is to protect the public but what happens when an officer is irritated, has a rough day, or is simply tired of dealing with an individual? In one interview, the respondent described the exact behavior that groups such as I-witness video or copwatch seek to document:

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<sup>15</sup> [http://www.democracynow.org/2008/9/4/i\\_witness\\_video\\_collective\\_forced\\_out](http://www.democracynow.org/2008/9/4/i_witness_video_collective_forced_out)

They were agitated as hell. As I was walking out of the park they looked at me and said 'you on the ground on the ground' and I realized there was nowhere I could run so I complied and I didn't resist. The cop that arrested me was giving me all kinds of abusive shit. I had a pair of prescription sunglasses on my face. He took them off my face and deliberately broke them. I had a pair of prescription glasses in my waist pack, and he emptied it and broke those too. He cut my belt off my pants, cut a bunch of my belt loops, and started pulling the buttons off the pants I was wearing. The guy was totally agro. Acting like I was resisting when I wasn't. He told me they were going to beat the living shit out of me and rape me when they got me in the jailhouse, threatening violence and then after I was cuffed, he put the cuffs on really tight. After I was cuffed he grabbed my right thumb and deliberately bent it back almost to the breaking point.

This person did not have a camera at the time, but the presence of a journalist with a camera could have restrained this type of brutality or at the very least been used as evidence in litigation during this person's trial (the charges were dropped against this individual eventually).

#### The Local Public Sphere.

Whilst production of content is a primary focus of most independent media, this study also found that the people who are involved in producing independent media foster a sense of community. Journalists who are working within their own community can facilitate a community of cultural empowerment. This cultural space is what is known as the public sphere. This area of social life is where people can get together and freely discuss and identify societal problems, and through that discussion influence political action (Koopman 2004). It is a discursive space in which individuals and groups congregate to discuss matters of mutual interest and, where possible, to reach a common judgment. The public sphere can be seen as "a theater in modern societies in which political participation is enacted through the medium of talk" and "a realm of social life in

which public opinion can be formed" (Downing 2000). During interviews journalists mentioned local issues that they were using their resources to organize and promote "For example this week we are organizing an action to help people who are facing eviction from their homes and there is a new collective that think this kind of action will help our neighbors and neighborhoods preserve integrity in neighborhoods which I think is important at this time." The local empowering of public spheres that independent media help to promote and maintain are best exemplified in the St Paul network CRASS (The Community RNC Arrestee Support Structure).

CRASS provides multifaceted support to those arrested during the 2008 Republican National Convention to ensure that all interested arrestees have the support necessary to fight their charges and stand up for free speech. The first meeting of arrestees and supporters took place two days after the end of the convention and meetings have continued regularly since. CRASS has a travel fund available to aid arrestees in returning to the Twin Cities for their court dates, is actively working on court solidarity strategies to support those still facing charges, and is dedicated to aiding and facilitating civil suits.

This is comprised of local citizens of St Paul, several friends and relatives of arrestees and members of arrested groups. Several of my interviewees were either helped by CRASS or gave their support to it. The St Paul Indymedia Center is heavily involved in publicizing and promoting the activities of groups like CRASS and this type of organizing and promotion not only reinforces solidarity between arrestees and their community but it also creates a local public sphere where support and solidarity can be discussed and maintained.

## Independent Media as a Coevolving Entity with Social Movements

Media outlets are of crucial importance in the creation and maintenance of social movements because they are spaces where the identification and expression of conflicting conceptions of reality are expressed. What I found is related to the coevolving dynamic that Oliver and Myers (2007) describe. The iterative relationship that emerged from my research indicates that independent journalists use innovative tactics and organizational structure in order to avoid arrest, surveillance, and strategic incapacitation. Moreover, my interviews suggest that independent media and social movements are complementary and coevolve together. Oliver and Myers (2007) state that social movements develop along with other actors in their environments, this could include the independent media which cover their activities. Independent media, which have close ties to social movements, can adapt and communicate through the same networks as social movements. This means that the channels of communication between the two entities are mutually dependent. The media “become actors in the social movement field, adapting to the actions of others and also subject to diffusion processes. One outlet picks up a story and it may be picked up by other outlets. If enough outlets begin to cover the story, it becomes news, and the media will begin actively seeking more stories on the same theme.” (Oliver and Myers 2007) In one interview a journalist demarcated the difference between his media and movement activity “we think of ourselves and we behave like media as in we are not completely part of direct actions but we make sure they get properly publicized.” This publicity contributes to a media attention cycle which helps diffuse action and ideas for social movements. In Seattle during the 1999 WTO protests

a similar action frame was being publicized by independent journalists which contributed to the diffusion process. As one seasoned journalist put it “The role of Indymedia in Seattle was really critical because that week and the following week saw a lot of really crazy intense solidarity action and protest all around the world and I think that Indymedia can be credited for a lot of that.” In this sense, media and movements are involved in a continually coevolving cycle of protest coverage, diffusion, and networking of collective action.

### Independent Media and the Corporate Media

While independent media are involved in the maintenance of the public sphere, the mass corporate media also have a hand in disseminating competing messages. Koopman (2004) explains that the public sphere “is a bounded space for political communication characterized by a high level of competition” (p. 372). According to Koopman, in order for the message of social movements to permeate the public sphere, three key selection processes must occur which the author calls “discursive opportunities.” These opportunities affect the diffusion chances of contentious messages. Visibility, resonance, and legitimacy are all vital to the diffusion of collective action frames. However, other scholars have established that the media are highly selective of content which appear on the pages of newspapers, television and computer screens, or radio waves (Gamson and Gadi 1993; Croteau and Hoynes 2006). Furthermore, Oliver and Myers (2007) claim that social movement coverage only occurs at the beginning and end of media attention cycles. The interpretation of movement activities often distort the message social movements wish to portray. The mass media coverage of contention

cycles results in an underrepresentation of messages which “has been shown to under-represent movements at the beginnings and ends of their cycles, and over-represent them in the middle, when the issue is ‘hot’” (p.5) The independent journalists that I spoke with maintain that the mass media are bent on misrepresenting the message of social movements, and only cover sensationalized acts by police and protesters, instead of the motivations for being in the streets. Referring to Seattle one activist said “That (the mass media) had to get in there and show what was going on. In an effort to save face and try to distract people from the potential of what Seattle represented, they focused on the police brutality issue and not on what the WTO was and why we were all there railing against it.”

Claims of selective editorial bias are frequent. What independent media achieve are accurate accounts of not only what happens in the streets, but why the people are in the streets in the first place. This quote from my interviews helps to illustrate:

It was critical that Indymedia people were also focusing on the brutality, that was about getting the truth out and about the future litigation and lawsuits that were going to represent but it was really important for us to show the rest of the world the one thing that the corporate media wouldn't touch and that was why we were all out there to begin with and what really impressed me about what was going on there was the solidarity.

Koopman (2004) also maintains that “media discourse is both a crucial source of strategic information on which movement activists base their decisions, and a sounding board for the evaluation of strategies, and as such provides the crucial information input for a next round of inter- actions.” (p.370) My research suggests that those in my sample have little or no trust for the mass media. One journalist told me “their message to the

public is compromised, and their coverage is too selective” for movements to trust it for strategic information. The counter hegemonic message of independent media however, serves not only to subvert the dominant media paradigm, but also to provide the strategic information (such as the twitter feeds). While coverage by independent media certainly has a vested interest, the journalists I interviewed conveyed a desire for objectivity “You have to work that line because of the material you put out cannot be biased. You have to be somewhat objective. Otherwise you lose the message. We operate like an open book.”

#### From Independent Media to Supplementary Media

As I discussed the events of the RNC in St Paul with a journalist who has been involved in independent media for several years, this person made some comments that I think deserve more close attention. This particular person has international coverage experience, as well as certain technical abilities, which has been used for calling attention to issues such as the Iraq war and the Israeli Palestinian conflict. The concept of “hacking the media” came up and I asked for a little more information. This person told me the following:

We did a bunch of campaigns and we were basically bombarding people or news organizations saying we are not happy with what you are doing. We were basically relentlessly criticizing everyone from the New York Times to the BBC, but fairly, for the stuff that they were doing because coverage is super biased. Although we were criticizing them we weren’t being d\*\*\*s to them and we recognized that there is no such thing as independent media, I don’t believe that there is such a thing as independent media. I think for the simple reason that no one will have the resources as CNN or BBC who is doing independent news therefore you are not an alternative essentially you are supplementary media which I think is a fair way to put it. If part of what you do makes the media itself better than all the better. We didn’t make them our enemies as much as we hated

what they did. We were not arrogant and we developed a lot of friends in the journalist community and developed some amazing contacts.

Although they were essentially an independent media organization, they were essentially supplementing the coverage of major news networks by continually bombarding the editors and journalists with the inaccuracies of their coverage. By establishing a positive rapport with the journalists who work for CNN or BBC, these journalists were able to call attention to some of the biased coverage of international affairs. Since the mass media are a major source of news for a great deal of people, this particular person decided that it might be more beneficial to try and reform coverage of issues by giving supplemental details of certain events or topics. This journalist described for me the process of “hacking the media”.

We could do this stuff where we make sure voices are being heard and that was cool too; it is kind of like you help them and they help you. That same person rang me up and explained how to write to a CNN journalist, they have a pattern for structuring email addresses which we used to write letters to journalists CCing the head honchos and stuff changed cause they weren't used to people writing to them directly and explaining that they couldn't put things this way. You can't call it a rubber bullet because it's essentially a nickel that is an inch in thickness covered by a millimeter of rubber, that is not a rubber bullet ok that is a rubber coated metal bullet and if you are shot within ten to thirty feet of that thing it is going into your brain it will break your bones, it is not something that will bounce off of you and everyone goes running like it was Disneyland. We did a lot of stuff like that which was fun because we were sort of hacking the media.

The process of supplementing information could be useful for those who seek to reform the modern media. However, it must be stated that the whole *raison d'être* of independent media is the creation of alternative viewpoints and perspectives. It must also be said that the mainstream media might not always take these supplements into account. For those involved in more radical politics, supplementing the media is not an easy task.

A different journalist put it this way: “I think part of it with leftist media and activism in this hyper advertised world comes down to PR and the way you pitch your story and when and how. If we had sent (our footage and information) to the NY times they wouldn’t have looked twice at it, it would have gone to their spam box you know.” The footage this person is referencing is video of a police officer tackling a Critical Mass bicyclist. The footage was uploaded to youtube.com instead of being forwarded as supplemental coverage and it became a video that “went viral” (this is the process where a video is watched by thousands and thousands of viewers over a relatively short amount of time). She goes on to describe the phenomenon:

Because we put it out on the internet anonymously and as a really short uncontextualized moment that highlights the forces at play in a moment where you kind of ask what is the rest of the story, that really spread virally on the internet and it became the most viewed video for one Tuesday in July this summer and that was amazing to see. And I think it is almost like a lottery, we have tons of footage of people being brutalized by police but if you can get it out fast enough, and to the right sort of circuits, and if it makes people ask a question it will get heard about more, and something can be done about it.

When a longer and more descriptive account of events is necessary, independent media must produce, edit, and upload their content in an effort to counteract the dominant message portrayed by authorities and corporate media. The film *Terrorizing Dissent* not only documents the methods that authorities use to repress movements, but it also gives a platform for the discussion of social issues that are rarely seen on mass corporate media coverage. While the local media in St Paul chose to focus on the acts of an unspecified group of anarchists, Democracy Now were covering the mass arrests and pre-emptive detainment actions by police. One independent journalist told me

The corporate media here, I had super low expectations of them but they went right along with the sheriff of Ramsey County's narrative of dangerous anarchists. (Sheriff Bob Fletcher) tried to portray this narrative of the anarchists being bent on destroying the city of St Paul and just classic example of how Republicans will create an enemy or inflate the danger to instill fear in the public. We saw it in the lead up to the war in Iraq and the same thing happened locally in St Paul.

Next I would like to offer a few clarifications about the ideology of anarchism, its goals and tactics.

### Anarchism

The RNC commission report references the actions of "anarchists" over 300 times as part of the explanation for the heavy handed tactics of police (Heffelfinger and Luger 2009). The narrative of destructive anarchists has been used by more than one local government as a justification for repressive tactics such as mass arrests at protest (Graeber 2002). I would like to briefly clarify the anarchist label in an attempt to buffer some of the statements made by such figures as Ramsey County Sheriff Bob Fletcher. In order to give the resident side of the story, I also asked journalists who lived in St Paul to describe the destruction of property that was used as leverage for repression. The anarchists I spoke with as part of this research uniformly condemned how they are portrayed; what I would like to do next is qualify the label of anarchist with a quote from anthropologist and anarchist David Graeber (2002) which helps to clear some of the confusion regarding the anarchist ideology:

(Anarchism) is about creating new forms of organization. It is not lacking in ideology. Those new forms of organization *are* its ideology. It is about creating and enacting horizontal networks instead of top-down structures like states, parties or corporations; networks based on principles of decentralized, non-hierarchical consensus democracy. Ultimately, it aspires to be much more than that, because ultimately it aspires to reinvent daily life as whole. But unlike many

other forms of radicalism, it has first organized itself in the political sphere—mainly because this was a territory that the powers that be (who have shifted all their heavy artillery into the economic) have largely abandoned. (p.70)

The organizational structure of anarchists according to Graeber is very similar to the organizational structure of groups such as Indymedia. A few people I spoke with for this research described themselves as anarchists. I would like to give their conceptions of what this label means.

It means so many things to different people. Some of the general principles that I understand anarchism to be would be to sort of intentionally remove oneself from or take a stand against hierarchies in society, obviously major political parties are one of those hierarchies but not the only hierarchy. There are many folks that focus on things like sexism, racial inequalities, and poor people's movements. So there are all kinds of things to work on all the time including our own lives and most of the anarchists I know are focused on their own lifestyle as much as society.

Another journalist I interviewed did not describe himself as an anarchist, but he did offer some insight into their ideology and perspective after spending a significant amount of time with them during the RNC.

The whole anarchist label is misleading; they pretty much care about the same stuff, the environment, not hurting people, and finding consensual ways of doing things. We would have called them hippies in my college days but that would be much nicer branding, anarchist rhymes with terrorist and communist. The root of the word it means someone who doesn't believe in centralized government and from that point onwards it is up for debate what it means.

The anarchist groups who were blamed for property damage were never arrested in the act. I asked my interviewees about how much destruction they witnessed. One resident of St Paul told me:

Maximum there were 200 Black Bloc people on day one, maximum, and they split up from the march and most of the people walking down the street, 20 or 30 were pulling things into the street which wasn't that destructive, it is just a pain in the ass if you want to look at it from the city's point of view. And the window

breakers were probably five people and for that we got a police state for a week I mean come on. It didn't deserve the police response we had, plus if you read the Luger report the police actually cornered and surrounded a huge group of Black Bloc in downtown St Paul before anything happened and then they let them go. Why would they release them? They were clearly ready to mass arrest people, so ok you have this group of fifty dudes in black bandanas and ski masks surrounded go for it, arrest them, maybe things wouldn't have gotten to the stage it did.

The tactical repertoire of anarchists includes the smashing of corporate symbols as a way of sending a message. While this is highly controversial, especially among activists, it is considered a tactic that symbolizes the disenfranchisement of a political group. It is clearly unlawful, and deserves more scrutiny than direct action tactics such as lock downs or sit-ins. We must remember however that it was innovative tactics, which brought attention to the civil rights struggle. Painting all anarchists with the same broad brush is as deceiving and unethical as calling all Muslims terrorists. However, it remains to be seen how the tactical repertoire of anarchists will change anything except the tactical repertoire of repression.

## CONCLUSION

The twentieth century saw some of the most violent and socially volatile protests and riots in American history. Some protests were met with equally violent repression from police. The doctrine of escalating force gave way to negotiated management as the U.S. Government developed protocol for dealing with large demonstrations. The Seattle WTO meetings shifted the policing of protests after direct action tactics shut down meetings and forced the Seattle Police to take a new approach to public order management. This event coupled with the World Trade Center attacks of 2001 made for a political climate of intolerance for disorder. Subsequent protests were heavily policed, especially in the United States where legislation such as the Patriot Act allowed unprecedented levels of surveillance and covert action for authorities. Some scholars maintain that the negotiated management style of policing is still extended to protesters who are willing to march in designated areas without disturbance Vitale (2007) Noakes and Gillham (2007). While this is true of a minority of demonstrations that took place in St. Paul such as Youth against War and Racism on September 4<sup>th</sup>, the majority of demonstrations were heavily policed. The rejuvenation of certain coercive force tactics included in the Miami model were present in St Paul in the form of offensive pepper spray use, concussion grenades, and claims of police brutality. However, the strategic incapacitation tactics were far more prevalent. Certain journalists and activists became a pre-emptive target for police and their arrest and detention threw kinks into the organizational infrastructure of protest organizing. Surveillance tactics along with paid

informants allowed the authorities both state and federal to trample the rights of both media personnel and protesters. A handful of transgressive acts of property destruction in St. Paul led to a massive unleashing of force. The federal grant money given to Minnesota police forces still flows in their coffers and actions are still being carried out against groups who were affiliated with protests at the 2008 convention.

The unconstitutional actions by police are not going unnoticed however. Independent media groups are still out there producing audio, video, and print content related to the 2008 RNC. These groups are undeterred by the repression they experienced. The organization of independent media groups I spoke with allows information to get out even if key figures are being detained, harassed, or arrested. The decentralized organizational structure of some independent media groups comes from anarchist ideology, which avoids hierarchical structure. While it has ideological origins, it also makes functioning easier in a climate of arrests, tear gas, concussion grenades, and pepper spray. In some cases being arrested amplifies their message and strengthens their resolve. In any case the ubiquity of technology has allowed the “all seeing eye” of digital video to spread rapidly. Individuals and groups can capture images or video and have them uploaded before the eyes of millions in real time. This ubiquity appears to be liberating, but also has the potential for cooptation.

As you read this there are protests happening all over the globe and police, protesters, and the media are interacting in changing and innovative ways. In recent developments, the G20 summit protests in London appear to be similar to some of the protests at the RNC in St Paul. In London the police tactics were similar and included the

cordoning of space, claims of brutal or excessive force, the death of a bystander due to police force, journalist arrests, and even claims of agent provocateurs were made<sup>16</sup>. On the protester side of things, vandalism to banks in London was also an occurrence similar to both St. Paul and Seattle. The police in St Paul used the proactive approach influenced by intolerance for disorder and preemptive action. The strategic incapacitation model tactic of cordoning space (or Kettling as it is called by British Police) was used heavily in London. Although there seems to be a pattern forming around large protests, the events are still developing during this research and conclusions cannot be made as of yet. However, it must be noted that the treatment of journalists by police has been called into question in both London and St Paul<sup>17</sup>. Future research on large protests and community demonstrations would be enriched by a focus on the treatment of journalists who are merely covering the activities of protesters and police.

What I have attempted to accomplish with this research was to give a descriptive account of strategic incapacitation. Equally important for this research were the organizational tactics that journalists utilized when repression was heavy. I also sought to understand the use of technological advancement for both organizing and repressive purposes. My research has its limitations but I think that the conclusions for this study

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<sup>16</sup> Lewis, Paul; Peter Walker (11 April 2009). "The G20 protesters' stories: Allegations over police treatment on the frontline". *The Guardian*. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2009/apr/11/g20-protest-witnesses-police-actions>. Retrieved on 2009-04-14.

<sup>17</sup> Brook, Stephen (17 April 2009). "G20: NUJ considers legal action over police treatment of photographers". *The Guardian*. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/2009/apr/17/g20-police-photographers-nuj>. Retrieved on 2009-04-24.

are as follows: the strategic incapacitation of demonstrators can extend to journalists if they fit certain criteria such as being in the wrong place at the wrong time, or having a content focus that is known to cause on the job problems for police. The organizing of the 2008 RNC protest was done with innovative technological advancement; the use of twitter feeds as action coordinators is a new development that may be heavily relied upon in the future. The use of surveillance continues to be a heavily relied upon tactic by authorities as well. Since social movements cannot rely upon the hegemonic message of mass corporate media, they have closely aligned themselves with independent media such as Indymedia so that their message and activities can be covered in a way that they see fit.

In a democratic society such as the United States the free press is essential for disseminating information. But simply because the press is free does not mean it will give accurate coverage. Editorial selectivity of social movements and their causes have led to a self-reliant philosophy that gave birth to independent media. While it is understandable that the mass media cannot give coverage and face time to every agenda, their job is to report, not to make broad generalizations about the motives of social movements. Independent media tend to fill the gaps or supplement the overly broad and somewhat selective coverage of activism. This research has attempted to understand and describe how these media individuals and groups react to heavy policing at large protests while simultaneously describing the tactics used by police. The results of this study suggest that the police are moving toward a more incapacitating orientation toward both activists and journalists. The extent of journalists' incapacitation cannot be precisely

measured at this early stage, but future studies could take a closer look at the extent to which journalists are included in mass arrests, pre-emptively detained, or restricted from coverage.

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