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CHAPTER 26

THE PRESENT AS HISTORY

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The Iowa Caucuses, the first electoral test for the eight people then campaigning to be the Democratic Party's nominee for President of the United States, took place on 19 January 2004.[1] After months of speeches, debates, television advertising, and public appearances, Iowa voters were finally able to declare a preference for the candidate of their choice. Around 8:30 p.m., it became apparent from exit polls and preliminary vote returns, that Senator John Kerry would be the victor, followed by Senator John Edwards and then by Howard Dean, the former Governor of Vermont. Shortly after the television news networks "called" the election based on their projections of the final numbers, Dean—as is traditional for an American presidential candidate—appeared before a crowd of his supporters and campaign workers to deliver some brief remarks. "I'm sure there are some disappointed people here," Dean began. "You know something? If you had told us one year ago that we were going to come in third in Iowa, we would have given anything for that." According to the text printed in the next day's *New York Times*, Dean continued:

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[1] Only six of those people were actually on the ballot in Iowa, however, as Joe Lieberman and Al Sharpton had skipped the contest altogether.

Not only are we going to New Hampshire ... we're going to South Carolina and Oklahoma and Arizona and North Dakota and New Mexico, and we're going to California and Texas and New York. And we're going to South Dakota and Oregon and Washington and Michigan. And then we're going to Washington, D.C. To take back the White House. Yeah.

At the point where the transcript reads merely "yeah," Dean gave a yell, or a call, or a cry. The answer depended on whom you asked. The next day's *Washington Post* described the speech as "an arm-waving, voice-booming appearance that seemed like a victory address" (Harris 2004: 7) while the *New York Times* noted that Dean was "shouting himself hoarse" and displaying "a fierce grin and a red face" (Wilgoren 2004*b*). By the following day, the *Times* was referring to Dean's "guttural concession-speech battle cry" (Rutenberg 2004) while the *Post* reported that Dean had "shocked many Democrats by storming onto the stage in Iowa with arms flailing and face reddening to fire up a huge crowd of younger supporters" (VandeHei 2004*a*: 6), and that Dean had appeared "almost frenzied" and "shrieked his determination to win coming contests" (Broder 2004: 6).

The campaign quickly tried to control the situation. At a press conference the day after the Iowa Caucuses, Dean explained that he had been focused on the campaign volunteers in attendance and not on how his remarks and actions might play on television: "Last night there were 3,500 people there who had worked for weeks in Iowa ... and I thought I owed them the reason they came to the campaign, which was passion" (Wilgoren 2004*a*). The following day he pointed out in speeches that he was "not a perfect person" and sometimes engaged in ill-advised public performances, but that his candidacy was driven by "passion" and that his post-Caucus speech should be understood in that light. Dean even poked fun at himself: "I still have not recovered my voice from my screeching in Iowa" (Nagourney and Wilgoren 2004).

But the speech had already become a media staple, with television stations "replaying it constantly" and late-night talk shows building gags around clips from it (VandeHei 2004*b*: 11). Numerous commentators declared the Dean candidacy to be at an end, as the speech had shown Dean unfit to be president (Kurtz 2004*a*). The *Times* quoted unnamed "advisers" as saying that "they had concluded that the portrayal of Dr. Dean as a candidate unhinged would make it impossible, at least for now, to run advertisements attacking their opponents" (Nagourney and Wilgoren 2004). By the end of the week, the reporters covering Dean had changed their tone dramatically, shifting from a celebration of an unorthodox campaign characterized by its innovative use of the Internet for fundraising to "exploring the psychodrama of Dean vs. Dean ... reasonable moderate or reckless hothead?" (Kurtz 2004*b*: 7).

In the space of a week, Howard Dean had gone from being the presumptive winner of the Democratic primary election to a candidate fighting to stay alive in the polls. Dean had been the clear winner of the "invisible primary"—the

campaigning prior to actual elections, in which success is measured through fundraising and public opinion polls—and had received disproportionate media coverage throughout the months before the Iowa Caucuses. He had also collected the most commitments from "superdelegates"—party dignitaries who are appointed by various constituencies rather than being elected at large—and the most prominent endorsements, including the endorsement of former Vice President and 2000 presidential candidate Al Gore (Bernstein 2004: 2–3). But all of that quickly evaporated. Dean failed to win any of the successive electoral contests and withdrew from the race a little over a month later. Dean's post-Caucus speech—dubbed the "I have a scream" speech by many, including by Dean's own pollster (Maslin 2004)—was often cited in the press as a significant moment contributing to his campaign's demise (e.g. Garfield 2004; Stolberg 2004).

Dean's post-Caucus speech, and the rapid production of its meaning, illustrates that the issues of historical interpretation well-known to historians are by no means unique to occurrences taking place in the distant past. The proximity of an occurrence is no guarantee of access to a "true" and unequivocal stream of data that will only subsequently be subject to interpretative controversies. The initial occurrence itself is always mediated by the various combinations of cultural resources that are brought to bear almost at once, as people struggle to make sense of what they have just seen and experienced. This irreducibly historical character of the present extends not merely to the "significance" of some occurrence, but even to the very definition of the occurrence as an "event." What *are* the proper boundaries of Dean's post-Caucus speech? How should it be characterized: red-faced rant, attempt to blow off steam and fire up the troops, public relations gaffe by an inexperienced staff of handlers, or something else? What *did* happen that evening?

Considerations like this direct our analytical attention away from conventional neopositivist causal accounts that seek to disclose cross-case correlations between presumptively stable and unambiguous events (King, Keohane, and Verba 1994). Instead, we should focus on the *cultural politics of "eventing"*: the ways in which occurrences, even present-day or just-recently-past occurrences, come to take on the shape that they have for us at a particular historical juncture. Eventing is logically prior to the study of connections between events, since it is impossible to conduct a study on (for example) the effects of "emotional outbursts" on a candidate's electoral success unless we have first established that Dean's post-Caucus speech was, in fact, an "emotional outburst."

But a focus on eventing also calls into question the whole explanatory strategy of trying systematically to connect events and outcomes so as to generate law-like generalizations, since the contours of an event are never definitively fixed and remain subject to renegotiation. Precisely because the initial experience of an occurrence does not provide anything like a solid core of incontrovertible data that could ground subsequent interpretations, we should be surprised when an

occurrence takes on a relatively stable meaning as an "event"—and should seek to explain this outcome instead of simply taking it for granted.

1 Presuppositions

Robert Jervis (1976: 5) suggests that when analyzing how actors perceive situations we should not assume that those actors are any less capable and competent than the social scientists studying them, and notes that both utilize similar methods in order to deal with "uncertain knowledge and ambiguous information." Similarly, Roy Bhaskar (1998: 14) argues that the practices characterizing scientists as they pursue knowledge are similar, at least in form, to the practices characteristic of actors struggling to make sense of their situations: "the properties that scientific activity depends upon ... turn on features that are a necessary condition for any social life at all." This position seems plausible, given that social scientists remain "internal" to their objects of study in a distinctive way: social scientists are always studying situations and objects that are fundamentally like themselves, and are simultaneously observing and engaging in social action.[2] Thus it stands to reason that the ways that social scientists go about making sense of situations might provide some helpful clues as to how sense-making occurs in the course of daily life.

Since the collapse of logical positivism in the mid-twentieth century, philosophers of science have generally agreed with the position that "there is no natural ... demarcation between observational and theoretical propositions," and that observation is therefore in important ways theory-dependent (Lakatos 1978: 99). The sources of evidence that we use to support our arguments are never the unambiguous sources for those arguments. "A source can never tell us what we ought to say ... a theory of possible history is required so that the sources might be brought to speak at all" (Koselleck 1985: 156). This observation applies equally to textual sources, which have their own embedded theoretical presuppositions, and to non-textual sources such as direct personal experience, which are hermeneutically "prestructured" by the expectations and categories that we bring into those experiences. Apprehending the world is never a matter of allowing raw data to impress itself onto a tabula rasa observer, but is always theoretically mediated (Elias 1992, 61–4).

Events and their meanings can therefore never be reduced to some kind of innate dispositional property of the world. Rather, it is the interaction *between* our way of

[2] The question of whether this is a strong ontological claim about the distinctiveness of "social" objects, or merely a methodological point about the definition of "the social" with which we ordinarily work, can be safely set aside for the time being. In either case, social scientists always remain, inescapably, social beings—like their objects of study.

interrogating potential sources of evidence and the contents of those sources themselves that leads to conclusions about the character of events. Max Weber forcefully argued that there could be no scientific analysis of social phenomena "independent of specialized and 'one-sided' points of view according to which—expressly or tacitly, consciously or unconsciously—they are selected, analyzed, and structured for representational purposes as objects of research" (Weber 1999: 170). Indeed, it is the value-orientation of the researcher (and of her or his research community) that enables scientific analysis in the first place, by delimiting the empirical field and permitting a focus on particular aspects of the world. Weber further suggested that social scientists always apprehend the world through "ideal-types," which are

> formed through a one-sided *accentuation* of *one* or *more* points of view and through bringing together a great many diffuse and discrete, more or less present and occasionally absent *concrete individual* events, which are arranged according to these emphatically one-sided points of view in order to construct a unified *analytical construct* [*Gedanken*]. In its conceptual purity, this analytical construct [*Gedankenbild*] is found nowhere in empirical reality; it is a utopia. (Weber 1999: 191)

In other words, "a fact is a particular ordering of reality in terms of a theoretical interest" (Easton 1971 [1953]: 53). It is important to keep in mind that both the description of a phenomenon *and* the subsequent analysis or interpretation of that phenomenon are ideal-typical in character, as both derive from the interaction between a conceptual apparatus and the world. This is especially true of "events," which result from processes of "demarcation undertaken for the purpose of uttering particular sentences." Events are plucked out of "dynamic reality" through the insertion of "static boundaries" into the characterization, and have an analytical or theoretical character (Riker 1990: 168–9). Events, and sequences of events are thus generated by a set of theoretical commitments, rather than by the putatively innate character of reality itself.

The analyst's temporal proximity to the phenomenon being analyzed does not mitigate this theoretical character, as scholarly apprehensions of the recent past involve much the same conceptual issues as those presented by the analysis of phenomena at a greater temporal remove. Indeed, there is little compelling reason to suspect that directly experiencing something will provide privileged access to the real character or significance of the thing experienced.[3] While eyewitnesses can

[3] I set aside here "spiritual" and other mystical experiences, the distinguishing character of which is that they purport to provide privileged access to the truest nature of things. The problem with such experiences is not that they are necessarily unable to provide what they promise, but that there is no non-tautological way to *evaluate* whether or not they have done so—which is related to the fact that such experiences are, by definition, subjective and thus not capable of being spoken about in an intelligible manner. "What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence" (Wittgenstein 1974: §7).

provide information that might not be otherwise obtainable, this consideration of *method* (how to gain access to the relevant data) should not be inflated to a *methodological* claim about what kind of data is preferable and what the status of that data is. Eyewitness accounts, especially accounts of contentious events, rarely settle the issue under discussion in a definitive way. Also, memoirs and other first-hand accounts have to be handled with extreme care given the possibility that the writer of the memoir is still fighting old political battles in giving her or his account.

2 Historicity

Matters become even more complicated when we turn from scholarly analysts to ordinary participants. "In fulfilling our responsibilities as competent and professional academics, we must write *systematic texts*; we run the risk of being accounted incompetent if we do not" (Shotter 1993*a*: 25). Such a mode of presentation, whatever its drawbacks,[4] has at least the virtue of spelling out its theoretical presumptions more or less explicitly; much scholarly writing operates with models that provide "an explicit, deductively sound statement of the theoretical argument, separate from a particular empirical context," and that which does not can often be formalized so as to provide such a model (Büthe 2002: 482).

But everyday life is considerably less orderly. People do not tend to operate with the highly abstract conceptual equipment that appears in scholarly accounts (Shotter 1993*b*: 164). Rather, everyday sense-making operates with far more ambiguous schemas, which cannot be exhaustively delineated in advance of their deployment in concrete circumstances (Sewell 1992: 18–19). These schemas are "cultural," in that they consist of "socially established structures of meaning in terms of which people do such things as signal conspiracies and join them or perceive insults and answer them" (Geertz 1973: 12–13)—or observe Howard Dean's post-Caucus speech and understand it as an emotional outburst. As an analytical concept,[5] "culture" directs our attention to those resources of meaning on which

[4] In the case of everyday sense-making, the typical scholarly way of writing presents immense problems, inasmuch as it can lead to the mistaken impression that scholarly ideal-typical oversimplifications of public conceptual resources are in fact the same as the resources in question—as though people in their everyday lives actually operated with rigorously demarcated scholarly categories. Scholars of public attitudes, particularly those operating in the Weberian tradition (e.g. Mannheim 1936: 58–9), are very cognizant of the difference.

[5] Designating processes as cultural offers "a view of political phenomena by focusing attention on how and why actors invest them with meaning," and should not be taken as a claim that this is the only way to analyze such processes (Wedeen 2002: 714).

actors can draw in order to establish the boundaries of acceptable action (Ross 1997: 52–3). This focus on "practices of meaning-making" (Wedeen 2002: 714) foregrounds the *active* character of cultural resources as they are implicated in specific situations.

These cultural resources, or rhetorical commonplaces, constitute a *living tradition*:

What might be called a "living tradition" does not give rise to a completely determined form of life, but to dilemmas, to different possibilities for living, among which one must choose ... a "living tradition," in consisting in a set of shared two-sided "topics," "loci," "themes" or "commonplaces," gives rise to the possibility if formulating a whole "ecology" of different and, indeed, unique "positions"—each offering different possibilities for the "best way" to continue and/or develop the tradition. (Shotter 1993*b*: 171)

Living traditions contain the cultural resources out of which people make occurrences meaningful and transform them into events.

In contrast to individualist approaches, whether methodological or phenomenological (Tilly 1998: 17–18), the resources of meaning highlighted here are not subjective and private, but intersubjective and public in a conceptual or theoretical sense (Laffey and Weldes 1997: 215–16; Tilly 2002: 115). As Wittgenstein (1953: §§152–5) suggests, understanding the meaning of something (in this case, a mathematical formula)[6] is "not a mental process":

"B understands the principle of the series" surely doesn't mean simply: the formula "a_n = ..." occurs to B. For it is perfectly imaginable that the formula should occur to him and that he should nevertheless not understand. "He understands" must have more in it than: the formula occurs to him.

Instead of this hypothetical mental occurrence, "understanding" consists in being able to "go on"—in other words, being able to apply the formula in a socially acceptable fashion, which includes the possibility of being corrected if the application is judged inaccurate (Winch 1990: 58–9). Demonstrating that one knows a formula means applying it correctly (i.e. in a socially acceptable way) in the correct (i.e. socially acceptable) circumstances, a situation that could not arise if formulas existed simply in the privacy of one's own head.[7] Something similar is true of other resources of meaning, even if they are nowhere near as firmly delineated as

[6] Mathematical formulas turn out to be a good model for cultural resources in general, inasmuch as many such resources take the form of "schemas" (Sewell 1992: 17–18) or "programs" (Rescher 1996: 38). Of course, the scholarly ideal-typical constructions of such schemas or programs should not be conflated with the actual, improvisational character of lived social experience (Tilly 1998: 52–3).

[7] Contrast this socially focused approach with the introspective "verstehen" approach associated with Dilthey and the hermeneutic tradition of the humanities. "Meaning," in the social-scientific approach that I am advocating here, is intersubjective and connected to appropriate use in a social context, rather than inhering in some transcendental sphere of subjective intent.

a mathematical formula: understanding and using them is irreducibly public and intersubjective.

These considerations suggest that if we want to analyze events we should be attentive to the content of the living tradition of cultural resources on which actors draw in order to make sense of the events in question. It is this living tradition to which scholars implicitly refer when they argue for the importance of "the previous histories and relations of particular interlocutors" (Tilly 2002: 116) implicated in a given episode of sense-making. The availability of particular resources is important in enabling a particular characterization of an event; "all metaphors and all stories are not available to us at each and every moment," and this availability makes a difference (Ringmar 1996: 74). The availability of particular cultural resources is both a logical and an empirical prerequisite of crafting a socially sustainable claim or interpretation; if the appropriate resources are not present, practical and discursive work is required in order to produce and disseminate them in advance of their concrete deployment (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001: 47–52; see also Jackson 2006). As Somers (1994: 630) has pointed out, "this is why the kinds of narratives people use to make sense of their situations will always be an *empirical* rather than a presuppositional question."

Beyond the simple question of resource availability, the form of cultural resources is also significant. Cultural resources are *narratives*, which means that they are scripts or plotlines into which particular occurrences can be placed. Narratives are dynamic in that they move a reader/listener/performer from one place to another, unfolding so as to capture the temporality of a developmental process in a way quite foreign to conventional statistical techniques (Abbott and Hrycak 1990: 148–9; Büthe 2002: 484). This narrative character of cultural resources is perhaps most apparent in more or less formalized "scripts" for social interaction (Tilly 1998: 53–5), but is also present in both the most abstract archetypes (e.g. the upstart mortal challenging the gods and failing, condemned by his hubris to a crushing defeat) and the most specific metaphors (e.g. "guttural concession speech battle cry"). Both of these latter figure prominently in the immediate characterization of Dean's post-Caucus speech. Occurrences like those of that evening in Iowa are never just a "pure sequence of isolated events" that have to be subsequently made meaningful (Carr 1986: 24; Heidegger 1962 [1927]: 190–1) but are instead gathered up into sequences with plotlines even as they are experienced in the first place (Carr 1986: 47–8, 89; Somers 1994: 616).

Events, therefore, have "historicity"—an irreducibly historical character—at the very moment of their occurrence. The experience of events is always mediated by the cultural resources which we bring to bear on the experiences at the time; those resources are not created *de novo* each moment, but are in a sense handed down from the past, and form the field of possibilities within which we operate. The field produced by these possibilities may be more or less restricted, ranging perhaps from Orwell's nightmarish world of "newspeak" in which words themselves are

tightly controlled to the cacophony of the modern Internet "blogosphere" in which anyone with access to a computer can sound off about virtually any subject.[8] But the historicity of events remains in any case.

3 Eventing

In much of social science, we focus on the causal explanation of events, trying to ascertain why they occurred or failed to occur. Such explanations take various forms; while traditional strategies involve comparing cases in order to control variance (King, Keohane, and Verba 1994), more recent methodological turns involve the introduction of logical property spaces and "fuzzy set" logic (Ragin 2000) and the increasing prominence of the analysis of *sequences* rather than of putatively solid and stable cases (Abbott 1995). This latter approach is especially prominent in the study of contentious events, where scholars have developed extremely sophisticated techniques for determining the patterns according to which events unfold (McCarthy et al. 1996). Common to all of this work is a methodological disposition to focus on events as discrete happenings taking place outside of the process of conceptualizing them.[9]

But the irreducible historicity of events suggests an alternative way to proceed: instead of working with events as presumptively stable entities, we should focus on the ongoing dynamic process of *eventing* whereby the contours of an event are produced and reproduced.[10] This social negotiation, or "contentious conversation"

[8] A "blog," short for "weblog," is a kind of virtual soapbox from which an author can fulminate about almost anything by posting comments. The net result of the promulgation of blogs is a hyper-abundance of cultural resources available to anyone with a web browser. See http://blog.lib.umn.edu/blogosphere/. This myriad of voices makes analysis more logistically complicated, but does not raise any insoluble theoretical or conceptual problems.

[9] I should stress that this is a *methodological* decision in the Weberian sense: a necessarily partial approach to the study of (social) reality that gains its leverage by deliberately downplaying certain aspects of the phenomenon under investigation. Comparative case study and sequence analysis downplay historicity, and as part of the methodological trade-off gain the ability to make (at least limited) generalizations. I am not convinced that there are absolutely correct and final ways to make such methodological decisions; instead, such trade-offs should depend on the question that one is asking. My advocacy of a different approach here should not be construed as a dismissal of work that proceeds from a different set of methodological principles, but only as an attempt to envision an alternative perspective.

[10] There is another approach to events that also departs from their irreducible historicity: the kind of "effective history," or "history of the present," advocated by Michel Foucault (Foucault 1977: 153). Foucault suggests that interpretations of events in the past (even the recent past) should be specifically and strategically targeted at the production of changes in the present: disrupting facile narratives of origin, denaturalizing arrangements which have come to seem inevitable, and the like. Foucault's

(Tilly 2002: 113–14, 116–18), displays the unusual temporal property that it always takes place *in the present*, even when the event or events that it concerns are held to have taken place in the past. A negotiation about a speech of a few moments or months ago is no different than a negotiation about occurrences decades or centuries in the past, in that in each case the negotiation involves the deployment of the cultural resources available to actors at the point in time when the negotiation takes place, and not necessarily those in existence at the time of the occurrences themselves.

This curious temporality is the origin of "revisionist history," the practice by which the contours of an event are renegotiated using novel cultural resources. Because events have no determinate character outside of the practices that produce and locally stabilize them, they are always available for modification as the living tradition utilized in their interpretation changes. As an example, consider St. Augustine's *post facto* description of his first book in his later work *Confessions* (1992: 68–9). Addressing the God in whom he has only subsequently come to believe, Augustine declares:

> I was about 26 or 27 years old when I wrote that work, turning over in my mind fictitious physical images. These were a strident noise in the ears of my heart, with which I was straining, sweet truth, to hear your interior melody when I was meditating on the beautiful and the fitting. I wanted to stand still and hear you and rejoice with joy at the voice of the bridegroom. But that was beyond my powers, for I was snatched away to external things by the voices of the error I espoused, and under the weight of my pride I plunged into the abyss.

In this passage Augustine reads his later understanding and experience of God backwards into his earlier life, lending the earlier occurrences a character that they could not possibly have had at the time. By "emplotting" (Somers 1994: 616) his first book differently, and situating it in a narrative of personal salvation, the very contours of the event are altered—what had been an important step in a career as a rhetor and teacher now becomes a step on his road back to a clearer experience of God, and evidence of a spiritual lack of which he has only recently become aware.[11]

Beth Roy (1994: 186–7) provides a less theologically freighted example of the same phenomenon. In conducting a series of interviews concerning a conflict between Hindus and Muslims in Bangladesh that had taken place several decades in the past, she encountered a strange discrepancy between two of her Muslim sources: "Both

response blends the normative and the empirical in fascinating ways that are somewhat different from the more analytical response to the historicity of events that I propose in what follows. But I do not mean to suggest that the analytic that I propose exhausts, let alone "solves" the problem of historicity.

[11] In fact, Augustine's whole approach to memory and narration has this goal; his general methodology consists of emplotting events within a grand story of salvation (Wills 1999: xiv–xvi, 92–95).

[tellers] placed themselves at the Tarkhania household, for instance, when the haystack was set on fire, but they saw very different fires. Golam [a Muslim peasant farmer] insisted that the Hindus had torched their own structure," while the other interview subject, a Muslim community leader, claimed that Muslims had attacked and burned the Hindu farm. Roy goes on to relate these different versions of the event to the broader social location of the two informants, including the set of cultural resources on which they were drawing to construct their overall sense of the conflict: Golam's was a story about the duplicity of the Hindus, while the Muslim community leader told a story about passions overflowing on both sides and his own efforts to mediate and keep the peace. Here again the very "facts" depend on the perspective adopted and narrated.

Contestation about an event need not take place at such a large remove from the event, however, and it need not take place simply at the level of the individual. On the basis of detailed ethnographic work with a group of copy machine technicians, Julian Orr (1996: 43–5) concludes that "diagnosis is a narrative process," in which techs fit symptoms into familiar stories garnered from work in the field. Orr details the everyday institution of a working lunch during which members of the repair team present otherwise inexplicable symptoms displayed by the machines in their care; the group as a whole then struggles to place the symptoms within a storyline that will make them comprehensible, as well as designating a course of action to be undertaken that afternoon when the repair visit proceeds. Similarly, based on her detailed analysis of extant documents, Jutta Weldes (1999: 102, 117–18) argues that the discussion among US officials concerning what to do about Soviet missiles in Cuba, was a process of narrative contestation involving various ways of characterizing the missiles and the "threat" that they represented.[12]

In all of these cases, we have a present struggle about the contours of an event, the outcome of which affects both the future (by providing a plausible course of action) and the past (by reshaping the division of that past into events and situating those events into plotlines). The narrative contestation disclosed by these analyses is thus a kind of active "presencing" (Heidegger 1962 [1927]: 416–17) of both past and future, in that it selects elements and renders them relevant for contemporary concerns. A focus on this active presencing or eventing keeps agency, understood as the temporal situatedness of actors and the inherently creative aspect of their social actions (Emirbayer and Mische 1998: 973–4), firmly in the foreground of the analysis. Such an analytical move garners both practical–moral and explanatory advantages, in that it simultaneously high-

[12] Much recent work in international relations emphasizes that "threats," like "dangers," emerge from socially sustainable narrations of events rather than from putatively intrinsic characteristics of those events themselves (Campbell 1992; Wendt 1992; Wæver 1998).

lights the capacity of actors to have done otherwise that they did (Giddens 1984: 9) and permits a causal analysis of the production of outcomes (Jackson 2003: 236–8).[13]

The key to analyzing eventing in this way is to focus on historically specific configurations or concatenations of factors and mechanisms, rather than looking for law-like generalizations connecting such factors (Katznelson 1997: 99). Different episodes of eventing will have different configurations, and different classes of eventing episodes[14] will most involve different kinds of resources. Delineating these mechanisms and their configuration in a specific situation involves a kind of grounded theorizing in which detailed empirical discussions are brought into dialogue with abstract formulations. But in general, three categories of mechanisms are likely implicated in public episodes of eventing: narrative, audience, and technical considerations (Consalvo 1999: 109–11).[15] Particular combinations of these factors generate the historically specific outcome of any episode of eventing, whatever the particular event in question.

Narrative mechanisms involve those considerations "internal" to the plotline under discussion, including the need to provide some measure of continuity between an event and those events held to precede and follow it. In the case of Howard Dean's post-Caucus speech, the extant plotline before the Iowa occurrences largely involved Dean's "anger," leading to a tendency to characterize moments in terms of a raging disposition. Although Dean and his wife tried to counteract that impression during an ABC television interview several days after the post-Caucus speech (ABC 2004), the previous narration of events imposed certain parameters on those trying to make sense of the new occurrence. These parameters might have been resisted, but this would have required additional effort—effort that was not likely to emerge among journalists working on tight deadlines (Oliver and Myers 1999: 46–7).

Complementing these narrative considerations is the fact that socially plausible stories cannot be promulgated in a vacuum, but must always connect up with cultural resources already present in the relevant audience. The central audience mechanism is therefore something like "resonance," which catches up the extent to which a novel formulation supervenes on and incorporates extant resources. The account of Dean's post-Caucus speech utilized a number of extant resources, ranging from the "tragic fall" archetypal myth to the characterization of Dean as

[13] The kind of analysis that I am sketching here is of course not immune to the temporal dynamics under discussion. The analytical language of mechanisms, actors exercising agency, and the narrative (re)construction of events is itself a historically specific set of cultural resources upon which I am drawing to make sense of a set of situations. To claim that there is anything *definitive* to this kind of analysis would be theoretically inconsistent; like most relational pragmatists, I will settle for the generation of novel and useful insights.

[14] It should go without saying that "episodes" are also ideal-typical theoretical constructs (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001: 29–30). But in case it does not, I will say it explicitly.

[15] These three categories are adapted from the work of Stuart Hall on the mass media, although Consalvo helpfully modifies them to highlight the centrality of the technical aspects of representation. See also Jackson and Nexon 2003.

too angry to be "presidential" and the notion that a potential president must look good on television—a cultural resource dating back to the Nixon–Kennedy debates during the 1960 election campaign. The prior production and dissemination of these cultural resources made possible the specific eventing that took place in the press immediately following the speech, in which the image of Dean screaming was emplotted and contextualized for subsequent viewers. The event of Dean's scream was made encounterable as such; viewers could now utilize the visual data as evidence for the accuracy of the very narrative resources that generated the event and its interpretation in the first place.[16]

But was Dean even screaming? It certainly appeared that way on television, and was widely reported that way in the press. But Diane Sawyer, the ABC News reporter who had interviewed Dean during prime time a few days after the incident, pointed out two weeks later that Dean had been holding a special hand-held microphone when he spoke after the Caucus. The microphone was "designed to filter out the background noise. It isolates your voice, just like it does to Charlie Gibson and me when we have big crowds in the morning. The crowds are deafening to us standing there. But the viewer at home hears only our voice" (Sawyer 2004). Here we see the third category of mechanisms playing a role, as technical considerations involving the television medium provide the "raw data" to be formed into an event—but do not do so in anything like a neutral and transparent manner. An additional technical consideration involves the reproducibility and modifiability of electronic imagery; within hours of the speech, clips of Dean speaking set to techno music were circulating around the Internet, and excerpts were readily available for use in various computer applications. There was even a website—www.deangoes-nuts.com—from which people could download remixes of the speech or request the production of special versions (Lee 2004).[17]

Analyzing the cultural politics of eventing requires a detailed tracing of how these mechanisms interact and concatenate to generate a specific outcome.[18] Such an approach preserves agency while recognizing the central importance of context, and may perhaps make us more sensitive to the possibility that an event, however stable it appears at one point in time, always stands capable of renegotiation.

[16] Peter Novick (Novick 1999: 144) makes a similar point about "the Holocaust," which only emerged as an event (especially as an event with the focus on the experiences of the victims) in the United States in the mid-1960s. Prior to this time, most survivors were reluctant to discuss their experiences at all, and certainly did not connect them to a broader phenomenon called "Holocaust survivorship." None of this is to say that "the Holocaust didn't happen" or that Howard Dean's post-Caucus speech was grave and quiet; the point is that mere occurrences are *indeterminate*, not that they are simply imagined or that our accounts of them are somehow false—or could be truer.

[17] The website was actually produced by a Dean *supporter*, who was impressed with Dean's exuberance and wanted to share it.

[18] This procedure bears some striking similarities to the position articulated by George Herbert Mead (1959). In recent German sociological debates (e.g. texts collected in Kraimer 2000), this stance is referred to as "reconstructive methodology."

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