If I Can't Dance:
Play, Creativity, and Social Movements

by Benjamin Shepard

Volume I

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Social Welfare in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy the City University of New York.

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Abstract

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by Benjamin Shepard

Advisor: Professor Irwin Epstein

In recent years, a new breed of organizing has ignited campaigns for peace and justice. Many of these campaigns utilize innovative approaches to organizing diverse communities against a broad range of targets. This new organizing emphasizes elements of play, creativity, a healthy dose of experimentation, and cultural activism. Themes of community building run throughout. A lively element of openness, learning from past mistakes and empirically testing new approaches propels this new organizing. A spirit of trial and error keeps it fresh. Weissman (1990) describes such work as 'serious play.' Here, innovation finds its inspiration in a spirit of fun, pleasure, and joy.

Play is a term for drag, ACT UP zaps, the use of food and mariachi bands in the Latino community, dance dramaturgy, culture jamming, the carnival, and other forms of creative community-building activities. It is the exhilarating feeling of pleasure, the joy of building a more emancipatory, caring world.

While some movements are concerned with specific ends, such as policy making, other projects are concerned with the day-to-day activities of clients and participants. In the former, the ends are the emphasis. In the latter, some means and ends overlap, such that engagement with other people in creative and joyful ways is a desired end and it is also a means for drawing attention to a problem. This study emphasizes the latter in case

studies of direct action groups including: the Yippies, Young Lords, ACT UP, SexPanic!, Housing Works, Reclaim the Streets, the More Gardens Coalition, the Absurd Response to An Absurd War, the Clandestine Rebel Clown Army, and Times Up!. The study locates itself in the history of social movements, including a close study of the work of the Dadaists, the Situationsts, and decidedly unplayful formations, including the Weather Underground. There is a long history of community-organizing which makes use of prefigurative organizing approaches that seek to create an image of the world in which activists hope to live. This study builds on the use of play in these cases to make the case that different kinds of social knowledge are necessary to sustain movements for social cultural change.

Acknowledgments

A qualitative project on social movements is as much a result of a collective zeitgeist as the hand of any one writer. In the time that this project was in gestation during my years at the City University of New York, a handful of writers, sages, and unsung heroes shuffled this mortal coil. This project is very much a response and a channeling of their experience. In the weeks before I entered the graduate program at City University, social welfare luminary Richard Cloward passed in the summer of 2001; only weeks later thousands of New Yorkers perished in the third Monday of our fall Semester on September 11th; in the years which followed, uncounted thousands and thousands of people around the world were decimated in the post-attack vengeance including the 2609 Coalition and near 10,000 Iraqi civilian losses as of late April 2006; throughout these years countless untold souls who lived in the Manhattan and Bronx SRO hotel rooms were lost to drug overdoses, HIV, Hepatitis C, physical attack and structural violence which characterize life in our ever dwindling welfare state; homeless advocate Sylvia 'Ray' Rivera passed in the Spring of 2002; and garden advocate Francoise Cachelin, who understood what was truly radical about a community garden and why they were threats to the established order which Giuliani wanted to destroy, passed in October 2003; housing, harm reduction, pleasure activist, and personal friend Keith Cylar, of Housing Works, passed in April of 2004; Yippie Stew Albert, whose February 2006 obituary read 'Used Laughter to Protest a War' and Jane Jacobs, one of the few to fight big real estate and win, both made the big proverbial transition in the

Spring of 2006. Albert's death was announced the day I was finished the Yippie chapter, and Jacobs the week I defended in the study. The study is very much a response to their lives and struggles, experiences and legacies. I only wish our culture could learn a little more from their experiences, pain, passion, and play. It is my honor to be one of a city of New Yorkers who insisted that our grief was not a cry for war.

Of course, the person who was most effected and sacrificed most for this dissertation was Caroline Shepard, who spent the first five years of her marriage with me, watching me juggle between life as a graduate student, including saying goodbye to me that third day of class on September 11th, a deputy director at a syringe exchange, and a 'participant observer' of the social movements aimed to slowing the carnage. I am forever grateful to Caroline and our playful daughter Dodi, who was born only weeks before the bombings in Iraq, for putting up with dad in and out of jail, protests, arrests, and my own countless panics.

After leaving Caroline for school that morning in September, I tried to get to Harold Weissman's class on social work knowledge scheduled for 10 AM (which by the way he did not initially cancel). We would battle out the meanings of the various responses to the attacks over the next semester and the following year in an independent study in which Weissman, who had written his own book on play, suggested I situate my writing about social movements into social work. Of course, Mike Smith and Mike Fabricant were consistently supportive of my writing and activism, even when it meant missing their classes because of the Carlyle group arrests. Mimi Abramovitz offered constant encouragement of my writing and activism. Steve Burghardt offered supportive counsel throughout the dissertation committee process. And, of course, Irwin Epstein

offered everything a great mentor, supporter, and intellectual counselor could offer in a very messy open ended journey from elite engineered panics through countless playful responses. Epstein made it possible to continue to locate joy in the long arduous PhD process.

Outside of Hunter, of course, there are the many mentors and scholar activists who helped me bridge the line between practice and praxis. Bertram Cohler first sent me to Winnecott back in my days at Chicago and encouraged me to think about communities as spaces for stories. Stephen Duncombe, who I had known from the streets, first agreed to serve on my committee while we sat around waiting for legal counsel at the Center for Constitutional Rights. If there is one person who made the idea of playful engagement with difficult politics a living, breathing expression; it was Professor Duncombe, who first suggested I study play after one of our clown rehearsals before the RNC actions. That same week, David Graeber suggested I read *Homo Ludens* during one of RNC spokes councils. Another scholar activist at the clown rehearsals was L.M. Bogad, who served as an intellectual catalyst for my introduction to the field of performance studies where the play element is considered serious business. A different scholar/activist who served as an informal committee member and intellectual mentor was Professor Kelly Moore, who I first encountered during the Garden auction period in NYC and helped shape the way I think about politics, embodied experience, and social movements. Countless others, including Ron Hayduk, LA Kauffman, and Peter Nardi offered guidance counsel, support, fun, and inspiration.

Two other intellectuals and activists who helped catapult this project from rough edges into polished prose were Kate Crane and Liz Highleyman. Highleyman

provided more than a copy edit, she provided an invaluable, concise, critical appraisal of the material.

No PhD is written in a vacuum. My Mom and Dad, Dr. and Dr. Shepard provided ongoing insight into what the process would be like, what it would take, and what would be fun about it, all the while offering a helping hand. My brothers John and Will continued to be comrades. Al and Penelope and the rest of the Smith helped make life in New York a wonderful klezmer smorgasbord. And Regine dropped off diapers and helped Caroline and I with becoming new parents until her passing in Fall 2005.

Of course, no qualitative study can happen without those who help make the news and the stories. Colleagues, such a Chuck and Christine and Amanda from RTS; Charles King from Housing Works, Bob Kohler, and countless others shared of themselves. Sixty activists took time out of their lives to tell their stories over repeated occasions. Those such as Elizabeth Meixell, Karan Ramspacher, James Wagner, Steve Quester, and Aresh Javadi even opened up their files of photos, images, and activist paraphernalia for me to use. Sara Schulman organized an ACT UP Oral History Project which pulled together the ACT UP story as a unique tool for activists and scholars alike.

Throughout this period, another group of citizens – Dorothy Imogene Shepard and her sister to be (knock on wood), Sydney Slingsby and Sebastion Yves Raila-Duncombe, Rita Kalet Hayduk-Jones, Corinne Alice & Desmond Clyde Kauffman-O'Hehir, Wyley Casmer and Maveric Jacey Mouchowshi – were born while the war raged. The hope is this baby block will live to grow up in a world with less war and more play dates as they come of age.

Thanks to all of you, especially Caroline, for letting me play with you!

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Part I

Introduction

Statement of Research Question, Issues, and Problem

From the birth of the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP) in 1987 through the rise of the global jjustice movement in 1994, the largest day of antiwar protest in world history on February 15, 2003, the Republican National Convention (RNC) protests in August 2004, and the Immigrant's Rights rallies of Spring 2006, the streets of cities around the world have been filled with a new theatrical model of protest. Elements of fun, creativity, carnival, pleasure, and play are cornerstones of this new approach toward protest and community building. In a nutshell, people are playing. Play is a term for drag, ACT UP zaps, the use of food and mariachi bands in the Latino community, dance dramaturgy, culture jamming, the carnival, and other forms of creative community-building activities. It is the exhilarating feeling of pleasure, the joy of building a more emancipatory, caring world.

While some movements and social work projects are concerned with specific ends, such as policy making and economic resource distribution, other projects are concerned with the day-to-day activities of clients and participants. In the former, the ends are the emphasis of day-to-day life (liberal strategy). In the latter, some means and ends overlap, such that engagement with other people in creative and joyful ways is a desired end and it is also a means for drawing attention to a problem. There is a long history of community-organizing (CO) models which make use of playful, prefigurative

approaches that seek to create an image of the world in which activists hope to live. Some involved campaigns that utilized creativity to achieve policy victories; others involved campaigns which resulted primarily in community building. The question remains: can social and creative play/organizing bridge these two streams of social change practice? And if so, what are the best practices in this work?

To answer this, one must grapple with the several questions: Is creative protest useful? How does it succeed, if at all? When does it fail? Is the goal to change the world or to create an idealized image of a better world? The proposed qualitative study will consider the role of creativity, pleasure, and play in urban protest and community-building practice. It will consider the history of creative protest, showing how this practice has changed over time, and why.

Many of elements of creative play have long been part of social movements. Civil Rights activists sang and danced even when facing the likes of Bull Connor's attack dogs throughout the Civil Rights era (Reed 2005; Zinn 2002). Queer youth formed a Rockette kick-line and sang, "We are the Stonewall Girls" as they thwarted riot cops during the Stonewall Riots of June 1969 (Carter,2004, p. 176-9; Duberman 1993, p. 200-1). Throughout the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, environmental activists met at weekend festivals called raves **,** where dance, performance, and gestures described as, "acts of beauty" overlapped with activism and organizing (McKay 1996). By the 1980s and 1990s, ACT UP had made sophisticated graphics, arts, and a defense of pleasure cornerstones of their struggle for life (Crimp 1988, 1990, 2002). Pleasure, camp, and fun became vital tools in a struggle against disaster.

By the 1990s, Do-It-Yourself (DIY) avant-garde agitational groups sought to break down the lines between art and life and introduce "creativity, imagination, play, and pleasure" into activism, explains John Jordan (1998). With events such as Critical Mass, bicyclists created protests with amoeba-like bike cavalcades. In New York City, community garden activists created their own Central Park within the rubble of neighborhood vacant lots, and DJs transformed street parties into political protests (Ferguson 1999a, 1999b). As public spaces were transformed within this burlesque of do-it-yourself protest, creative play was recognized as an effective approach. What links these protest gestures is an appreciation for the transformative possibilities of creative play.

Play, Creativity, and the New Community Organizing

In recent years, a virtual cavalcade of creative, playful, rambunctious street protest has transformed streets around the world. Yet what is the impact? In what ways does social, cultural, and creative play contribute to or undermine social change activism? Social change activism is designed to ameliorate social inequalities while changing the customs, institutions, or culture of a society. But where does playfulness fit in?

There are many forms of play. For anthropologist Johan Huizinga (1950), play is anything but serious (p. 5). It is a space for joy. For Richard Schechner (2002), play involves doing something that is not exactly “real.” It is looser; it is “double edged, ambiguous, moving in several directions simultaneously,” (p. 79). The *Oxford English Dictionary* lists pages and pages of definitions and meanings for play as both a noun and a verb. As a verb, it is used to describe the state of being “busily engaged,” to “leap for joy, rejoice.” It involves “living being[s]” that “move about swiftly with a lively,

irregular, or capricious motion, spring, sly, or dart to and fro, gambol, frisk, or flutter." The third definition suggests that to play is to "cause to bubble or roll about as in boiling liquid." The forth suggests it is to "carry out or perform (an action), perform or execute (a movement), perform or practice (a trick, a joke, etc.) in the way or sport, deceit, etc." As a noun, play is understood as an "active bodily exercise, brisk and vigorous action of the body or limbs in fencing, dancing, or leaping." It can be thought of as "an action, activity, operation, working, esp. with rapid movement or change, or variety. (Now almost always with abstract things, as fancy thought)."

Play can also be thought of as a theatrical presentation. This theatrical spirit of playful performance and sense of space supports social movements in countless ways. While some forms of political performance and guerilla theatre may not feel inherently playful, the struggle to create a space for this performance has everything to do with creating a space for play (Addams 1910/1998; 1914). In this sense, notions of serious play function as cornerstones of a struggle for public space and pluralistic democratic engagement.

Here, play is considered in the context of social movement activity encompassing a range of affects and outcomes, including joy, social eros, liberation, and policy change. For the purposes of this study, a few core assumptions are useful. The first is that play is near impossible to completely define. Instead it is useful to think of it as a spirit, which encompasses theatrical presentation as a construction, motion, and ethos. "It is a mood, an activity, an eruption, of liberty," Schrechner explains (p. 79). But it is also paradoxical (Bateson 1972). Sometimes, play is a formal commercial or competitive activity one participates in or enjoys; examples include a tennis match at the U.S. Open or an off-

Broadway show. In its less formal incarnations, play includes a pick-up soccer game in Prospect Park, or occurs "at parties, while working, on the street, at playgrounds," (p. 79). Play can be seen as part of a continuum from work to leisure and games, as Stanley Aronowitz (1972/1992), Herbert Marcuse (1955), the Situationists (1958), and even Max Weber (1946/1968) suggest. The paradoxical nature of play also extends into realms of human desire, imagination, and exploration. Many people have both orderly and playful sides, as Friedrich Nietzsche (1967) explores in his work on the conflict between the linear logic of Apollo and playful eros of Dionysus. Yet the approaches are intimately connected. Thus, this study views notions of play along a continuum from its meanings as a noun – a performance – towards those as verb – as forms of action.

A Working Definition of Play

While there are countless ways to conceptualize and define play, it is probably useful to begin with Huizinga, whose 1950 work *Homo Ludens: a Study of the Play Element in Culture* has inspired social movement players for decades. His definition encompasses many of the threads established in this opening discussion:

> Summing up the formal characteristics of play we might call it a free activity standing quite consciously outside the ordinary life as being "not serious," but at the same time absorbing the player intensely and utterly. It is an actively connected with no material interest, and no profit can be gained by it. It proceedswithin its own proper boundaries of time and space according to fixed rules and in an orderly manner. It promises the formation of social groupings which tend to surround themselves with secrecy and to stress their difference from the common world by disguise or other means (quoted in Caillois 1961/ 1979, 4).

In his footnote, Roger Caillois (1961/ 1979) offers another, less restricted albeit less eloquent statement of Huizinga's most succinct description of play (p. 177). Here, play is understood as, "having its aim in itself and accompanied by a feeling of tension, joy, and consciousness that it is different from ordinary life."

With his study *Man, Play and Games*, Caillois built on Huizinga's work. He criticized Huizinga's view of play as free activity separated into a sacred area outside of regular life. Caillois viewed play as unproductive and free, spontaneous and make-believe, yet regulated. I will acknowledge the ambiguous difficulty of spontaneity and regulation within the same frame. Caillois delineated play into four categories based on notions of competition, chance, simulation, and vertigo. Games within these categories take place within an evolving continuum from paidia – a highly energetic, active, tumultuous, spontaneous, and exuberant realm of play – toward ludus, or ludic activities involving calculating, contrived subversion of rules (Barash 1979, p. vii-viii). While for Caillois such ludic activities tended to be relegated to children's play, this study advances the premise that such forms of subversive play are a vital dimension of the process of social change. Here, notions of playing by a different set of rules (Bernstein 1991, p. 21-40; Neumann 2000, p. 89) and shifting the parameters of the game offer an entirely relevant context for the work of social movements.

Shifts in the way people play reflect clues within the process of social change. Caillois insisted that play and games offered innumerable clues into cultural life. In much the same way that researchers have mined the functions of religious, economic, familial, and political institutions, Caillois suggested researchers interrogate the play elements of

culture (Barash 1979, p. ix). This work contends that the study of social and cultural play offers a number of essential insights into mechanisms of social change.

Context

Much of the renewed focus on creative play unfolded as the policy landscape in the United States shifted from an emphasis on public welfare toward law enforcement over the final decades of the 20th century (Davey 1995). By 2000, well over six million American citizens found themselves under police control, either through prison or parole (Morone 2003, p. 455-6). While the era of big government for social programs ended with the failure of President Bill Clinton's heath-care initiative in 1994 and the passage of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996, big government for law-enforcement only expanded with the passage of the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994 and the Patriot Act in 2001. A number of thinkers have suggested that panics over race, crime and civic upheaval dating back to the 1960s have helped legitimize a shift in public expenditures from health and supportive services toward policies aimed at social control (Chambliss 1995).

While American political history promotes the myth of unbridled freedom, when it comes to social deviance, the U.S. tolerates far less than other Western nations. Hence, some three percent of the U.S. population is linked with the criminal justice system through prison or parole (Morone 2003, p. 455-6). While social welfare scholars have bemoaned the criminalization of poverty, others have taken a more stoic position. Under capitalism, good things are linked to bad things; the good life always has its dark underbelly. Thus, Karl Marx contends, "everything is pregnant with its contrary" (quoted in Merrifield 2002, p. 5). Marxist critic Walter Benjamin, keenly aware of these

contradictions but still intrigued with the city, is said to have wanted to be converted, just not today (Berman 1982, 146). The pulse of the city thrives in just such a jazz-like urban dialectic. Psychoanalyst Nancy McWilliams (2004) frames this dynamic as a contrast between the tragic and comic elements of life. "'Tragic' denotes a sense that one has to come to terms with inherently flawed and painful realities; 'comic' captures the more pragmatic, problem solving view that changes can be made to bring about a happy ending" (p. 28).

Th current study considers the notion that social control is a context in which play is often a useful response. For many observers, play offers a useful intermediating space between what is real and what is fantasy, between liberation and repression, possibility and pain (Aronowitz 1972/1992, p. 51-93; Bateson 1972, p. 175-94; Marcuse 1955, p. 157-75). Authentic experience often emerges when elements of risk are present. Long-distance runners find their stride when fatigue overlaps into exhilaration and beta endorphins are released. Within the context of theater, the play offers actors and spectators alike the chance to reconcile the interaction between humor or folly. The core assumption is that panic and play interact in a style similar to the tragic and comic elements of life. Yet this study emphasizes the creative "comic" view that changes can bring about better circumstances for people's lives. Thus a core element of this study involves the question: Is play a useful response to social controls?

Brian Sutton-Smith (1997/2004, p. 134) writes that, "Play, like dreams, is not a secondary state of reality...but has primacy as a form of knowing." In recent years, activists within various cohorts, including the AIDS, global justice, and public space movements, have turned from a more conventional rational approach toward a strategy of

play, creativity, and performance as a response to a burgeoning politics of panic, privatization, and control driven by neoconservative and neoliberal social and economic policies. The months immediately following the passage of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1994 witnessed the birth of the Zapatista rebellion in Mexico, and with it a new, more playful organizing approach. The Zapatista uprising marked the upsurge of a global justice movement comprised of many different social movements (Mertes 2003). The overarching goal behind this "movement of movements" is to protest the ascent of neoliberal economic policies which privatize countless aspects of life (Klein 2003). To do this, the Zapatistas – like many in this "movement of movements" – have sought to include members in a more pluralistic form of democratic political engagement. In one example of their use of playful performance, the group's public spokesman, Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos, actually re-envisioned their struggle as a theatrical play:

> The play is a problem. Those directing it are making a huge effort to convince the audience that it's already over. Not only is the public not leaving the premises, they're also insisting on getting up onto the stage. The director and the actors are tearing their hair out. It is no longer possible to know where the stage is and where the seats are (154).

The play is a problem. In this and many other examples, the Zapatista movement aims to create different ways of transforming power rather than aspiring to take it. And in so doing, they have inspired a new generation of political actors to embrace the idea of playfully engaging power (Solnit 2004).

To do this, social actors use play to communicate truth through illusion (Nardi, forthcoming) performance, prank, and the kind of political performance Marcos (2001) describes. Here, the stage becomes a site for activist engagement. Here, actors and

activists and citizens (and for that matter non-citizens) cultivate theatrical imagery of regular life where art lives in a street made up of many many different types of actors. Here activists recognize social life is made up of many, many political actors, who are restricted by social roles they may or may not choose to follow. They can either remain on the sidewalk or they can step onto the street, into a different kind of stage and performance in democracy where they no longer listen to their directors. Here, social movement action takes place when actors start improvising with their roles and their lives. Everyday life becomes an arena of struggle and performance a place for subversive possible possibility (Nardi, forthcoming). "Stage, theater, circus and even carnival - here we have the imagery of our dramatic model, with a conception of society as precarious, uncertain, often unpredictable," Berger contentds. "The institutions of society, while they do in fact coerce us, appear at the same time as dramatic conventions, even fictions," (quoted in Nardi, forthcoming). The plays the thing, afterall.

Such thinking finds its political manifestations in the politics of play, performance, and Zapatismo. If realilty is but a series of fictions, as Berger contends, then the task of social movement actors is to create more compelling dramas, more inviting stories for citizen participation. It is difficult to neglect this point in the interview of Subcomandante Marcos (2004) by by magic realist novelist Gabriel Garcia. The implicit point of the choice of a novelist to interview a rising politico is of course that the arena of struggle for a new social movement is to take place with reality twisting stories, not with bombs. *[O]ur Word is our weapon is*, of course, the name for Marcos' (2001) selected writings. The point of such a politics is to blur genres between politics and stories in a fusion which creates a different kind of political power.

"The seizure of power does not justify a revolutionary organization in taking any actions that it pleases. We do not believe that the end justifies the means. Ultimately, we believe that the means are the end," the Zapatista leader Subcommandante Insurgente Marcos (2004) contends (11). Here the Zapatista politics of play involves an aspiration to transform and diffuse power. Such a politics is buttressed with a different way of thinking about polical efficacy. "We define our goal by the way we choose the means of struggling for it," (11).

Building on this sentiment for the study of play in social movements, it is useful to stear away from a positivist-style prediction by thinking about innovation and the mix of the aesthetic/ political activism. Thus, while this study considers ends, the focus of the study is on means. The study of play in social movements compels practitioners and scholars to consider different forms of efficacy, different outcomes than scoring the goal. In a discussion of play and the sociological imagination, sociologist Peter Nardi suggests that stories, myths, illusions, fables, and fictions, "all come together in a sociological imagination seeking to make sense out of everyday life." Here, the study of play offers a different kind route toward social knowledge and investigation. "Rather than only looking at the social world as a construction set of institutions and roles, consider instead using illusions and play in the search for meaning and truths," Nardi counsels (forthcoming). While the Zapatista narratives assert there are different ways of thinking about political power, this study asserts that there different kinds of social formations and community resources are produced when people play with politics and power. Here, the emphasis remains on play elements which do and do not sustain community, and cultivate movement action.

Much of the new political organizing aims to create a truly direct democratic political globalization project that honors countless points of view – not just those of the richest corporations. Building on both Zapatismo and ACT UP's work, the movements that make up the global justice movement valorize creativity, anger, defiant politics, culture jamming, sexual non-conformity, the rejection of shame, and protest pranks which include expression of affection, care, and a desire for social acceptance rather than social isolation (Gould 2002; Lasn 1999). Along the road, Zapatismo's theatrics combined with ACT UP's queer aesthetics to merge creative protest and radical play into a new philosophy of playful political engagement.

Creative Protest

Saul Alinsky (1971) once wrote that in order for protest to remain effective, organizers must keep their tactics fresh and creative. In the last decade, a new cohort of political actors has taken this advice to heart (Prokosch and Raymond 2002; Shepard and Hayduk 2002; Solnit 2004; Yuen et al 2004). In so doing, these activists have helped revitalize approaches to community organizing. This new organizing ethos is accompanied by the emergence of elements of play and generativity – camp, dancing in the streets, fun, humor, the use of arts, culture – all used to create a message about a more equitable, vital, and democratic world that activists hope to create. This creative protest functions as an innovative response to the politics of social control.

In the United States, only a small portion of this organizing comes from social workers. Instead, a brief survey of the literature on social work community organizing reveals works on historic struggles including the settlement house movement (Elshtain

2001), the Rank-and-File movement of the 1930s, social workers involved in welfare rights in the 1960s (Abramowitz 1996, 1998), and tensions between professional and activist voices (Reisch and Andrews 2002a). Much of social work-based organizing is framed within a very serious, even ominous ethos. "[T]here is a sad, quiet truth about organizing and community-based work," organizer and social work scholar Steve Burghardt (1982, p.1) explains, adding that, "too many people never enjoy themselves or take personal satisfaction from either what they do or the way they do it."

Still, political protest is enjoying a pulsing resurgence. For example, on January 20, 2005, thousands of activists in Washington, D.C. "turned their backs on Bush" as the inaugural presidential motorcade passed Pennsylvania Avenue, while in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, citizens in New Orleans held a theatrical Funeral for Democracy, which included marching bands. The gesture was the most recent in a remarkable decade of theatrical confrontations, including the Amadou Diallo protests in New York in 1999, in which hundreds participated in mass acts of civil disobedience, the World Trade Organization (WTO) protests, and actions against the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.

Visible protest and organizing against U.S. militarism accelerated in October 2002 with countless anti-war demonstrations around the country. Then on February 15, 2003 – recognized as the largest day of protest in world history – millions of people on five continents demonstrated passionate opposition to the U.S. war in Iraq. In April 2004 more than one million people converged in Washington for the pro-choice March for Women's Lives, a gathering many described as the biggest ever on the Mall. By August

of that year, the RNC protests began with an estimated 500,000 people marching past Madison Square Garden. By the end of the week of protests, some 1,800 people had been arrested – over 1,000 on August 31 alone, the largest single day of protest against a political convention in U.S. history (Loew 2005). The movement's emphasis has shifted to creating open spaces for dialogue, experimentation, community building, and direct democracy. While the mood of much of this protest ranged from serious to silly, a more subversive mood of playfulness and comic satire could be witnessed within much of the public sphere of social protest. This style of protest effectively invites participation and reduces burnout.

The National Association of Social Workers (NASW) notes that social work has "achieved its greatest successes when it has regarded change in a broad perspective, linking the improvements sought through social and economic reforms with larger cultural, legal, political, and ideological dimensions of the issues it has addressed" (1993, p. 54). The profession's mission thus calls for social workers to fight for social justice from just such a perspective (Reisch and Andrews 2002a, p. 6-7). Nevertheless an important tactical shift was beginning to emerge.

In 1982, Steve Burghardt suggested that organizers should incorporate approaches that include pleasure and fun within efforts aimed at social change for one very simple reason: "Given present objective limits to our work, it is clear that if community based practitioners cannot gain satisfaction and political meaning from their work, they will stop doing it" (p.2). If these organizers stop fighting, they court defeat.

Given that social protest is on the rise, social workers would do well to consider this new activism. Much of the appeal of the new community organizing stems from its emphasis on diversity, flexibility, creativity, and minimal barriers to participation. This new CO offers fresh approaches to organizing diverse communities for social change. It does so through a low-threshold emphasis on elements of play, humor, innovation, the use of culture, peer-based popular education, and respect for pleasure. As Eddie Yuen explains, "[T]he movement has been most successful at exorcizing the legacy of the hairshirt left while simultaneously critiquing the empty satisfactions of consumer culture" (2004, p. xii). There has long been a view that social change best takes place within a context of rational discourse that takes precedence over affect or feelings (Goodwin et al 2001). The problem is that these approaches are often discouraging and difficult to sustain (Burghardt 1982, p. 1-3). The new CO acknowledges the need for rationality as a useful component of targeted action, but recognizes that feelings of pleasure and play lead to sustainability and creativity in movements (Gould 2002).

These playful approaches can be understood as a way to foster innovative approaches to practice which bridge the gap between micro and macro approaches to social change. Clinical practice acknowledges that playfulness creates room for individuals and groups to explore and experiment with different ways of being in the world (Bateson 1972; Ehrenberg 1992, p. 118). Conversely, the new organizing acknowledges "the interpersonal emotional realities of practice life" and "is directly, simultaneously connected to the community work being carried out" (Burghardt 1982, p. 26). Ehrenberg notes that "spontaneous kinds of playfulness" open up new spaces and scripts for individuals and groups. "[T]he value of playfulness lies precisely in the kind of

affective experience it may help generate and the opportunity this provides for the patient to discover this potential in himself or herself," (1992, p. 118).

The point is that people must be allowed to grow personally and emotionally if they are to succeed in organizing. This is an insight organizers working in non-hierarchical organizing traditions have been emphasizing for a long time. Ella Baker, for example, specifically called for movement development based on networks of individuals rather than charismatic leaders (Johnson 2001, p. 114). Within this model, "followers" are allowed the space to discover the leadership capacities within themselves. Baker's empowerment approach has been heralded as a best-practice example by those involved in the new organizing (Crass 2004). A low-threshold, light-hearted organizing philosophy that places a premium on humor and play helps this emancipatory approach to thrive.

A lively element of openness and learning from past mistakes propels this new CO, with a spirit of trial-and-error keeping models of engagement fresh. If something does not work, activists aim to learn from their mistakes with an openness that honors discussion rather than conflict. Harold Weissman (1990) describes such work as "serious play." Much of this innovation finds its inspiration in a recognition of the social necessities and authentic possibilities of play. If isolation, the location of social problems in individual rather than structural flaws (Mullaly 1993), and the turning away from CO are what ails contemporary culture in general and social work practice more specifically (Specht and Courtney 1994), then elements of creative play and enjoyable participation cultivate the networks that allow actors to engage in new forms of CO.

This study aims to assess the theoretical and practical applications of the use of creative play for engaging citizens, organizing communities, sustaining campaigns, and running innovative programs. The goal is to identify the strengths and limitations of the use of play, creative direct action, and radical street performance as organizing and protest approaches. The question remains: Can play be an effective strategy against social controls? The study will situate this question within a theoretical and historical overview of creative protest and the politics of play.

From here, the qualitative study will address distinct aspects of community organizing practice. Historic use of playful tactics in the Civil Rights, anarcho-feminist, Yippie, AIDS activist, and global justice movements will be considered. Further, this introduction will consider the theoretical uses of creative play as a CO strategy. It will situate this discussion within debates about prefigurative community building versus task-based community organizing at the core of discussions of the efficacy of the use of creative play (see Literature Review).

Urban, Rural, and International CO

According to Jack Rothman (1995), approaches to purposeful community change work in the United States can be broken down into three distinct communities: urban, rural, and international. These approaches are divided into three additional categories of practice: locality development, social planning/policy, and social action (p. 28). The first, locality development, assumes that social change takes place through the active participation of a large cross-section at the local neighborhood level in determining goals,

tactics, and strategies for taking action. The style is deliberatively inclusive and democratic (p. 28).

The second, social planning/policy, involves the process of identification of social problems, assessment of their scope, data collection, and producing solutions on a governmental policy level. This style is deliberately technocratic and rational. Community participation is often minimized. Professionals, rather than community members, are thought to be best able to engage in this mode of social change practice. (Crenson and Ginsberg 2002). While community participation is not a core ingredient of this approach, differing circumstances and problems may require differing levels of community involvement. After all, garnering maximum civil involvement or successfully carrying out a protest demonstration against a carefully chosen target in the policy food-chain often requires a great deal of rational calculation. Thus, means are logically connected to intended ends (Rothman 1995, p. 30-1, 35). (The Literature Review includes further elaboration on the conflicts between means/process versus Task-based community practice.)

In this respect, policy and planning are linked with the third style of community change work, social action-based practice. This type of community organizing assumes there is an aggrieved section or class of the population that needs to be organized in order to make its demands heard by the larger society. Classically stemming from the 1930s and 1960s, this mode of practice involves a range of confrontational techniques including sit-ins, be-ins, demonstrations, boycotts, marches, strikes, pickets, civil disobedience, teach-ins, and festive carnivals. The aim of these practices is to allow those with little financial power or access to use “people power” to apply pressure or to disrupt carefully

chosen targets. In this respect, even social action applies a rational analysis to its practice. The intellectual foundations for this type of practice include the work of Marx, Jürgen Habermas, Charles Fourier, and Mikhail Bakunin . Social action-based practice was advanced by progressive era reformer and social work pioneer Jane Addams and the Settlement House Movement. Saul Alinsky (1946, 1971) outlines the underpinnings of the model. Newer contributions continue to reflect this orientation (Burghardt 1982; Fisher 1995; Hanna and Robinson 1994; Piven and Cloward 1977). Yet there is a gap in the social work literature on innovations in social action-based practice. In recent years, social action movements have moved beyond many of the traditional models to expand their strategies and targets (Wood and Moore 2002). This "new wave" of protest involves a wider range of creative tactics (Rothman 1995, p. 32-3). The study builds on Rothman's model to suggest a focus on sustainability is necessary for effective movement mobilization. Thus, the focus of this study is on the playful means, rather the ends of movement activity.

Study Subjects and Proposed Framework

This study involves information-rich interviews with practitioners from six overlapping, yet distinct, camps – all of whom are involved with social action-based practice (although, as discussed above, elements of the locality development and social planning/policy orientations often overlap with social action-based orientations). The study will involve interviews with key informants from major organizations including historical groups such as the Yippies, the Young Lords, and the Gay Liberation Front, as well as the still-functioning AIDS/harm reduction, DIY, public space, and global justice

movements – all of which make use of innovative and creative approaches to social change practice. The point is to learn from key informants to update the social action literature with contemporary best-practice models. The following describes the six distinct camps of activists included in the study:

1) The first group of activists are from two late 1960s New York City direct action groups, the Youth International Political Party (Yippies) and the Young Lords. Each took a distinct approach to the use of political engagement and direct action. They set the context for the study.

2) The second is the story of the Gay Liberation movement in New York City after the Stonewall Riots of 1969. For Gay Liberationists, pleasure and play were intimately connected with their work throughout the 1970s.

3) The third group, ACT UP and its offshoots, defended the right of political actors to engage in play when the AIDS crisis hit in the early 1980s. ACT UP's offshoots include those involved in the harm reduction movement, whose aim is to create more inclusive programs for substance users with HIV/AIDS. One of the primary advocates of this movement is Housing Works, a militant AIDS service organization, which has fought to create a bold, generative form of community building and activism within the trajectory of service provision. Their work includes struggles against social controls in public health, including surveillance of recipients of public services.

4) The forth camp - another subset - is pleasure activists, including members of SexPanic!, a New York direct action group which fought for the political defense of pleasure in New York City from 1995-1999. SexPanic! lead the struggle against Mayor Rudolph Giuliani's war on public sexual culture under the banner of his "quality of life"

campaign. Their work included a struggle against closure of private spaces where communities of sexual outsiders converge, comparing Giuliani's efforts with those of anti-vice crusader Anthony Comstock (Beisel 1997; Gilfoyle 1992). Other ACT UP spin-offs include the Church Ladies for Choice, which links AIDS activism to the reproductive rights movement, and the Lesbian Avengers. These struggles can be understood as part of a lineage of protest against prohibition dating back to the days of the temperance movement (Wagner 1997) through the sex workers activism and lesbian sexualltiy activism which was a responce to the sex wars ot the 18980's**.**

4) The fifth camp includes activists involved in current struggles for public space in New York City and around the world. This study will consider activism against restrictions on and removal of open public spaces. Relevant case studies include struggles over community gardens in New York, as well as other spaces where people meet, such as the streets for bicyclists and cruising spots for gay men such as public parks and the Hudson River Piers

5) The sixth camp involves actors involved in the global justice and peace/anti-war movements.

The unit of analysis is based on the stories and experiences of key informants – individual activists and their organizations (Patton 2002, p. 228-31). Specific individuals and groups were chosen because they use creative play in different ways and have had diverse experiences with play as means and ends. A purposeful sample of key informants make up the data gathered for this study (Patton 2002, p. 230-31) (See Research Methodologies). These individuals can contribute knowledge about best practices in

social action-based organizing. The study sample includes 60 activists (17 women, 44 men, 6 people of color) who completed 45-90 minute face-to-face or phone interviews.

The face-to-face interview was the main research method. This was complimented with participant observation data. Having been an active participant in several of these movements, I have a distinct history and perspective within the movements under consideration. I have made a careful effort to be aware of and to acknowledge biases that this background may trigger (see discussion of participant observation in Research Methodologies section).

Payoffs

Creative protest does six things especially well, which will makes this dissertation a significant contribution:

1) It connects participants to politics.
2) It helps promote community organizing in neighborhoods and communities.
3) It helps build creative images of a world activists want to live in – for example, an urban garden, a group bike ride, and effective social interventions such as syringe exchange which alleviate social isolation, poverty, and illness – in the here and now.
4) Psychoanalysts have long suggested that play is where individual growth, innovation, and creativity emerge. The same thinking can be applied to social groups. Thus, creative play bridges a divide between micro and macro social work practice.
5) It nourishes political actors by allowing them to bring elements of culture into their work, which helps them stay active, engaged, and involved.

6) Finally, it helps alleviate alienation.

But there are limitations to creative play approaches. This study considers both the possibilities and the limitations. Yet, its focus is clearly on the role of play in the process of politics and political organizing rather than on the outcome or the efficacy. The focus of this study is on means, rather than the ends.

A) Context

Welfare, Policing, and Social Control

Professional social workers face an array of problems, including isolation from a larger society which is increasingly dominated by neoliberal social and economic policies privatizing everything from health, to water, to basic services, and public space itself (Klein 2003). The field faces a corporate globalization "which promotes a destructive competition in which workers, communities, and entire countries are forced to cut labor, social and environmental costs to attract mobile capital. When many countries each do so, the result is a disastrous 'race to the bottom'" (Brechner et al 2000, p. 5). Thus, Stanley Aronowitz and Heather Gautney (2003, p. xxx) suggest that corporate globalization has become the context in which future struggles over poverty will be waged.

Unfortunately, social workers are often isolated from movements opposing this trend. Instead of joining larger popular struggles, social workers and their clients contend with an onslaught of social controls which restrict their movement as social and political actors (Garland 2001, p. xii). Simultaneously, policy trends emphasize increasingly punitive moralistic interventions based on criminalization of poverty rather than

prevention of problems (Abramovitz 1996, p. 13-17; Davey 1995; Katz, 1986, p.251-92; Morone 2003; Shevory 2004, p. 136-70).

Mechanisms that control the body (sex, appetite, movement, pleasure, etc.) are entrenched in current politics. They directly affect clients, who are turned away from services and modes of political participation because of personal histories with sex, drugs, or the criminal justice system (Moore 2004). While social welfare policy was dominated by ideologies of liberalism from the New Deal through much of the Cold War, current policies that call for social control of recipients of public assistance are supported by neoconservative ideology. According to social welfare scholar Robert Mullaly (1993), neoconservative ideology assumes a number of core social and economic beliefs: freedom from government, individualism, and inequality. The core articles of faith are the free market, competitive capitalism, and private ownership. Core political beliefs emphasize elite rule, de-politicization of economic policy, law and order, stability, and paternalism. In terms of social welfare, the core neoconservative view is fundamentally hostile. Its view of social work practice is that social workers can basically function as arms of the police department. Neoconservative ideology assumes that social welfare policy should deploy coercive measures to control people's behavior and force them to take care of themselves. It is an ideology that favors a high level of investigation and monitoring. At its core, this ideology situates problems in individual behavior, poor choices, and character flaws. It builds on the classical "poor law" assumption that there are worthy and unworthy poor. At its core is a moral interpretation of human behavior (Mullaly 1993, p.62).

This study study considers the years from 1968 to the present. This period begins with President Richard Nixon's rise to power and his "southern strategy," which lead to a renewed focus on crime control rather than social services (see Davey 1995). The mobilization leading up to Bill Clinton's election in 1992 was built around the goal of universal health-carethis was a key aim of the first years of the Clinton administration. By the end of 1994, the health-care initiative had died without much of a fight. The same pharmaceutical companies that ACT UP had fought for years worked with the American Medical Association, the insurance industry, and political conservatives to generate a climate of fear that helped sink the proposed health-care plan. Many commentators have located the failure of the Clinton plan within a broad cultural backlash, even anxiety, around elements of collectivity – anything that even resembles socialism – which can be traced back to the fevered years of the McCarthy "witch hunts" of the 1950s (Schrecker 1998; Skocpol 1995). Columbia University historian Richard Hofstadter (1964) describes this line of logic as "the paranoid style in American politics."

When Republicans took control of the 104th Congress after the 1994 midterm election, universal health-care was put on the back burner of the national policy agenda. Instead of the health-care or welfare reform bills supported by social welfare advocates (Ellwood 1997), the year 1994 witnessed the passage of a federal crime bill, the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994 (Chivigny2001, p. viii; Sites 2003, p. 58). The same year, the state of California passed its "three strikes" law, setting in motion a nationwide reallocation of resources from social services and education to criminal justice and the prison industry (Shichor 1997). Thus, a generational opportunity was lost.

Instead of educating its children, the nation's largest state was spending more on prison construction than on its entire education system.

With the election and re-election of Mayor Rudolph Giuliani in New York City in 1993 and 1997, "broken windows" policing became a model emulated nationwide (Harcourt 2001). This model of policing was designed to address the smallest urban problems – a mural on a wall, an infraction such as running a subway turnstile, a gathering of friends on a street corner – as criminal justice matters. With the passage of the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994, New York and cities around the country were given the resources to fight such miniscule crimes. The problem was that this form of crime control also took away a city's edge, its color, and threatened the possibilities of public space as a site for pluralistic democratic engagement (Burr 1998; Ferrell 2001; McArdle and Erzen 2001).

The justification behind the push for "broken windows" policing, of course, was that it helped cultivate a better business climate for urban growth. While entrepreneurs suggested that a pro-growth regime should not be augmented or inhibited, others countered that such a strategy actually "organizes inequalities among jurisdictions and their residents" (Logan and Molotch 1987, p. 15). Pro-growth opponents noted that the underside of "quality of life" campaigns was increased police brutality and social control (Sites 2003, p. 60). Recent histories of police violence in New York City dedicate considerable attention to Giuliani's aggressive policing approach aimed at countless elements of urban life (Johnson 2003). The litany of complaints is not short, yet the former Mayor's pro-growth and social control model of urban governance has been emulated across the country—most recently in Los Angeles—and even in Mexico City

(Lipton 2004). These get tough policies have only continued with Mayor Bloomberg (Murphy, 2006). In response, a new cohort of political actors has utilized countless forms of creative play to challenge these policies.

A History of Opposition

Throughout the 1990s, there remained significant opposition to supporters the hyper-control and redevelopment of urban space**.** As John Logan and Harvey Molotch note, "Much of our work tries to show how much activism is a force in cities" (Logan and Molotch 1987, p. 11). A core theme of this study is the competing narratives involved in the struggle over urban public space in New York City during the "quality of life" years. Despite its inherent contradictions and inequities, the city remains a space of countless possibilities. When Mayor Giuliani's draconian approach toward broken windows and zero-tolerance policing resulted in 99 bullets in the body of an unarmed African immigrant, Amadou Diallo, the incident united New Yorkers in protest against this aggressive stance (McArdle and Erzen 2001).

Countless actors have successfully thwarted elements of the pro-growth machine, even when they have been cloaked within the politics of fear. Despite increasing rents and social inequalities, community activists have created counter-narratives to the "quality of life" campaign. They did this by advancing compelling and workable alternative strategies that preserved public spaces for services and community building. Political actors made use of a new series of innovative strategies, including creative protest and play. (A conceptual elaboration of the use of creative play is detailed in the literature review.) Faced with an environment of panic, many activists looked to the

politics of play, creativity, and joy. The following section further elaborates on pertinent concepts used in this study.

B) Concepts and Key Terms

A Continuum of Play

As stated earlier in this overview, the list of terms and concepts for play extend for pages in the *Oxford English Dictionary*. Many of the concepts overlap, while others do not. Just because a production is a play, does not mean that it is presented in a light and playful spirit. Nonetheless, it may still have dramatic merit. The verb "to play" is the operative function for expressions related to games, such as "ball" or "Russian Roulette." Given that this study involves the exploratory stages of understanding play in social movements, it incorporates both meanings of the noun "play" as a theatrical production, as well as light, sometimes frivolous, sometimes subversive action. "The layers of meaning of "play" also are part of the intricacies behind ideas of truth and illusion, between appearances and reality, what is play and what is for real," Nardi writes (forthcoming). "Let's avoid thinking about "play" as something not serious. Playing requires an active agency and the creative use of our sociological imagination."

This study does not make a hard and fast distinction between the verb "to play"' and the noun "play." Rather, the study suggests there is a continuum of how organizing strategy can be orchestrated, ranging from presentation, to dramatic acts, to theater, to tactical events with flair, to guerilla plays with and humor or outrageous acts, to non-playful confrontation.

Rather than differentiate between play as noun or verb, the study limits itself to ten basic dynamics of play as they relate to social movement activity. These terms incorporate the evolving understanding of the use of play in social movements, which will be further highlighted in the literature review to follow. A realization of the use of play as political prank began with the Situationists and the Yippies in the 1960s. By the 1970s, an understanding of the political possibilities of play as a vehicle for pleasure and personal freedom became a cornerstone of movements for sexual freedom. At the same time, play functioned as way of understanding a struggle for leisure time as opposed to traditional work with the labor movement. With ACT UP, notions of play as both guerilla theatre and as affect, camp, and pleasure became cornerstones of the group's work. Many of these conceptions overlapped by the time the global justice "movement of movements" picked up steam in the 1990s. Here, play evolved into an understanding of a wide range of movement strategies – including social and cultural activity, creative and disruptive engagement, "hard" fun and game playing, carnival and community building, storytelling and struggles – as forms of democracy renewal. The new activism borrowed from countless previous movements and theoretical conceptions to come to these understandings.

On Playing — Theoretically

"All play means something," explains Huizinga (1950/2004, p. 117). While it may not be everything in social movements, a playful spirit helps. Weissman (1990, p. xxi) suggests that the mere act of imagining alternative visions of the world witnessed in movement activity offers important clues for social work organization and practice.

Social movements and movement organizations promote adaptability and innovation in the profession. Playing gets us out of our theoretical ruts. While creative social workers can still find themselves stifled in organizations that fail to appreciate their ideas, play nevertheless helps social actors to move beyond conceptual cul-de-sacs.

George Bernard Shaw once observed, “Life does not cease to be funny when people die, any more than it ceases to be serious when people laugh.” Similarly, play is not always recognized or appreciated. Huizinga (1950/2004, p. 120) notes that while in Shakespeare’s day “[i]t was the fashion to liken the world to a stage” on which everyone plays a part, that did not mean that the play element in culture has often been openly acknowledged as a central part of public life. Yet whether acknowledged or not, play involves creating, experimenting, and finding ways of reconsidering intractable problems. Henry Bial writes, “To play is to do something that is neither ‘serious’ nor ‘real.’ Yet play is nonetheless important, for it demands risks and promises rewards that may have consequences for our everyday lives” (2004, p. 115). An essential element of play is its use as a route outside of “everyday experience, if only for a moment.” Here, actors are free to “observe a different set of rules.”

Given its liberatory character, spaces where spontaneous play occurs are often highly contested and regulated. Some types of play, such as organized sports, are highly ceremonial. On the other hand, “Play may involve an erosion or inversion of social status (as in the Trinidad Carnival)” (Bial 2004, p. 115). For this reason, authorities often seek to close spaces where improvised play takes place, such as Falun Gong practitioners’ spontaneous appearances for breathing exercises in China (Hongzhi 2001). Such play has

been known to invert social hierarchies. This is where these activities find their subversive social movement character.

This study differentiates a number of elements of protest and play as they relate to movements aimed at social change. The first is social and cultural play, where culture is the dependent variable to be manipulated. This includes themes of play as performance, and involves the creative use of different kinds of stages for various aspects of social and political performance – Shakespeare's notion that "All the world's a stage." Countless performances contain some element of play (Bail 2004, p. 115).

A second type is creative and disruptive play, where elements of play offer spaces to consider different ways to improvise with inductive rather than deductive reasoning. Psychoanalyst D.W. Winnicott writes, "in playing, and perhaps only in playing, the child or adult is free to be creative" (1971, p. 53). Thus, the play space is a space where the child traverses the edges between the pleasure principle and the reality principle. Sigmund Freud frames this form of play as a series of changes in boundaries between the self and the external object (1961, p. 13-14). Here "real'' objects are incorporated into a world of "make believe" where the child has the most agency. The playground thus becomes a psychic space for creative exploration in a context of "complete freedom" (Freud 1914, p. 147-56).

"We play to explore, to learn about ourselves and the world around us," Bial explains (p. ??). In terms of activism, this includes disrupting elements of the status quo that appear to reproduce social inequalities, creative dead ends, and social log-jams. A third element, serious play, takes place when the stakes involve larger social elements such as political structures. This includes therapeutic play, which is present when the

subject of play focuses on “micro” issues involving individuals and small groups. Here, play is understood as “the rehearsal of agency over life’s barriers, while practicing and rehearsing ego mastery,” (Sutton-Smith, 1997/2004). Winnicott (1971) elaborates on the social and therapeutic implications of play: “[I]t is play that is universal, and that belongs to health; playing facilitates growth and therefore health; playing leads into group relationships.” For Winnicott, the entire clinical engagement can be viewed as “a highly specialized form of playing in the service of communication with oneself and others” (1971, p. 41).

Playful use of humor as an organizing strategy permeate many of these approaches. Here, the rules of the game shift and are transformed (Bernstein 1991; Caillois 1961, 1979). Thus, the metaphor of the games people play further permeates many of the approaches discussed.

In the following theoretical discussion, these themes emerge as they are addressed in relation to a number of distinct elements of organizing – cultural activism, creative play, performance, direct action, popular education, community building, the use of humor, and democracy renewal – all of which serve to connect participants to organizing work. The central assumption is that community building leads to a more engaged citizenry. To get there, contemporary groups use low-threshold fun and pleasure to build social eros and solidarity as they cultivate an engaging form of direct action practice. A final section will consider creative play in relation to social work practice. The aim is to conceptualize creative play as a forward-leaning approach to social work.

Practices - Cultural Play and the Joy of Protest

Social change generally accompanies changing conditions within the culture and political economy, as social arrangements considered unchangeable or "just the way things are" come to be understood as both unjust and mutable. The idea of culture can be thought of as both a set of meanings, ideas, and ways of acting, as well as a product or performance, which contains and communicates a message (Duncombe 2002). Cultural production and political economy increasingly overlap, as elements of considered political economy undergo a profound flux. Sociologist Stephen Duncombe explains: "Culture and information are now major exports of the most powerful economy in the world." The culture industry – including music, movies, software, and graphic design – is a primary U.S. export. It feedsglobal information markets and corporations. Debates about intellectual property rights – i.e., the economics of cultural production – are a major source of discussion at world trade meetings and in diplomatic relations between nations. Here, culture stops being an "add-on" to social and political conversation; in countless cases, cultural production functions as a cornerstone of capitalist production and political economy (Duncombe, 2004).

Thus, culture has become a powerful arena for activist engagement as well. Advocates, including social work pioneer Jane Addams (1910/1998, p. 238-55), have historically recognized the important role of culture in creating social change. Unfortunately, all too often cultural activism is considered an "add-on" to the task of changing the material conditions in people's lives. While social actors emphasize a model of education that relies on intellectual analysis, challenging entrenched systems of oppression requires shifts in emotional as well as intellectual attitudes. As long-time organizer Si Kahn explains, "Culture – poems, songs, paintings, murals, chants, sermons,

quilts, stories, rhythms, weavings, pots, and dances – can make such emotional and visceral breakthroughs possible" (1995, p. 575).

Creative play has long been a strategy of cultural activism. American poets and philosophers, including John Dewey, William Carlos Williams, and Walt Whitman, have long suggested that the imagination is the best source for revitalizing U.S. democracy. They envisioned a political project in which an alienated world was overwhelmed by an aesthetic activism as art and life, culture and society, become interwoven in a single democratic interplay (Beck 2001, p. 35).

In a recent example, an installation at the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art – called The Interventionists User's Manual for the Creative Disruption of Everyday Life - exhibited the intersections of creative play, cultural activism, and the new social movements (Thompson and Sholette 2004). The show highlights disruptions involving the blurring of the line between life, play, performance, and art. Here, play overlaps with aesthetic and political intervention and invasion into highly regulated public and private spaces where "business as usual" reproduces social inequality. The show highlights the work of the Situationists, the Church of Stop Shopping, and other social and political actors in their efforts to bridge the theoretical "disruption of everyday life" with the practical challenges of pulling off such pranks (De Certeau 1988; Lefebvre 1947/1991). Groups from the Situationists, to the Yippies, to ACT UP, and those within the global justice movement have aspired to bridge this praxis divide through creative, disruptive play. Many such efforts will be highlighted in this study.

Social work practitioners around the world have long made use of a form of cultural play called cultural animation (although not in the USA). By definition, this practice is understood as "operations undertaken by a person or a group of persons in order to readjust or change the human behavior or its environment in an educative and cultural frame according to well determined plans." Those involved – or "animated" – include the animator who acts and trains; the subject, who benefits from the animation; the social program, which provides a catalyst; space, which provides the frame; means, which serve as material; and pedagogical sources (HIGHER, Undated). Put simply, it can be understood as "community arts work which literally animates, or 'gives life to,' the underlying dynamic of a community. The animateur is a community artist who helps people create and celebrate their own culture" by drawing on community stories and aspirations (Reynolds 1984). Those involved in the anti-consumerism and global justice movements engage in a similar, yet more pointed form of cultural play called "culture jamming" (Lasn 1999).

Social work acknowledges that culture emerges as both a strength and a stressor for organizing groups. Many communities use culture as a CO tool – – the Chicano community's use of Mariachi bands at protests is just one example (Takaki 1993, p. 334-40). If there is an enduring image of the global justice "movement of movements," it is the proliferation of marching bands. The Infernal Noise Brigade provided the soundtrack for the 1999 "Battle of Seattle" WTO protest, New York's Rude Mechanical Orchestra regaled the crowd during the "Still We Rise Poor People's March" during the RNC protests, the Brass Liberation Orchestra jammed as San Francisco activists shut down the

financial district during the Direct Action to Stop the War actions in March 2003, and New York's Hungry March Band has accompanied many protests in recent years.

Such practices date back at least to the years before the Haymarket Affair in Chicago during the 1880s, when labor groups regularly made use of cultural activism, including theater and games, as part of their organizing (Bogad 1998). Jane Addams, who was also in Chicago at this time, utilized elements of cultural production in the Settlement House Movement from the 1890s through World War I.

Yet while play and culture have long been interwoven, their connections are rarely acknowledged. Nevertheless, "pure play is one of the main bases of civilization," as Huizinga explains (1950/2004, p.120). To this end, over the past decade activist groups such as ACT UP, Reclaim the Streets (RTS), the Hungry March Band, and countless others have made use of cultural play involving theater, music, bikes, and the arts as core parts of a new form of CO.

ACT UP

Much of the recent use of culture as an organizing strategy began with ACT UP. The group brought a sensibility – a sartorial splendor – to every action it did, and in so doing transformed the way activism was conducted. Born in 1987 after some six years of inaction by the Reagan administration in the face of an escalating AIDS epidemic in the United States and abroad, the group's first chapter started in New York City. At its peak in early 1990s, ACT UP had chapters around the world. Today, many former members of ACT UP remain at the forefront of struggles for access to anti-HIV drugs abroad, while continuing to support local struggles over the inequalities in health access in local

communities from Oakland to Philadelphia (see Phillips 2001). The story of activism from 1987 through 1999 is very much a tale about an activist landscape becoming radically revitalized.

Creative Play, Direct Action, and Activist Performance

In an essay written shortly after the Seattle WTO protests in 1999, movement activist Andrew Boyd (2002) wrote about building a movement one joke at a time. Over the next few years, a new series of groups and activist protects – including RTS, the Yes Men, RTMark, the Billionaires, and Critical Mass, among others – built on this notion. As activists, they understood that little in life does more to help folks get by than a good laugh. As such, they built on this spirit of irony, play, joy, pranks, and humor to create a new approach to political performance as cultural mobilization.

Participatory Performance as Protest

Paul Bartlett works with the Billionaires group, which lampoons the role of money in American politics. He explains: "Performance with humor can disarm fear. When we laugh, we can listen, we can learn. Our audiences are not passive; we engage them. When people participate in a play, opportunities for new perspectives and transformation emerge (quoted in Soloski 2004). To a degree, social movements and protests are essentially constructions of countless performances. To the extent that protest seeks to recreate or represent another view of reality, it becomes a performance of democracy. As Boyd and Duncombe explain: "There is a counter tradition on the Left that has long understood that all politics, at some level, is a kind of theater. This practice

continues on today" (2004, p. 39). If a protest is sterile and boring, it gets bad reviews. The aim of performative protest is to represent the idea that "another world is possible," and to do it with style. Performative approaches to activism thus play on postmodern narrative approaches to culture in an attempt to challenge and disrupt countless oppressive certainties of modern life (Irving and Young 2002, p. 19). With its emphasis on spontaneity and improvisation, protest as performance breaks through barriers to shift public opinion and create change.

Protest as performance is not entirely new. Martin Luther King was a master of this form of strategic dramaturgy. By courting violence from police while restraining themselves, activists with the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) framed stand-offs during the civil rights movement as theatrical confrontations. Acts of civil disobedience were thus framed as performances between "righteous petitioners" and an "oppressive system." Part of the strength of this immensely effective tactic was its use of performance rather than mere pronouncements. Media coverage of the SCLC's confrontations helped King generate support and compel the Kennedy administration to move (McAdam 1996, p. 343-55). While much of activist performance may function as a sort of street threater, it may not be inherently playful. Hence the paradox of play. Still, today's colorful street theatrics, full of hope for a better tomorrow, offers effective ways to meld alliances, garner media attention, and produce results.

Take New York's Reverend Billy, a theatrical character invented by Bill Talen (2003). Through his joyous, self-deprecating street persona – a preacher guilty of the sin of shopping too much – Talen has created a playful messaging device used effectively in campaigns addressing sweatshop work conditions, protecting community gardens,

preserving historic sites, and defending the First Amendment. After the Rainforest Action Network won environmental concessions from Citibank, member Ilyse Hogue specifically acknowledged the efficacy of street theater in the long campaign. She explains:

> The real action of the four-year Citigroup campaign took place on the mean streets of New York City. From a mid-town New Orleans-style funeral procession led by the infamous Reverend Billy [to other more conventional CO], it was the grit, resolve, determination, and creativity of New York City activists that made this campaign a success.

The utility of political theater involves its joyous, playful, subversive character, which challenges the powers-that-be while offering creative, workable solutions for a more sustainable world (Sanders 1995).

In *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Erving Goffman writes that the essence of the presentation of self is to make a point. The same thing takes place within social protests (Goffman 1959, p.15). The gestures of one set of participants influence other participants. Some may be movement players; others may be those whose opinion they seek to influence. Thus, social movements and protests are essentially constructions of countless performances.

One of the great traditions of political theater is the role of righteous protestor confronting a police officer. Many demonstrations are actually designed and staged for arrests. In many cases, activists hope to be dragged away by the police. The point of the spectacle is to expose the opposition's position in order to win the attention of policy-makers, generate media attention, and win support for services. Most political work involves basic ingredients of strategy-building, research, and theatrics capable of making the news and shifting public opinion. When used in coordination with tight political, legal

and media messaging, the drama of civil disobedience often surmounts impasses. The process begins with ritual and theatrics capable of breaking down entrenched power structures. In recent years, political actors have highlighted the dramaturgical elements of political action. Goffman put it simply: "when an individual appears in the presence of others, there will usually be some reason for him [or her] to mobilize his activity so that it will convey an impression to others which it is in his interests to convey" (1959, p. 4). Sometimes, it takes a business suit or a theatrical presentation to establish the conditions to get to the negotiating table.

From ACT UP's birth through the emergence of the global justice movement, guerilla theater became a staple of this playful anti-authoritarian model of organizing. In Seattle, one observer noted:

> I watched a hundred sea turtles face down riot cops, a gang of Santas stumble through a cloud of tear gas, and a burly Teamster march shoulder to shoulder with a pair of Lesbian Avengers naked…Protest has become an extreme costume ball (Boyd 2002).

In the years that followed, theater would continue to be a primary tool of political action. Yet it is essential to keep the plot lines and the spectacle of such protest fresh. Street theater is tool to do just that. George Lakey suggests that activists create "dilemma demonstrations," placing the powers-that-be in the position of either allowing the demo to succeed or exposing their own moral bankruptcy by attacking a peaceful protest (Lakey 2002). This is where Martin Luther King showed his keen knack for strategic dramaturgy. By successfully courting violence from police while restraining themselves, the SCLC framed confrontations during the Civil Rights movement as dramatic

confrontations between a peaceful movement and a corrupt system (McAdam 1996, p.343-9).

Play, Carnival, and Community Building

Yet a number of other dynamics are also involved. Before moving onto the final section of this proposal, it is useful to consider a final form of postmodern political performance: the use of protest as carnival . The concept is a core component of Russian anti-formalist critic Mikhail Bakhtin's work, as he uses it to consider issues of empowerment and social justice, knowledge construction for practice, and the embrace of justice (Irving and Young 2002, p. 20). "Carnival is not a spectacle seen by the people; they live in it, and everyone participates because its very idea embraces all the people," explains Bakhtin (1984, p. 7). Thus, the carnival offers the possibility for liberating the "lower orders" of society. Social boundaries are lost in a "joyous, outrageously humorous demonstration" (Bogad 2005b). This concept integrates all the themes outlined so far: the liberatory nature of humor, culture, and the possibilities of theater. Further, by breaking down power hierarchies, carnival helps actors dream of and act on a more equitable brand of democracy than standard forms of political participation:

> Carnival is a sustained protest against the monologic misrule of officialdom and it means to transgress and transform canonical orders of truth, rupture established hegemonies... Carnival is a nonviolent form of social transformation as it breaks and reverses established orders of power (Irving and Young 2002, p. 25).

The carnival model of protest begins with recognition of the possibilities of pleasure. In *The Production of Space*, Henri Lefebvre specifically highlights a place for "play, struggle, art, festival—in short eros" as "necessit[ies]" within struggles for social change (1991, p. 177). These forms of transgression cultivate an energy that creates new

kinds of spaces and social relations. In contrast to models of scarcity, this approach assumes that violations of social norms create new forms of space. As Lefebvre explains, "A productive squandering of energy is not a contradiction in terms: an expenditure of energy may be deemed 'productive' so long as some change, no matter how small, is thereby effected in the world" (p. ??).

Much of the utility of play as a community-building strategy involves its capacity to create open spaces where new sets of rules and social relations emerge. Huizinga suggests that countless human activities are organized like games. Play that is competitive, goal orientated, and orchestrated takes place in closed, occupied space, whereas cooperative, improvisational, and open-ended play takes place in open space (Bial 2004, p. 115). Bogad (2005a) breaks down political performance into contrasting frameworks: monological ("occupied/closed space") and dialogical ("open space") public protest. The difference between these two approaches highlights the contrast between what Victor Turner differentiates as authentic, transformative ritual, in which social change is possible, and status quo-reinforcing ceremony, which is repeated without shifting power relations. In terms of practice, the problem with occupied spaces is that closed minds usually inhabit them. As Weissman explains, "An oppressive environment lowers the odds on the gestation of creativity and innovation" (1990, p. 252). In contrast, open-space models cultivate "Do-It-Yourself creativity." The paradox of play involves its use in both contexts – open and closed space. What remains consistent is the capacity of play to help those involved build community in all its various forms (Huizinga 1950, p. 12).

By dismantling power imbalances, the organizing model of the carnival offers alternate strategies for working with diverse communities, allowing everyday actors to become leaders by their mere participation. Instead of relying on speakers to preach to the converted ("Hey, Hey, Ho, Ho!"), carnival creates a space for participants to design interactions of their own invention. It's a space where everyone involved communes in the celebration of difference as diversity and democracy intermingle in an image of what our world could look like (Bakhtin 1984, p. 122; Irving and Young 2002, p. 25-7). And in the process, the carnival attracts audiences.

Professional social advocates could do well to consider the performative aesthetics of social change. Perhaps the best way to speak to Doug McAdam's multiple publics is to cultivate a far more joyous brand of protest, one with a sense happiness that can be seen in the faces of all those involved. We've all laughed during comedy shows or jokes. Everybody wants to be part of a party in which everyone is free to laugh. The point of joking is to punch holes in social pretensions. The liberating daring of satire, of release, is an effective part of organizing and movement work. The point of such a brand of protest is to link the optimism of activism with a feeling of possibility or rejuvenation. The festive atmosphere of a great action can be bridged with the transformative aspirations of the carnival. Beyond the status quo-reinforcing ceremony of the usual protest, the carnival creates liminal in-between spaces, the "communitas" generated within rituals capable of shifting power hierarchies (Turner 1969). When protest integrates with the model of carnival, it merges the joyous spirit of exhilarating entertainment with a political agenda aimed toward progressive political change. Within this festive theater, progressive elements of political change are linked with notions of

social renewal, moving spectators to join the fun, to become part of the concrete action of social change. Along the road, public spectacle becomes intimately linked with practical shifts in the social and material conditions of people's lives (Ornstein 1998, p. xiv-xv; 6-9). Party as protest thus becomes an invitation to possibility. As actors embrace the model of carnival as protest, what emerges is an organizing model for freedom, abundance, equality, and redemption (Irving and Young 2002, p. 25).

With its capacity to generate ritual, carnival, and community, the play element of human nature also overlaps within notions of social eros. In this respect, play can extend into areas of pleasure and experimentation, which may manifest themselves in ecstatic, creative, caring, and destructive ways (Marcuse 1955; Mains 1984/2002). Just as anarchists suggest that the power to create is also a destructive energy, the shadow of Dionysus takes many forms, sometimes dark, yet often affective (Maffesoli 1993). Orestes' adventures with the Sirens contain both such elements, as desire overlaps with Thanatos and defense against personal destruction (Aeschylus 1984). Part of the difficulty in grappling with play is that as a counterpoint to the linear logic of Apollo the play spirit embraces a different way of being than that experienced within rational thinking (Nietzsche 1967).

Yet this is not to say that such thinking is not without reason or purpose. Within the context of irrationality, Carl Jung (1923) explains, "As I make use of this term it does not denote something contrary to reason, but something outside the providence of reason, whose essence therefore is not established by reason." What emerges then with play is a way of being which functions outside of parameters, "established by reason." Within such spaces, social actors encounter less inhibited ways of functioning in the world. Here

play takes on a dinstinctly liberatory, inherently subversive character. “Play can subvert the powers-that-be, as in a parody or carnival, or it can be cruel, absolute power...,” Schechner contends. (2002, p. 79). Many Gay Liberation proponents borrowed from such an ethos to help advance a movement built on the defense of pleasure, as well as the idea that the pursuit of happiness is an authentic part of the struggle for democracy. Thus, play is inherently involved with questions about participatory democracy.

Serious Play as Democracy Renewal

If there is anything essential about play, creativity, and community-building, it is that this sort of interaction sets the stage for democracy renewal. While the Billionaires have lampooned the role of money in the U.S. political process, over the past decade countless actors – from Sister of Perpetual Indulgence Sister Booms’s 1982 run for San Francisco City Council on the‘’Nun of the Above’ Party in whichj she won 23,124 votes to drag king Murray Hill, who ran against Mayor Giuliani in 1997, to drag queen Joan Jett Black, who ran for president in 1992 representing the Queer Nation Party (Highleyman, 2003; Sisters, the. Undated) have used elements of play, theater, and performance in their campaigns for political office. Their aim was less about getting elected than challenging institutional inequalities. Drag queens, anarchists, and other marginalized groups use the tools of camp, stand-up comedy, and agit-prop theater to challenge the legitimacy of their opponents. Like Weissman, Bogad (2005b) considers this ‘serious play,” author Larry Bogad explains (2005b). At the core of this play-acting is a series of experiments in democracy, the aim of which is to expand the political dialogue between spectators and actors. Thus, electoral guerilla theater becomes a tool of democracy renewal. “In play, there is something ‘at play’ which transcends the

immediate needs of life and imparts meaning to the action," Huizinga explains (1950/2004, p. 117). For our purposes, the subject in play is the state of the democracy.

The central goal of the global justice movement is to globalize democracy while slowing the encroachment of corporate globalization. The movement works from the vantage point that the American political system is deeply flawed and often undemocratic. This sentiment was only confirmed during the recount in Florida after the 2000 presidential election in which people of color were physically barred from voting. A central lesson of the fiasco was the need to find more compelling ways to make the system responsive to regular citizens (Hayduk and Mattson 2002). Given the assumption that U.S. democracy is broken at the top, many activists work from the bottom up, concentrating on forms of direct democracy within their own communities. "Direct democracy is about 'originating' ideas as much as it is about 'approving' them," explains activist Shawn Ewald (2003). The goal is to create non-hierarchical structures to break down the relationship between the leadership and the grassroots.

To this end, the global justice movement emphasizes a deeply democratic political tradition. "Play as protest" thus becomes an invitation to be part of a more inviting democracy. As actors embrace this notion, what emerges is an organizing model based on freedom, abundance, equality, and redemption (Irving and Young 2002, p. 25). Boyd and Duncombe locate themselves within the work of Bertold Brecht:

> "We pin our hopes to the sporting public," Bertolt Brecht wrote in 1926 in an essay directed to his fellow playwrights…bemoaning the fact that the masses preferred soccer matches to serious theater. Instead of whining about the general lack of taste, the radical dramaturge believed that artists could learn something useful from sporting events; the primary lesson being that people participate in what they enjoy, and unless theater was made enjoyable the people wouldn't come (Boyd and Duncombe 2004, p. 46).

The same principle must be applied to activism. Indications are that the left is finally learning this lesson. Take the League of Pissed-Off Voters, a group of youth activists, mostly of color, who have won elections from Oakland to Boston. In order to create a world with more democracy and less George Bush, they have organized a campaign that builds on Boyd and Duncombe's "put the party back in party" strategy. Adrienne Maree Brown , an organizer with the League, looks to the possibilities of pleasure and fun as an organizing principle. Her approach finds its roots in her experience in the harm reduction movement. "Some people think I've spent the last several years of my life working with raising awareness about HIV/AIDS, destigmatizing drug use, and ending overdose, but really it's about breaking down barriers to pleasure. So I'm a pleasure activist." For Brown, "Its not really about politics at all. Its about my life" (2004, p. 20).

The League aims to cultivate a sense of celebration, joy, and connection in order to bring new people, especially young voters, into the process. To do this, the group heeds Brecht's advice to borrow from the lessons of a soccer game. In their call to arms, *How to Get Stupid White Men Out of Office*, they look to Puerto Rico, where elections are treated like the World Cup. The group aims to create an emotional, inclusive party, which engages one voter at a time. As Jim Hightower explains: "Our events should feed the soul as well as the brain, and we should laugh and celebrate even as we speak the truth. As an old Yugoslavian proverb puts it: 'You can fight the gods and still have fun.'" The core understanding is that if organizing, elections, and campaigns are about anything, they are about relationship building. Thus, groups such as the League of Pissed-Off Voters build on studies suggesting that the best way to boost voter turnout is peer-to-peer organizing.

One way they do this is through connecting with "party as protest" groups. The point is really to create a prefigurative politics encompassing interaction, care, creativity, joy, and generativity. As Brown explains: "In fact, elections are important only inasmuch as they determine how we live our lives. Really, I just want folks to get along so we can all survive and, dare I say, enjoy this whole experience" (2004, p. 20).

Play in Groups — a Framework for Play as a CO Strategy

A key subtext of this study is the mechanisms of everyday social movement activity. The work seeks to highlight the best practices of movement activity that encourage experimentation, risk taking, and joy within a caring democratic process in which oppressive systems are rejected in favor of egalitarian engagement and playful creativity. Thus, a further subtext is that process counts. In *Mind, Self and Society*, social psychiatrist George Herbert Mead (1963) suggested that our sense of self emerges as a process of communication and interactions, out of which we produce meanings; thus, our sense of ourselves is constructed in process with others. Humans are meaning-creating animals. For CO to work, it must be done in an egalitarian fashion; for social movements, this means breaking down systems of imagination-crushing domination, while respecting dialogue and difference.

Building on these sentiments, the global justice movement assumes that how the movement organizes itself is as important as the results. Therefore, the emphasis is on organizing within affinity groups and loosely-coordinated "spokescouncils." This model was revitalized during the organizing efforts of the late 1960s and again with the advent of the global justice movement. Lesley Wood and Kelly Moore explain that this approach

emphasizes "intentionally nonhierarchical organizing mechanisms which date back to radical feminist, civil rights, antiracist, environmental, and anarchist movements…. These approaches to organizing are attempts to overcome histories of sectarianism, internal sexism, racism, and other forms of domination" (2002, p. 30).

The utility of this model is its informality – actors are able to experiment, create, and play with alternative possibilities. Within such spaces, activists consider different ways of playing with and manipulating data and possibilities. As Schechner explains: "Ordinary life is netted out of playing.…Work and other activities constantly feed on the underlying ground of playing, using the play mood for refreshment, energy, unusual ways of turning things around, insights, breaks, opening, and especially looseness" (quoted in Sutton-Smith 1997/2004, p. 135). A spirit of openness and willingness to learn from others presents a stark contrast to humorlessness and self-importance, which have dogged left-leaning community organizers and stifled social change movements for a generation. The lesson is that without a conscious appreciation for play, movements loose these necessary elements of refreshment, energy, and especially looseness.

When the ability to dream fades, so do possible solutions to seemingly intractable problems. Today's activism emphasizes the integration of theory and practice (Hanna and Robinson 1994, p. 42). A willingness to rely on evidence takes precedence over ideological certainty. Addams (1910/1998) always emphasized the importance of sound research, data collection, and presentation to make the case for advocacy. Her insight is just as relevant today.

Play as Narrative, Communication, and Direct Social Work Practice

Much of this preamble has discussed ways to incorporate aspects of play into community organizing and creative direct action. Direct action-based social work practice is "characterized by active resistance to existing or proposed laws or policies or living conditions…People may join together, as temporary mobilizations during a crisis or large-scale movement (such as during civil rights or anti-Vietnam war movements)" (Hanna and Robinson 1994, p. 10). Yet if people are unable to join together because of difficulties with communication, then efforts toward change are vastly compromised. In looking at the role of play in contemporary social movements, Bogad (2005b) explains: "Serious play is meant to communicate, but is also meant to inspire desire, culture, stories, group cohesion and identity formation."

When communication breaks down in interpersonal conflicts, organization usually fails (Burghardt 1982). Frankfurt School theorist Jürgen Habermas (1971) suggests that perhaps the greatest ailment of contemporary society is the failure of people to communicate with each other. Those who can play with each other do so by learning to communicate along the way. Thus, creative play also extends into the arena of group work, including the use of affinity groups discussed above, as well as clinical practice. As Winnicott notes, "playing leads into group relationships; playing can be a form of communication" (1971, p. 41). When it succeeds, the result is usually striking new forms of connection and affect. Thus, it is useful for group processes as well as one-to-one work. "[T]he process of mutual play and creativity can be an opportunity for growth for both the therapist as well as the client," Ringel (2003) explains. "It's joy to be able to communicate," one client explained after a successful therapy session. "That was the

playful part for me. That is why it felt satisfying and not just needy" (quoted in Ehrenberg 1992, p. 119).

From oral tradition to popular education, play is a cornerstone of communication. In a treatise on the history of Western attitudes toward laughter, Barry Sanders explains: "Play and language, jokes and literature – the connections may seem odd at first. But play is so basic to animals – humans and nonhumans alike – why shouldn't it inform the very foundations of communication itself?" (1995, p. 190).

Not So Funny: the Use of Humor as a Community Organizing Strategy

"Tell us what to think!" the protestor screamed to a response of "Obey" during a protests against the Bush inauguration in 2001. Whenever this group encountered Bush supporters, they screamed it again: "Tell us what to think! – Obey!" The chant disarmed most opposition as the protesters screamed about the inauguration of a president the majority of Americans had not voted for (Grote 2002). "Power, money, persuasion, supplication, persecution – these can lift a colossal humbug – push it a little – weaken it a little, century by century; but only laughter can blow it to rags and atoms at a blast," Mark Twain wrote. "Against the assault of laughter, nothing stands" (quoted in Sanders 1995).

The implications of humor can be understood in political, physical, psychological, and even epistemological terms. Authoritarians and bureaucrats usually resent all types of humor, especially cutting jokes. Political humor's strength stems from its subversive character, which represents the world in a comic mirror, distorting the powers-that-be by turning them upside-down. In so doing, these jokes elevate the bottom end of the social

hierarchy while debasing the top. Along the road, this topsy-turvy lens offers a glimpse of the arbitrariness of "business as usual" (Ornstein 1998). "Accounting is always truthful," we're told, even when major campaign contributors to the president cook their books while lecturing on "family values" and business ethics. The Enron scandal and the double morality it represented offered an unending series of jokes. Political jokes generally fall within "pie in the face" or "sad but true" groupings of humor. All societies have their touchy areas that everybody keeps quiet about – e.g., "Ritalin is good, but marijuana is bad for kids." Humor does an end-run around this subtle censorship (Bogata 2000).

The physiological benefits of humor are profound. Laughing causes secretion of endorphins, which decrease pain, muscle tension, and blood pressure, allowing people to relax and feel better. Laughing also increases respiratory activity, alertness, memory, and creativity. Further, by providing an emotional release that lightens heavy moments, laughter serves as a coping mechanism for those with few other resources. And for those with difficult jobs, it reduces burnout by lightening brutal reality, offering relief and space to breathe (Diffley 2000).

In terms of political efficacy and experimentation, humor creates spaces for actors to reconsider seemingly intractable problems (Diffley 2000). Mikhail Bakhtin explains: "Laughter demolishes fear and piety before an object, before a world, making it an object of familiar contact and thus clearing the ground for an absolutely free investigation of it. Laughter is a vital factor in laying down that prerequisite for fearlessness" (1981, p.23). Once one stops being afraid of a problem, one becomes free to assess and deconstruct it. From here, social problems lose their intransigent power. The freedom to experiment

with alternative interpretations usually accompanies the space to joke about serious issues.

Humor suggests that the world does not have to be accepted at face value. By transforming seemingly intractable rules into manageable challenges, humor creates a fluidity where stark reality once loomed (Sanders 1995, p.16). Social movements are born though just this sort of shift in the ways people consider social problems. When people start viewing negative circumstances as due to injustice instead of ill fate, they are taking the first steps toward shifting long-standing social problems into changeable entities. That's when people start organizing (Snow et al 1986, p. 464-468).

Humor can work as a surprisingly effective tool when engaging with public officials and the media. Jesters carry no weapons; thus they apparently offer less of a threat to the powers-that-be. These light-handed approaches get the audience's attention in ways that "dangerous" political agitators rarely accomplish. By serving as comics instead of lobbyists, jesters maintain face-time after others have been shooed away. For advocates, humility is often more effective than self-righteousness. When gardeners converged on New York City Hall in their campaign to save community gardens from 1999 to 2002, the media delighted in the idea of lobbyists dressed as giant sunflowers and tomatoes. The stories and public pressure mounted, and a usually obstinate mayor became willing to cut a deal. The result was a compromise. How could you resist the demands of a giant papaya? When asked why he imposed a temporary restraining order against bulldozing community gardens in 2000, New York Attorney General Elliot Spitzer responded, "because a giant tomato asked me to do it."

C) Theory – Discourse and the Public Sphere

The theoretical frame used to explain the findings for this study involves the interplay between three overlapping theoretical models: discourse, public sphere, and narrative theory of social movements.

Discourse and Narrative Theory

Many of the subjects of the current study are activists from highly charged, stigmatized groups, including drug users, sex workers, anarchists, and promiscuous queers. These activists have sought to shift the social and symbolic views of their acts, such as drug use, sex work, and direct action, which constitute the work of their lives. French structuralist philosopher Michel Foucault described the social, professional, and linguistic construction of such symbols as "discourses." By discourse, he referred to a linkage of symbolic representations and a series of social actions and actors. Their interaction produces social meanings embodied by cultural "objects" (Zukin 1995[,). These interactions can be recognized through narratives that contain dueling definitions, understandings, and social meanings. Discourse and narrative theory overlap in countless ways. The aim of social movements is to take an active rather than a passive role in the construction of social discourse and meaning creation.

Discourse theory recognizes that social problems are formed within a series completing claims, counterclaims, and intersecting narratives (Treichler 1988). The study of discourses is a familiar method in social work research (see Chambon 1994; Nye 1994; Sherman 1994; Siporin 1994). Studies that consider urban spaces as locations for processes of identity construction, meaning production, and fragmentation underscore the

centrality of discourses of urban life. Here, urban space takes on countless diverging representational forms (city as text), produced by subjectivities including race, sex, and gender identities. These differences become the subject of policy debate (Mele 2000, p. 312). Studies of discourse offer means to assess patterns of representations of marginal groups as "inferior, ignorant, deviant, mentally and/or morally deficient…"; these representations have countless impacts on public policy (Daniel 2000, p. 66). In this fashion, members of the "counter-public sphere" of outsider groups are discursively and politically marginalized. In response, activists make use of countless protest strategies to re-emerge into thediscourse taking place within the public sphere.

Public Sphere Theory

Nancy Fraser (1989) first outlined the term "counter-publics" as a way to assess the interplay between those included and excluded from the formal public sphere of democratic political participation, or civil society. Jamie Own Daniels contends that the public sphere does not seek to formally exclude marginal groups, such as anarchists, queers, and drug users, at the level of discourse. Rather, it aims to disqualify their life experience and the counter-publics to which they belong as less than meaningful. Thus, it uses narrative means to wage ideological war against those it deems less than worthy, by preventing their stories from finding a place in public discourse (Daniels 2000, p. 72-3).

Scholars refer to such one-sided telling of stories as forms of media panics (Cohen 2002, p. xvii). For conservatives, anarchists, queers, and drug users undermine traditional moral authority. Thus, their voices do not belong in public discourse. Liberals, on the other hand, suggest that media exaggerate the risks presented by the lives of outsiders in order

to create support for increased crime controls. For Stuart Hall, these panics reflect the interests of social and economic elites. Thus, they legitimize increasingly aggressive law-and-order policing policies and displacement patterns. The significance of panics – whether transmitted through the media or other social discourses. – involves the ways they reproduce dominant ideologies (Cohen 2002, p. xxix). These ideologies compete through printed and broadcast media in the public sphere. Much of this study deals with marginalized groups – such as queers, people with HIV/AIDS, and anarchists. Thus, it makes use of a public sphere theoretical framework for considering the ways activists claim a place for themselves in public discourse.

Frankfurt School sociologist Jürgen Habermas first coined the term "public sphere" in his 1962 work, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*. By "public sphere," he meant a place in our social life "in which something approaching public opinion can be formed. Access is guaranteed to all citizens. A portion of the public sphere comes into being in every conversation in which private individuals assemble to form a public body" (Habermas, 1964). Still, various barriers – including class and economic positioning – present significant obstacles to entry. Habermas' public sphere is a vision of a civil society in which public space supports critical debate rooted in democratic political institutions. Today, Habermas' conception has become a foundational basis for assessing everything from intellectual civility and "public access" criticism, to the functions of race, gender, sexual difference, and the dimensions of the welfare state. The work's core point is that democracy should be understood as a question of access to public space and debate.

For a study of social movements, public sphere theory is especially useful. In *Democracy in America*, Alexis De Tocqueville wrote that American democracy thrives as a combination of three forces: government, civil society, and the market. Civil society functions as a place for citizens to meet to discuss problems and create solutions. It functions as an intermediary between the government and the market. When any one of these is lost, democracy is jeopardized. Public sphere theory assumes that the public sphere operates as a form of civil society. Thus, a thriving public sphere in which diverse voices thrive becomes a harbinger of a successful democracy. Activists seek to inject different points of view, different voices from subaltern counter-publics, into larger policy debates. For example, queer theorist Michael Warner (2002) suggests that tensions over queer life, family, and public sexual culture can be understood as a struggle between a dominant mainstream public sphere and a radical subaltern public:

> The bourgeois public sphere consists of private persons whose identity is formed in the privacy of the conjugal domestic family and who enter into rational-critical debate around matters common to all by bracketing their embodiment and status. Counter-publics of sexuality and gender, on the other hand, are scenes of association and identity that transform the private lives they mediate.

Thus, for Warner, debates about public sexual culture function as contests over the nature of pluralistic democracy.

Narrative Perspectives of Social Movements

Countless reports have considered the relationship between contested spaces and democratic participation (Deutsche 1996; Smith 1996). A central goal of American social movements – from temperance, abolition, and suffrage to feminism, civil rights, and queer/AIDS activism – involves redefining norms of public and private space (Warner

2002, p. 31). Social movements can be understood as cultural movements underscored by discursive practices (Fine 1995, p. 127-44). The theory of narrative has long been considered a useful approach for considering the ways groups of people make sense of their lives and cultures (Fook 2002; Holland, et al. 1998). The present study builds on an increasing recognition of the interplay between theories of narrative and social movements (Fine 1995; Nepstad 2002; Reissman 1993). Striking cultural tales often propel social movements, creating spaces that allow actors to locate and construct new identities (Somers 1994, p. 613-4).

The intermingling of competing storylines around the use of public space involves an essentially democratic exchange. This process is reflected in discourses, and witnessed in anything from magazines to newspapers to political rallies. These stories offer a route toward political representation and vitality. Through these stories, individual voices often find themselves within public debate. As social theorist Marshall Berman (2002, p. 5) explains, "Life stories were a crucial force in the culture of the New Deal and the Popular Front, a culture that insisted that every ordinary person's life had meaning and power."

The way spaces and policies are described, or storied, has everything to do with how we understand their uses. In *Policy Paradox: The Art of Political Decision Making*, Deborah Stone outlines the ways stories are used as mechanisms of political strategy. "Policy makers as well as interest groups often create problems as a context for the actions they want to take," (2002, p. 162). While there certainly may be objective issues that cause harm in communities, these actors "represent the world in such a way as to make themselves, their skills, and their favorite course of action necessary" (p. 162).

Finally, in a postmodern world, the study of discourse and narrative could not be more important epistemologically. Max Weber has written that once feelings of connection with god are abstracted and uncertain, much of life's meaning is lost. In the wake of this un[?]certainty, social meanings are found in personal narratives that contain hints to how social actors look at the world (Cohler 1982). Philosopher Richard Rorty (1979) has demonstrated how questions of knowing in the second half of the 20th century have shifted from notions of truth to notions of significance and meaning. Neither science (see Kuhn 1962) nor theology are outside the influence of cultural bias or interpretation. No one has a monopoly on the truth. Instead, we have stories to help us interpret and create meaning within a rapidly changing world (Howard 1991; Bruner 1990; McAdams 1985). This study will consider stories of how social actors create meaning for themselves through play and community building.

Much of the investigation emphasize the narrative perspectives of activists who make use of radical play to resist social controls (Spence 1982). Building on social standpoint theory (Hartmann 1992; Harstock 1998), this study emphasizes stories that represent the reality of counter-publics and their interplay with larger dominant public spheres (Warner 2002). Increasingly, analysis of narrative has become a critical tool for social science research. Two reasons explain this methodological development. "The first has to do with the role narrative plays in constructing identities and enabling social action," Jacobs explains. Narratives allow individuals, groups, and communities to understand their lives in terms of stories, plots that have beginnings, middles, and ends; heroes, epiphanies, and denouements; dramatic, comic, and tragic forms. Countless studies suggest that social actions and identities are guided by narrative understandings.

Furthermore, by connecting self narratives, individuals can identify with such “imagined communities” as class, gender, ethnicity, and nation (Jacobs 2000, p.8).

Another useful feature of narrative is that it enables the analyst to consider the significance of events. Theories of civil society often fail to consider either the significance of events or the ways these events are linked within a story or plot, and what determines their inclusion in or exclusion from a particular narrative. In this respect, events can have significant consequences for social identity and action. Some events “demand” narration. These have the power to disrupt prevailing systems of belief and to change events in the past, present, and future. Other events get called up from the past, pointing to a foundational point of origin. The point is that events do not have a unitary causal meaning; they contain multiple plot structures, multiple narrative antecedents, and multiple narrative consequences. The same event can be narrated in countless different ways and within a number of different public spheres. These competing narratives influence how individuals and communities make sense of social experiences (Jacobs 2000, p. 8-9).

Today, global media collapses the circumstances in which people experience their lives and the dramatic circumstances that seem to require narration. Thus, they depend on the possibility of a public sphere in which they can aspire to participate (Jacobs 2000, p. 9). Mair suggests that, "We inhabit the great stories of our culture. We live through stories. We are lived by the stories of our race and place" (1988, p. 127). Whole communities exist within such stories (Plummer 1995). People organize around stories. They also listen to each other’s stories. This gives the teller a sense of purpose, meaning, and community. While many people do not feel they have time to go to a café after work

to participate in a public sphere, as Habermas envisioned, there are times – such as periodic crises – when citizens come together to ask, "Who are we?" Crises are among the central circumstances that demand narration. Events such as the fall of the Berlin Wall, the Los Angeles Rodney King riots, the 9/11 terrorist attacks, or radical shifts in the social or political landscapes mark such moments of crisis. Such crises become media events, with expert witnesses and news outlets all polling and interviewing the players involved (Jacobs 2000, p. 9).

Ronald Jacobs' study of public sphere communication during times of crisis focuses on three structural components of cultural narratives. The first is plot, which is concerned with selection, evaluation, and attribution of different statuses to events. A narrative's plot is fluid and complex; it can linger on an event, flash back to the past, or flash forward to future events.

A second feature is "character," depiction in both the narrative and in relationship to other protagonists and stakeholders. Analysis of characters is particularly significant for nonfiction because the narrators are often the same as the characters in the plot. Narrative structures often feature binary oppositions in terms of character. This oppositional discourse is often deployed as a means for one group to "purify" themselves while "polluting" opposing stakeholders. To buttress their own position as heroic "moral guardians," actors must decree that opposing stakeholders are dangerous, antiheroic, and corrosive to the status quo. Thus, political enemies are depicted as irrational; by contrast, the narrators describe themselves and their supporters as rational and reasoned. The projects and policies of political enemies are viewed as perverse and futile, while those of friends and allies are seen as mutually supportive and progressive. Over time, these

identifications of similarity and difference develop into cultural structures based on binary oppositions – good and evil, worthy and unworthy – resulting in a mutually reinforcing system of civil society discourse. Groups that find themselves continually polluted in a given newspaper's narratives, for example, are thus put in a position to continually operate from a defensive position.

The third analytic tool for narrative analysis is genre. This tool provides links between characters, events, and narratives; in addition, it influences the relationship between players, audience, and narrators. Four "archetypes" of narrative are comedy, tragedy, romance, and irony. Yet there are also many subgenres and plots. The different genres used to explain events tell a great deal about how a story will be scripted and received. Within the context of the public sphere of newspapers, television, internet and public opinion, stories emerge through a series of competing narratives, with different storytellers vying for a winning script. Creative protest and play offers activists a useful means of entry into these competing plotlines, allowing them to find their way into the public sphere (Jacobs 2000, p. 9-12).

III D) Relationship of the Study to Social Work Practice, Policy, and Research

The Goal of Social Work and a New Community-Based Approach

The promise of social work is to facilitate the development of communities of happy, engaged, healthy, and materially satisfied people, who feel mutual commitment to each other. Over the past hundred years, social workers have sought to achieve these goals in a variety of ways, from lobbying to community organizing to program

development. All too often, however, the most well-intentioned programs and policies have failed to produce the kinds of communities that social workers strive for. Among the most important and powerful solutions to this problem is the development of community-based programs that integrate clients into their design and practice. Drawing on some of the lessons of community organizing, practitioners build on the (sometimes fragmented) communities that already exist, capturing the skills and energy of participants to build new relationships and practices. If isolation, alienation, and the rejection of community-based approaches to social problems is what ails social work practice in general (Specht and Courtney 1994), then elements of creative play and joyful participation cultivate the networks that allow actors to engage in new forms of community organizing. The present study considers the ways in which social work clients and professionals can get involved with a range of engaging community practices.

Without this creativity, reform efforts are too often doomed to flounder. After all, many of the great social movements of the 20th century witnessed efforts aimed at reformation of existing government structures with a goal of making them more humanistic. Over and over again, reformers took over flawed structures only to reoccupy and replicate similar structures of power. And few if any of these efforts were successful. In many cases, they left legacies of betrayal and disaster for those who sacrificed everything to create a better world. Rather than replicate old structures of power, the new movements honor a spirit of creative experimentation in which openness and respect for difference is a given. As organizer David Solnit notes, “Unless positive new ideas and methods are more clearly articulated and widely explored, people and movements

striving for a better world will remain trapped in the failed models of the past" (2004, p. xiv)

How the Study Attempts to Build on a Revitalization of Social Work

This study is intended to nurture this new kind of social work. It does so by assessing the theoretical and practical applications of what I call "creative play" for engaging citizens, organizing communities, sustaining campaigns, and running innovative programs. Creative play includes the joyful engagement in exploratory theater, art, storytelling, dancing, music, and popular education. Over the past two decades, creative play has become an integral part of a number of political movements, including those organized around AIDS, global justice, and community control over public space. The goal of the dissertation is explore how participants in these movements use creative play and understand its strengths and limitations, in order to develop theoretical and practical applications for community building in social work.

Movement approaches to creative protest and play offer tools for social workers to take the air out of efforts to isolate and to maintain social control. Approaches to creative protest and play acknowledge the need for joy, pleasure, and fun. Such approaches connect social workers to movements for social and economic justice, while addressing the broader movement and policy publics.

Social Work Issues: What's Wrong and What's Right?

Personal behavior is heavily policed in the current political milieu; these politics directly affect social work clients, who are discouraged from political participation due to

their personal histories with sex, drugs, or the criminal justice system. While social welfare policy was dominated by ideologies of liberalism from the New Deal through much of the Cold War, current policies – which call for physical and social control of those on public assistance – are supported by neoconservative ideology (Mullaly 1993). Under these conditions, social work programs insist on endless monitoring and punishment schemes as means of "reforming" an individual until he or she is ready to re-enter a presumably healthier community. It follows, of course, that such monitoring and punishment systems provide clients with no sense of their own resources or their possibilities for contributions to a community.

As an alternative to punitive approaches that treat clients as moral failures in need of constant monitoring, there is another approach to social work that sees clients as engaged social actors. Rather than reforming individuals through punishment and monitoring, the idea behind this other approach is that social workers and clients can co-produce moments of creative, enjoyable, play that can help them participate in broader social movements.

This alternative approach, or model, will be the subject of this study. It will address creative protest and play through a number of distinct elements of organizing – cultural activism, creative play, performance, direct action, popular education, community building, humor as an organizing strategy, and democracy renewal – to connect participants to organizing work. Such an approach offers tools for social workers to social control and isolation. Approaches to creative protest and play acknowledge, rather than denigrate, the need for pleasure and fun.

Within this model, play becomes a metaphor for a healthy form of creativity and exchange. “The play is the thing” Hamlet used to tap the conscience of the king. Play is not without its limitations for a culture that emphasizes outcomes and the bottom line. Yet the paradoxes of play are what make it so essential for social workers struggling with the somber dialectics of social work practice in late capitalism. In 1926, Jane Addams warned of the pitfalls of social work practice framed “too steadily from a business point of view” (quoted in Franklin 1986, p. 518). Her point was that social workers need not be so limited by professionalism that it restricts the tools they use to make democracy more responsive to the needs of the poor and marginalized.

Still, the ideas of play and social work sometimes appear contradictory. Walt Whitman once wrote, “I shall use the words America and democracy as convertible terms.” These two terms may sometimes be contradictory as well. But their source bears an important lesson about play and community building. Think of poetry – it could not be less important, or more meaningful. As a source for reinvention, the play of social work would involve a similar spirit.

IV Literature Review

History

The study of play in social movements opens up any number of questions about social and cultural change. When considered historically, the question becomes even more vexing. Did the Commedia dell’ Arte zanies prefigure the French Revolution (Grantham 2001)? It is difficult to say. Yet surely enough, when Richard Schechner conceptualizes play as an “eruption of liberty” (2002, p. 79), it is not a stretch to imagine Liberty with her breast bared waving a tricolor banner during the French Revolution. But

this does not answer the question, what is the relationship between play and social movement activity? Is storming the Bastille play? It depends on whom you ask. In *Sentimental Education*, Gustave Flaubert (1869/2000) writes about the students who participated in the revolution. To him, their individual motives appeared anything but pure. For the poor, the revolution seemed to be about a response to desperation. For others, including the students, the motivation was anything but simple or consistently heroic. This anti-heroic impulse would find many different expressions in future soical movements (Takemoto, 2003). The motivations of those involved in social movements and protests is often a combination of affect, anger, love, and maybe a bit of a desire to be a part of the carnival. Recall the interview with one of the students involved with the pro-democracy struggles in China in 1989. When asked what he wanted in Tiananmen Square, he explained, "I'm not sure, but I want more of it." The public theatre of the streets, as well as Dario Fo's embrace of the 'grotesque' and Charles Ludlum's 'theatre of the ridiculous' included many such moments (Kaufman, 2002; Mitchell, 1999). There is something very telling about being moved by the wise food or the possibility of theatre even when one does not know why. When asked about the message of the play, 'Waiting for Goddot,' actor Bert Lahr is said to have explained something to the effect that, "I haven't the slightest idea but it sure is a hellovalot of fun!" Social change is about affect as often as it is about rational thinking. I will never forget the response of one African American student as he took to the streets during the Los Angeles riots of 1992. "It's been 400 years baby! 400 years!!!," he exclaimed as he sang and chanted with the others. The expression seemed to be a joyous release. If anything, social movement activity is about the motivation to live in a more caring, just world, where many have hoped for a

space to play. The title of this study is "If I Can't Dance." This refers to Emma Goldman's famous adage, "If I can't dance, it's not my revolution," (althouth many argue she never said it). After she was taken aside at a dance by a young comrade who told her that revolutionaries should not be seen dancing, Goldman responded:

> I did not believe that a cause which stood for a beautiful ideal, for anarchism, for release and freedom from conventions and prejudice, should demand the denial of life and joy. I insisted that our cause could not expect me to become a nun and that the movement should not be turned into a cloister. If it meant that, I did not want it (Highleyman 2004b).

Much of Goldman's philosophy was based on a broad beliefin personal freedom. For her, joy and justice intermingled, neither able to exist without the other. Today, Goldman's adage on dance and revolution provides the underpinnings for the street party-style protest of Reclaim the Streets and the global justice "movement of movements" to create a far more colorful public sphere (Duncombe 2002; 2002A; Jordan 1998). As such, the study will consider the history and current use of creative protest and play in community organizing.

There is a long tradition on the left of using creative protest and play to engage other participants and create new spaces for political engagement. Take the labor movement for example. From the Haymarket era of the 1880s through the Wobblies' free speech battles of the first two decades of the twentieth century and the community-labor alliances witnessed around the turn of the century (Ness 2002), the labor movement has a distinguished history of using theater and the arts (Bogad 1998; Buhle and Schulman 2005; Ferrell 2001). The IWW journals *The Rebel* and *The Heatwave* from the 1960s promoted a highly creative, unorthodox brand of cultural criticism, which borrowed from popular culture as well as French surrealist imagery to promote a rambunctious style of

class-war humor. Cartoon characters such as Bugs Bunny and the Incredible Hulk were depicted as playful rebels against class exploitation. These mimeographed journals promoted a critique of everyday life rooted in poetry, jazz, a politics of pleasure, and playful provocation (Rosemont and Radcliffe 2005). Yet this theatrical tradition extends far beyond labor. From the Living Theatre's "poetic dramas" in public spaces to the San Francisco Mime Troupe and Bread and Puppet's "insurrection" theatrics dating back to the 1940s, the left has long made use of performance and guerilla theatrics (Bogad 2005B; Ornstein 1998).

Radical historian Howard Zinn recalls that throughout the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s, movement opponents constantly sought to stop activists from keeping their spirits up by singing and dancing. After a group of activists was arrested in Albany, Georgia, in 1961, one sheriff informed all those arrested, "We don't have no singin', no prayin', and no clappin' here'" (2002, p. 51). Yet for Zinn and others, these elements of culture were necessary tools to resist social controls and create a better world. Zinn always emphasized this point in his classes. In one case, he went so far as to have a student perform with his string quartet in the classroom. "I wanted the class to understand that politics is pointless if it does nothing to enhance the beauty of our lives," he said. "Political discussion can sour you. We needed some music" (p. 201).

Increasingly, elements of culture, performance, and play have become essential tools used by activists to build community, stay engaged, and prevent burnout. Throughout the past ten years, more and more new activists have begun to recognize cultural work is a vital resource for themselves and their organizations. Take Kavita Rajanna, an organizer with Empty the Shelters and Project South in Atlanta. She was

close to burnout before she brought the sustaining elements of her writing to her organzing work. “I just started thinking about the things in my life that made it possible to do the work, and I realized that it was the cultural stuff I did outside of the group. It was the poetry I wrote...the collages I made... going to hear music.” Instead of compartmentalizing politics and culture as work and play, Rajanna successfully integrated them in her into her organization (Duncombe 2004). Culture often serves as a barometer. Organizer Andrew Boyd elaborates:

> There was one sublime moment in Seattle when I realized that the wild yet focused energies in the streets could never be resolved into a folk song -- we were now part of Hip-Hop Nation. The rhythms of the chants were rougher, more percussive. The energy was fierce and playful… Something deep had shifted.)Somehow the movement had taken a Hegelian lurch forward (2002).

For Boyd, the ‘60’s offered a thesis, "We can change the world," that was opposed by the ‘80s antithesis, "What good did it all do anyway?" Assured that everything was corrupt, activists felt bitter and distrusting. Yet by the end of the 1990s, the streets of Seattle offered a synthesis as a new generation found a way to engage and joke simultaneously.

The marks of this shift can be traced in cultural reflections of how we look at the world. Sometimes culture itself creates the shift. One group in the new “movement of movements” is Reclaim the Streets (RTS). Born in London in 1995, RTS is a worldwide movement that throws street parties as both a protest against the encroachment of roads and cars into public space, and as a living example of what public space can be. Its mantra is “Public Space for the Public.” RTS conveys this message through its street parties, often styled as raves. The aim is to re-imagine public space as a place for diverse groups to dance and play together, thus building a more colorful public commons. Rather than repeat the protest model of the traditional left, RTS favors the Groucho-Marxist

approach of the Situationists and other pranksters (see Chrysler 2003). The point is to use culture, music, joking, and performance to involve people in community organizing. These practices reflect a shift organizers and researchers conceptualize as the "emotional turn" in social change practice.

Emotions in Social Change – From Rational Thinking to Emotive Play

For many years following Gustave Le Bonn's seminal 1895 study of crowd behavior and Eric Hoffer's 1951 study of political extremism (Goodwin, et al, 2001, p. 4), emotions – including playfulness – have been looked down upon in the study and practice of social movements and social change. After all, the rise of National Socialism in Germany in the 1930s and McCarthyism in the US in the 1950s provided examples of the potential dangers of elevating emotion over reason in political organizing. In the face of totalitarianism, rational approaches to organizing became an imperative. Emotions were regarded toxic after viewing with horror the Nuremberg rallies of 1933 through the lens of Leni Riefenstahl. Rather than study creativity, affect, and theatrics, scholars of social movement activity and social change instead focused their work on the study of instrumental changes, linear patterns, and rational thinking and organization.

Max Weber suggested that social advocacy needed to be based on logical thought rather than empathy or manipulation of emotions: "The more we ourselves are susceptible to such emotional reactions as anxiety, anger, ambition, envy, jealousy, love, enthusiasm, pride, vengefulness, loyalty, devotion and appetites of all sorts, and to the 'irrational' conduct which grows out of them, the more readily we can empathize with them...For the purposes of a typological scientific analysis it is convenient to treat all

irrational, affectively determined elements of behavior as factors of deviation from a conceptually pure type of rational action" (quoted in Goodwin 2001, p. 2).

Emotions are minimized within this tradition of organizing as rational action. The problem with the "rational turn" in social movement scholarship was that it failed to explain why people got involved, what excited or motivated them. Saul Alinsky suggested that there was always a place for emotions as a complement to larger, more coherent organizing strategies (Goodwin,, 2001, p. 3). Yet it was not until Antonio Gramsci that movement scholars began to question why so few people were actually involved in social change work, rather than merely considering how they were involved. Few scholars were interested in the epistemological questions of why people do or do not get involved, and what motivates social actors to stay involved in social change work (Goodwin 2004, p. 3-5). By the 1960s, this attitude began to shift. Movement scholars and activists began to rethink when and why and how activists got involved and to what end.

After all, the rational turn described by Weber was never presented as an ideal condition. His 1904-5 work, *The Protestant Work Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, reveals a deep concern about an "iron cage of despair" that accompanied modern life. Weber's writings are filled with musings about cold and unyielding prison-like capitalistic modes of production and economic life (Löwy 2002; Weber 1930/1992). Within this context, he worried about the lack of meaning in a bureaucratized, hyper-rational society (Weber 1946/1968). Still, he suggested, there are reasons to consider the paradoxes of play, frivolity, and the irrational (p. 85-6). Weber sought to assess the complex limitations as well as the necessities of a rational view of social action. While

less organized or coherent forms of thought tend to be displaced within bureaucratized societies, the craving for affect remains, even as longings are marginalized. Bureaucratization impacts countless elements of daily life, as mysticism is replaced by asceticism, sexuality is repressed, art is minimized, and charisma is inhibited. Within this context, Weber acknowledged that "the antagonism toward rationality" takes many forms (p. 1105).

Most important for this study, Weber's musings include a recognition of the eclipse of play (Sunshine 2003). Weber saw that there are many forms of work, economic activity, and training which function within large bureaucratic entities. Yet these could not replace the cultivation of coping skills that take the form of "games." Although it is "increasingly eliminated by every rationalization of life," the yearning for "the game" remains, Weber explained (p. 1105). For him, the game serves a number of purposes, including limiting economically rational action (p. 1106). Here, play helps the individual to create space, adapt, cope, and find pleasure. After all, Weber explained, "The need for 'ostentation,' glamour, and imposing splendor, for surrounding one's life with utensils which are not justified by utility but in the quest for 'beautiful things'" remains (p. 1106).

Weber was referring to "beautiful" in the Oscar Wild sense of the word (p. 1106). Weber's appreciation for Wilde's camp sensibility of play appears ahead of its time. It would be another 18 years before Susan Sontag wrote her "Notes on Camp" in 1964, and another five years before queer youth formed a Rockette-like kick-lines to resist the police during the Stonewall riots. Nevertheless, the camp sensibility Weber eludes to would prove to be a profound inspiration for movements in the years to come (Sontag 1964/2001; Carter 2004; Shepard 2005B).

Strikingly, Weber recognized that "[l]uxury in the sense of rejecting purposeful-rational control of consumption" is more than a "superfluous" aim; it is a vital "means of self assertion" (p. 1106). While there may have been room for such sentiment in the feudal era (Sunshine 2003), efforts to secure places for play would come to fruition throughout the 19th and 20th centuries. These battles included the struggle for the 40-hour work week, which offered a little room for leisure time. Here, movements that involved creating a place for play were considered a social threat (Aronowitz 1972/1992). Efforts to round off the subversive edges of the possibilities of play would remain omnipresent, as the Situationists pointed out. "A society based on organized survival can only tolerate false, spectacular forms of play," wrote Situationist theorist Raoul Vaneigem (1967/2003, p. 256).

Given its inherently unchanneled, liberatory possibilities, efforts can be witnessed from the Enlightenment through the 19th century to contain and rationalize the anarchistic contours of play, while channeling or sublimating it into far more civilized forms, as Freud (1961) describes. By the 1950s and 1960s, the Situationists recognized that the impulse to play and create art play had not been – and could not be – rendered extinct by capital and rationality (Debord 1967/1994; Vaneigem 1967/2003). The edgy and volatile character of play had been routinely marginalized, exiled to a corner of our lives that is clearly delineated as exempt from the normal rules (e.g., the art gallery, vacation, the scrum). In order for these non-exchangeable, non-rational elements to break out and become primary parts of society, the foundations that demarcate work and play would have to be dissolved, so as to no longer separate categories or delineate mere parts of our whole lives that are inseparable from the others.

The Situationists suggested that existing escape valves must be shut off so the pressure builds and the system explodes. Here, art and play move out of the realm of the gallery or playground and into the streets. The conflict between rationality and creative play establishes play as a primary site for contention in social movement activity. Building on Georg Lukacs (1971), the Situationists saw "the spectacle" as so big and all-encompassing that it colonizes every aspect of our lives – except those things that are so alive that they escape it: play, imagination, erotic desire (Debord 1967/1994). Thus, play was a site of resistance for the Situationists. "[W]ith the crisis of the spectacle, playfulness, distorted in every imaginable way, is being reborn everywhere" Vaneigem explains (1967/2003, p. 256).

One of the first Situationist papers suggested that play can take many forms, from commodity to liberatory experience. Thus, the Situationist International (1958) never called for the abolition of competitive games . Instead, the group advanced a movement built on a series of practices including pranks, jokes, and game playing aimed at provoking and creating authentic experience. Here, the object of the game is to live with desire and vitality and freedom (Sunshine, 2003).

The Situationists built on a combination of Marxist aesthetics and Frankfurt School social theory, which borrowed from the tools of psychoanalysis as much as it borrowed from theories of social change and economics (Marcuse 1955; Reich 1970). Borrowing from Weber, Vaneigem explains, "Economic necessity and play don't mix" (1967/2003, p. 256). Thus, to create a world in which creativity, authenticity, and affect are valued, the oppressive structures Weber bemoaned must be abandoned. For Vaneigem, the time to eclipse the "iron cage of despair" had arrived. "The desire to play

has returned to destroy the hierarchical society which banished it," he wrote (p.257). A spirit of play thus becomes the vehicle for a new type of society based on the premises of direct democracy and "participation" (p. 257). Such a society would require the rejection of the Weberian bureaucracy and hierarchy in favor of a world that supports self-realization and connection. "All true play involves rules and playing with rules," Vaneigem asserts before making a nod to a liberatory playground where rules become flexible toys to be embraced or rejected on a whim. "Watch children at play. They know the rules of the game, they can remember them perfectly well, but they are always breaking them, always dreaming up new ways of getting around them" (p. 258). Thus, the great contribution of Situationist thought was its profound recognition of the mechanisms of alienation that existed not just in capitalist production, but in the very ins and outs, the shopping trips, the commodities, the commercials, the magazines, and other trappings of "everyday life." (What Ever Happened to the Situationists, undated).

Work, Play, and a Critique of Everyday Mechanisms of Power

The rules the Situationists envisioned changing involved the very workings of everyday life in contemporary culture. This mode of thought can be located in the writings and life of French Marxist philosopher Henri Lefebvre, who spent the better part of his adult life as a member of the French Communist Party. In 1947, Lefebvre published his breakthrough work, *Critique of Everyday Life*. In it, he laid out a framework for an inquiry into "the creative potentiality of ideas and thought in history" (Harvey 1991, p. 428). Lefebvre suggested that, "there is a certain obscurity in the very concept of everyday life" (1947/1991, p. ??). While it is a concept that seems evident

enough, it is not easy to capture with a simple formula. "Where is it to be found? In work or in leisure? In family life and[OR?] in moments 'lived' outside of culture?" (p. 42).

For Lefebvre, the complexity of everyday life with its political tasks, its play, its intellectual work, was that the tasks of daily life – personal interests, pleasure, and money-making – have become hopelessly separated from one another (Molesworth 1998). As a result, the process of social change and activism is separated from the tasks of day-to-day living, put aside for the proverbial day to be seized. The problem was that oppressive structures overwhelmed everyday life. Thus, Lefebvre counseled that thinkers should attempt to clearly assess and articulate a difference between "fulfilling" authentic engagements, including play, and "alienating" "negative elements" (p. 42). This theme would only become more pronounced in his work in the years to come. Yet only after he was kicked out of the French Communist Party in 1956 for speaking out about the events in Hungary could he elaborate on his "critique of everyday life."

When everyone else was into psychoanalysis, ethics, and power, Lefebvre said that everyday life was the key to social knowledge. The point of his work, of course, is that everything that happens on the streets, the patterns of friendships and organizing, are the important sources for social inquiry. The daily mechanisms of power, labor, and the reproduction of everyday life are rarely disrupted. It does not matter which party is in power if they are going to use the same oppressive mechanisms to run the country. Thus, the lesson emerges that movement actors could do well to cultivate a caring process of respectful, open, democratic exchange in which oppressive systems are rejected in favor of egalitarian engagement and playful creativity. For social movements, this means,

breaking down systems of imagination and crushing domination – even within the movement.

In the years after his premature departure from the French Community Party, Lefebvre embarked on a lifetime of study of the workings of everyday life (1958/1991, 1974/1991). In so doing, he opened a new chapter in French intellectual thought. This school involved theorizing about everyday life. Writers such as Michel Maffesoli worked to build on Lefebvre's study of the constant flux of space, place, culture, and political economy and their impacts on everyday life in the West (Maffesoli 1993, 1996; Gardiner 1997). This new school also included the Surrealists, the Situationists (including Vaneigem and Guy Debord), Michel de Certeau, and Pierre Bourdieu. Maffesoli's contribution to this lineage is his application of the work of the French structuralists (Foucault 1978, 1979, 1980, 1975; Sturrock 1979; Deluze and Guattari 1983/2003) as well as the German philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche to the study of everyday life. His 1993 work, *The Shadow of Dionysus: A Contribution to the Sociology of Orgy*, locates itself within Nietzsche's study of the tension between the linear logic of Apollo and the irrational affect of Dionysus, the god of pleasure (and perhaps play). This work addresses the dialectics of inhibition and sexual play, transgression and repression. For Maffesoli, the modern era is characterized by a reductive close-ended series of these "dualisms" (Gardiner 1997).

If there is one thinker who truely grappled with the inherent tensions between work and play, politics and pleasure, it was Frankfurt School social theorist Herbert Marcuse. Borrowing from Marx, he viewed this schism as a differentiation between a "realm of necessity" and a "the realm of freedom" in which imagination, freedom and

play thrive (1969). Friedrich Schiller's letter *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* and Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Judgment* profoundly influenced Marcuse's writing on the "play influence" on culture and the transformative possibilities of art, which first emerged in his 1955 work *Eros and Civilization*, and would continue to appear in his writing for the next twenty years.

Given its position outside of the everyday, for Marcuse the realm of play can be considered as a broad social critique of labor, production, and social thought. He explains, "On the whole play is necessarily related to an Other which is its source and goal, and this Other is already preconceived as labor" (1973, p. 15). In *Eros and Civilization*, Marcuse would suggest, "The play impulse does not aim at playing 'with' something; rather it is the play of life itself, beyond want and external compulsion – the manifestation of an existence without fear and anxiety, and thus the manifestation of freedom itself" (1955, p. 187). Play can be understood as a "self-distraction, relaxing oneself, forgetting oneself and recuperating oneself" (1973, p. 15). But here, the line between work and play blurs. Thus, Lefebvre could suggest, "there can be alienation in leisure just as in work" (1947/1991, p. 42; Molesworth 1998).

Play vs. Violence

There are limits to play, and Marcuse was acutely aware of them. He notes, "Play is *unproductive* and *useless* because it cancels the repressive and exploitive traits of labor and leisure; it 'just plays' with reality" (1955, p. 195). While "just playing" with reality may have had its limits for movements aimed at changing the world, the idea would influence social movements – including the Zapatistas – for decades to come. Playing

with power can be far more appealing than overwhelming others or violating Gandhi's principle of non-violence. In contest to the violence of the Red Army Fraction (RAF) in Germany (Varon 2004), the Weather Underground (WU) in the U.S. (Ayers 2001), and other groups that assumed the right to kill for social change, non-violent play is compelling.

Non-violent play may be compelling, but this generation of activists found peaceful protest frustrating. They had witnessed peaceful protest after peaceful protest result in little but escalated warfare. For many in the antiwar movement of the 1960s and 1970s, the most appropriate emotional response was despair. In the days after Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) split during their 1969 convention, a faction known as the Weather Underground turned to an audacious – perhaps crazed – response to state hostility. For the WU, emotion justified embracing violence (Varon 2004).

Instead of creating an ethical form of refusal, both the RAF and the WU practiced a form of activism which viewed violence as a form of transcendent action (Varon, 2004). Yet for Marcuse, dialectical negation had to include an affirmative component – "a vision, however prefigurative and itself negated by prevailing 'reality,' of liberated utopian possibilities." Rather than replace one system of violence with another, Marcuse called for a form of prefigurative political engagement. "The goal, free human beings, must already be evident in the means" (quoted in Varon 2004).

By the 1980s and 1990s, a number of movement scholars and activists (Burghardt 1982; Duncombe 2002; Epstein 1991; McKay 1998; Starhawk 2001, 2002) built on this sentiment to identify an approach understood as prefigurative community organizing. Quite simply, prefigurative community building assumes that the means of organizing are

as important as the ends. Thus, egalitarian and consensus-based direct democratic approaches to social change are basic cornerstones of this work. Prefigurative organizing models owe a great deal to anarchism and the women's movement, both of which sought to limit oppressive patterns, including male chauvinism, even [or especially] in the realm of organizing. It should be emphasized that prefigurative politics often involves actually creating an image of the world activists want to live in as part of political actions. "We must be the change we want to see," Gandhi offered as an ethos for the Indian independence movement (quoted in Hudema 2004, p. 4). For many of today's activists, Gandhi's approach is considered an imperative. Stephen Duncombe describes the group Reclaim the Streets as an example of prefigurative politics:

> RTS reclaimed more than a style of protest – they popularized a model of political action wherein the protest itself is a living, breathing and *in this case, dancing*, political message By filling the streets with people freely expressing themselves, RTS not only protests what it is against, but also creates an experimental model of the culture it is for (2002, p. 347) (Emphasis mine).

Activist Starhawk defines a prefigurative model of political protest:

> This is how it works: someone has a vision that arises from a fierce and passionate love. To make it real, we must love every moment of what we do. Impermanent spirals embed themselves in asphalt, concrete, in dust. Slowly, slowly, they eat into the foundations of the structures of power. Deep transformations take time. Regeneration from decay. Si se puede! It can be done (2001).

The poetry in Starhawk's exhortation should be noted. Prefigurative community-building approaches have become increasingly popular with the Global Justice Movement. L.A. Kauffman (2004) elaborates on the idea of protest as celebration:

> Protests gain in power if they reflect the world we want to create. And I, for one, want to create a world that is full of color and life and creativity and art and music and dance. It's a celebration of life against the forces of greed and death. And it's a way of protesting that gets out of the angry shouting shrill position that you can

> get put in when you're just simply saying no. Having a carnival is a way of saying yes.

Indeed, this approach to organizing is not unfamiliar to social work scholars. Steve Burghardt has suggested that respect for process and the need for pleasure are essential elements in organizing for social change. He explains:

> While one need not emphasize "the politics of joy" it is important to take joy from politics. After all [IF?] we are trying to change the world to make it a better place in which to work and live, our vision had better encompass a personal capacity that brings part of that vision to life before it miraculously appears somewhere in the distant future (1982, p. 2).

Building on this sentiment, members of the new "movement of movements" strive to build compelling images of protest that include vital, hopeful images of social possibility, rather then mere opposition that re-articulates what many already know is wrong with the world. Many conventional activist models of protest and organizing – rallies, speeches, marches, walking in circles, screaming at buildings – have lost their efficacy (if they ever had it). . They no longer influence public opinion or threaten those in power. And they certainly do not inspire activists themselves. "Tired mechanisms of protest" is how William Etundi, a cultural activist who organizes warehouse parties with his group, Complacent Nation (complacent.org) describes them (Duncombe 2004).

Instead, many of today's organizers promote a model that invites spectators to be part of a low-threshold, highly participatory form of social change practice. "All spectators must also be performers," Hakim Bey (1994), an intellectual founder of the movements, explains. "[I]f you're shaking your body to a beat," Etundi elaborates, people want to join in the pageant. Dancing and cultural play are great ways of inviting people to be part of the process of social change. "It's through our parties and our performances that

we imagine liberation," Etundi explains (quoted in Duncombe 2004). Thus, members of Etundi's Complacent Nation, Reclaim the Streets, and other groups are interested in more than just inviting people to be part of a protest; at their best, these groups aim to draw people into the experience of creating a more compelling democracy (Duncombe 2004). Play and pleasure are core parts of this world-making project.

Another way to describe the playful prefigurative organizing practices written about by Duncombe (2002), Burghardt (1982), and Epstein (1991) is "immediatism." Hakim Bey, whose concept of the “temporary autonomous zone” (1991) is an inspiration for many in these movements, notes, "[W]e nevertheless demand of ourselves an extreme awareness of *immediacy*. A direct means of implementing this consciousness is through an appreciation of the possibilities of play, immediately (at once) & immediately (without mediation)" (2003). For Bey, "immediatism" is not so much of a movement as an awareness. "It may take the form of any kind of creative play which can be performed by two or more people, by and for themselves, face-to-face and together. In this sense it is like a game” Yet this playful creativity is difficult to limit to mere aesthetic or even political purposes: "Real art is play, and play is one of the most immediate of all experiences. Those who have cultivated the pleasure of play cannot be expected to give it up simply to make a political point" Rather, the politics of play unfolds as a way to reconsider social and personal possibilities:

> We expect that the practice of Immediatism will release within us vast storehouses of forgotten power, which will not only transform our lives through the secret realization of unmediated play, but will also inescapably well up and burst out and permeate the *other* art we create, the more public and mediated art (2003).

Thus, “immediatism” becomes a way to think about breaking down the lines between art and life, another way to introduce "creativity, imagination, play and pleasure" into political activism, as John Jordan has imagined (1998).

To summarize, this literature review has to this point described two examples of current protest structures – one based on immediate prefigurative playful creative protest and another based on conventional protest models. Yet, both seek to addresses material aims. The question is, which model is more efficient for the purpose of addressing these needs? Table 1 frames the tensions between organizing models which include a “play emphasis” and those with “no play emphasis.”

Table 1

Competing pressures of creative organizing

Prefigurative Community Building as Aim

Art and Creative Protest Conventional Protest

Structures

Play Heavy ← → Play light

Material Ends is Aim

Organizers with a "play emphasis" place a premium on creativity; those who approach organizing with little or "no play" tend to approach their work with more of a linear, functionalist ways of thinking about the task at hand. Prefigurative politics work on the assumption that it's not whether one wins or loses, but how one plays the game, while standard protest assumes that the ends justify the means. The "play emphasis" borrows from cultural work to make protest enjoyable and entry easy. Thus, Mary Poppins addage, "make maximum fun in every event" becomes a part of this work. The underlying assumption is that there is joy in changing the world. Participation in creating a better world thus carries many inherent pleasures, which may be enough to inspire active engagement even without a clear sense that outcomes are possible. Table 1 suggests that these two approaches to social change – conventional and prefigurative organizing – need not be viewed as mutually exclusive. Again, Burghardt explains:

> The attention we apply to how we practice does not imply a substitution of process over content. Economic relationships are paramount factors that affect us in our work, determining the type of choices we face daily. However, the primacy of objective conditions does not make subjective, interpersonal conditions irrelevant. We can unite our personal and subjective interactions with our attention to larger material concerns. Indeed to neglect this is often detrimental to organizing (1982, p. 3).

Political economy is often intimately interconnected with social and cultural forces. Table 2 borrows from Deborah Gould, et al's (2002) study to frame the contrasts between "play emphasis" and "no play emphasis" in organizing approaches.

Table 2

Assumptions of "play light" and "play heavy" organizing models.

Scope and theoretical assumptions of play content in social movements

Play heavy	Play light
Playful	Work-oriented
Light	Heavy
Generative	Dour
Means determine ends	Ends determine means
Consensus based decisions	Hierarchical/sectarian decision-making
Non-linear	Linear
Deductive, experimental thinking	Inductive, controlled thinking
Prefigurative community building	Long-term outcomes the goal
Gandhi, RTS, Epstein	Marx, Ramsey Clark, Lenin
Utopian vision everyday	Narrow vision in everyday
Fun	Serious
Creative cultural activism	Conventional, acultural
Pleasure-based	Ascetic, "hair shirt" left
Social Eros/solidarity	Material distance between social actors
Theatrical	Conventional
Inventive	Routine
Reciprocal emotions	Rational bureaucratic
(joy, care, solidarity, loyalty)	Weber bureaucracy
Dionysus	Apollo
Social networks, affective bonds	Professional distance
Feeling	Science
Affective	Logical
Cognitive Liberation	Inhibition to act
Inspires active engagement	Restricts interest in participation
Irrational	Rational
Feeling of possibility, emotion	Feeling minimized, imagination restricted

Historical Context for Prefigurative Playful Organizing Approaches

A different way to consider play and prefigurative organizing is historically. An example from the civil rights movement is useful. There are those, such as Derrick Bell, who suggest that many in the movement participated to gain a sense of dignity and pride, even if they didn't foresee immediate outcomes (Goodwin, et al 2001, p. 18). Within this context, a premium was placed on creative, caring, egalitarian structures and identities within an oppressive larger social structure. Anarchists describe this structure within a structure as "dual power." For the civil rights movement, public displays of emotion – care, affect, solidarity – were a central movement strategy aimed at sustaining a collective identity. Thus, students in the movement strived to maintain joy and calm even in the middle of an arrest situation (p. 23).

The global justice "movement of movements" builds on this sentiment. The point is to create more egalitarian alternative institutions than those advocated in the standard hierarchical models of social change practice. A primary ambition of the movement seems to be to get the process right, thus avoiding the slow route toward authoritarianism that overwhelmed so many 20th century social movements. Absolute power corrupts absolutely, regardless of who is in charge. Thus, Zapatista leader Subcommandante Insurgente Marcos (2004) rejects seizure of power, in favor of a different kind of political engagment based on the transformation, rather than control of power. David Solnit, a San Francisco-based carpenter and activist who played a leading role in the organization of both the Seattle World Trade Organization (WTO) protests in 1999 and the Direct Action to Stop the War (DASW) actions in 2003, elaborates: "Unless the community or

world we want is built into is reflected by the struggle to achieve it, movements will always be disappointed in their efforts…movements that are hierarchically structured themselves cannot change the antidemocratic and hierarchical structures..." (2004, p. xiv). Table 2 breaks down the elements of play which overlap with conflict between prefigurative vs. material political aims of community organizing.

Table 3 situates this creative, playful turn in organizing practices historically.

Table 3 - Creative and political streams of joy, play, and creativity in community organizing from the settlement House Movement to ACT UP.

From Settlement Houses to ACT UP – Incremental Policy Emphasis using Creativity
Settlement House Movement
Arts, housing, and democracy renewal focus.

Saul Alinsky
Emotions and rationality overlap, from Chicago "back o the yards" to TWO

Civil Rights Movement, 1960s
Dance and song as resiliency

Gay Liberation, 1960s-1970s
Women's movement/feminist politics builds on lessons of the Bluestockings, "Personal is Political," political possibilities of pleasure as a CO strategy

From Dada to the Zapatistas –	*Prefigurative Political Engagement* ➔ ACT UP
Dada, 1920s	1980s to present
Art is action: life and art make one	Intersection of art, and pleasure as resilience, use of dramaturgy in civil disobedience
Gandhi	Sex, creativity, and life against death

"We must be the change we wish to see."

Situationists, 1960s - Disrupt the spectacle

Yippies, 1960s
Use culture, theater, and play to disrupt culture

British punk rock, 1970s
Emma Goldman meets Dada

No Nukes, 1970s and 1980s

Prefigurative politics to create a healthier, more sustainable world

Reclaim the Streets, 1990s
Environmental movement meets punk rock and Dada.
Prefigurative politics embodies a do-it-yourself approach to building the world you want to live in now. Carnival, party as protest and play as a CO strategy.

Zapatists, 1990s
Means are the ends, use of arts, words as weapons, engage power rather than take it.

Global justice movement

ACT UP meets the Zapatistas as joy meets creativity in CO

Pranks, Culture Jamming, Detourne, and Derive

Further elaboration on some of the history and assumptions is useful to make sense of the playful turn in cultural activism. From Abbie Hoffman's Yippies through today's pranksters, culture jammers and hacktivists (Critical Art Ensemble 1994; Shepard 2002), countless groups have made use of creative playful approaches to targeting political opponents and advocating for a more aesthetic image of the world in which they hope to live (Boyd 1999). Much of the roots of this work can be located in the topsey turvey experimentation of Michel Duchamp, the Dada movement, the Surrealists, Bertholt Brecht's theater, and the liberatory gender play witnessed in the Berlin cabarets of Weimar Era Germany (Kaes, et al. 1994, p. 474-99, 530-49). The Situationists specifically located their project within this milieu. Like many who would follow, the group recognized the liberatory potential of the intersection between art and play, which was so central to the Dada struggle. "It was in fact from art that play broke free. The eruption was called Dada," Vaneigem explains (1967/2003, p. 257) "The Dadaist events

awoke the primitive-irrational play instinct which had been held down in it audience," said Hugo Ball (quoted in Vaneigem, p. 257).

A few words about the milieu in which Dada was born are instructive. Within the disillusionment of post-WWI Germany, religion was thought to be on its deathbed; a progressive view of history had collapsed in the trenches; science had ceased to be viewed as a source of values; humanity was thought to be in its last days. Having inherited a dying world, the modernists sought to invent their own true world within the disillusionment and valuelessness of the old. What followed was a Dionysian yes, an amor fati (Interdepartmental 383 1991).

Previous understandings about the way the world worked, the way the universe was conceived, what constituted science shifted from notions of certainty toward the view that truth and reality depended on the perspective of the observing object (Heisenberg, 1958). Lights bends; reality and science shifted from notions of truth toward a perspective which honored relativaty (Einstein 1988). Social researchers cast an eye toward the less linear, logical elements of modern life. The irrational become an object of social inquiry (Hughes 1961). The social, economic, and personal dynamics of dance and play, of pleasure and urban space become valid subjects (Blumer, 1984; Cressey 1932; Park and Burges, 1925). This acknowledgement of the meaning in irrational, of the underworld, of the creative underbelly had a transformative effect on the arts of the period.

This topsey turvey feeling that the world had been turned upside down characterizes much of the Dada project. A sense of word play propelled this movement (Marcus 1989, p. 4). Tristan Tzara (1918) opens the DADA Manifesto with these words:

“DADA EXCITES **EVERYTHING.**

DADA knows everything. DADA spits everything out.”

A sense of silliness runs throughout the movement. Dada’s playfulness is positioned in stark contact to work, nationalism, and war. Thus, Tzara follows with the question:

> HAS DADA EVER SPOKEN TO YOU:
> about the fatherland
> about sardines
> about Art (you exaggerate my friend)
> about heroism
> about mustaches
> about lewdness
> about genius, about genius, about genius
> about the eight-hour day
> about heroism...

Instead of asking about “work” or “heroism” or the “fatherland,” Tzara notes that these things no longer matter. “NEVER NEVER NEVER,” has Dada not asked these things, Tzara conceded. Rather a different type of social force emerges. “DADA doesn't speak. DADA has no fixed idea. DADA doesn't catch flies,” TSara explained. Yet, “THE MINISTRY IS OVERTURNED,” he wrote, in a nod to a quietly subversive energy found within the social and cultural transformations of the Weimer period. “BY WHOM?” Tzara asked, in a nod to the force of a social movement without a leader, much like the spirit of Zapatismo, which would find its expression by the next *fin de siecle*. He continued:

> If you have serious ideas about life,
> If you make artistic discoveries
> and if all of a sudden your head begins to crackle with laughter,
> If you find all your ideas useless and ridiculous, know that

IT IS DADA BEGINNING TO SPEAK TO YOU.

It is difficult to over emphasize the struggle to interject elements of play into work and culture that took place within the arts movements of the WWI era. For many, the underlying recognition that there must be more to life than war and work inspired artists and writers to ponder alternate possibilities. Freud (1961) had noted, after all, that only a few writers and artists could actually sublimate their desires into their work. The rest were stuck with the reality principle of work. Thus, a number of artists began to ponder the line between work and play, which seemed to open up space for different kinds of relatednessness, including humor, unofficial fun, and social relations beyond pure labor (Molesworth 1998).

Thus, artists such as Marcel Duchamp attempted to alter the boundaries of work and relaxation with a series of projects of "readymades." Here, in one of the great playful gestures in the history of art and aesthetics Duchamp placed a toilet bowl in the middle of an art gallery space and said it was ready to be presented, "readymade." "In Duchamp's slapstick-infused readymades, the idea and the actuality of play offer possibilities for examining the tangled knot of work and leisure in everyday life" (Molesworth 1998). Here, the realm of play, of jokes and subversive humor became a part of an effort to critique and intervene around work (Molesworth 1998).

The era's arts and liberal democracy inspired a series of movements in radical ecology, aesthetics, and sexuality (Kaes 1994, p. 466, 693-701). A distinctly generative social Eros – in stark contrast to the authoritarian and nationalist impulses that had driven Germany into WWI in the first place – engendered these movements. "We are living in the midst of the most powerful and fateful revolutions of all time," Hugo Bettauer wrote

in 1924. “The erotic revolution that wants to create free happy people. For it is simply the case... that *everything existing is based on eroticism*, everything that is beautiful, good, and lovely on earth is bound up inseparably within eroticism,” (quoted in Kaes 1994, p. 700-1). It is not surprising that the life-affirming possibility of Duchamp, the Dadaists, and the cabaret was followed by a profound backlash.

This revolution, like much of the modernist promise of the Weimar Era, failed because it was so devastating to the status quo that the Nazis felt compelled to shut down most of this pulsing public sphere, debate, and sexual culture – including destroying the books and artifacts in Magnus Hirschfeld’s Institute for Sexual Science – during their first five days of power in 1933 (Gordan 2000, p. 209-215). And the legacy they left is undeniable. The pink triangle in the center of ACT UP’s “Silence = Death” logo is borrowed from the icon used to label homosexuals during this Nazi regime (Crimp and Rolston 1990). Play, pleasure, and panic have interacted for a long time.

Skipping ahead from WWI to the 1960s, many of today’s approaches to creative activism find their inspiration in the work of Guy Debord and the Situationists of Paris. Faced with the routine tedium of what they viewed as the commodification of culture, the Situationists advanced a radical politics which made use of rambunctious, spontaneous disruptions of everyday life – and most of all, of pleasure. With such a politics, the rules of everyday life would be turned upside down and restored into a “realm for play,” (Vaneigeem 1994, p. 131; What Ever Happened to the Situationists, undated).

The Situationist response to the privitization of public space included a series of guerilla activist tactics. Two primary tactics utilized by Debord and the Situationists included interventions termed "detourne" and "derive". “Detourne” refers to the

rearrangement of popular signs to create new meanings (Thompson 2004). Recognizing the importance of the term for the Situationists, Lefebvre suggests:

> An existing space may outlive its original purpose and the raison d'etre which determines its forms, functions, and structures; it may thus in a sense become vacant, and susceptible of being diverted, reappropriated and put to a use quite different from its initial one. A recent and well-known case of this was the reappropriation of the Halles Centrales, Paris's former wholesale produce market, in 1969-71. For a brief period, the urban centre, designed to facilitate the distribution of food, was transformed nto a gathering-place and a scene of permanent festival – in short, into a centre of play rather than of work – for the youth of Paris (1974/1991).

In many ways, the theory and practice of detourne anticipates today's culture jamming. "Derive" refers to short meandering walks designed to resist the work- and control-oriented patterns of Georges Haussmann's redesign of Paris (Thompson 2004). This approach anticipated today's Critical Mass bike rides – a current "best practice" in playful, prefigurative community organizing. In the days after the 2004 presidential election, one organizer with Critical Mass explained, "People are in a very depressed state because they see things as bad and getting worse. The antidote is joyful constructive activity. Of course there are pills, also. Unfortunately, after a certain period of time, they stop working," (quoted in Gonzalez 2004).

The Situationists were primary innovators of the political use of the prank. The Prankers (1987) defined pranking as "playing tricks." A prank can be understood as a "mildly mischievous act; practical joke; a ludicrous act." Abbie Hoffman's disruption of the New York Stock exchange by throwing dollars bills from the balcony is a classic example of a prank.

Similarly, the practice of "culture jamming" involves making use of what you have, what is around you, and recouping it with creativity and vitality. Some culture

jammers take old movie footage and turn it into their own stories. *The Encyclopedia of Culture Jamming* posits, "There's a great cosmic battle between organic chaos and mechanical order. On one side: life, libido, novelty; on the other: machinery, standardization, law" (quoted in Shepard 2002d). Activists view their urban environment in terms of competing narratives. On the one hand are marketing pollutants in our mental environment, on the other, a series of battles to reappropriate privatized spaces. Culture jammers see their job as subverting the blandification script with a community-creating story (Shepard 2002d). To reverse the spectacle, Debord felt that story-crushing alienation, the rat race, the alarm clocks of reality must be disarmed so that authentic engagement is free to find its own expression. "The revolutionary project ... a generalized historical life, is also the project of a withering away of the social measure of time in favor of an individual and collective irreversible time which is playful in character" (1967/1994).

To help operationalize these ambitions, the Situationists looked to the lessons and practices of the Surrealists, who spent much of the 1920s and 30s using art as a way take apart and manipulate the thoughts and emotions of viewers. The point was to use images to help trigger thoughts or to conjure up fantastical, childlike states, daydreams which might inspire viewers to second guess or rethink the givens of their modern world – including war, violence, and “business as usual” (Notes, undated). By the late 1960s many of the psychedelic pop groups – including the Beatles and Syd Barrett’s Pink Floyd – were heavily influenced by this sentiment. Their music was intended to cultivate experiences and feelings that could change the world and end the Vietnam War (The Beatles 1968/2004; Edginton 2004). This overlap among art, popular culture, and social

movements was not lost on the academy. Marcuse was greatly influenced by popular discussions of the influence of art on politics. For him, the role of art was to help regular people recognize that daily routines, including elections and politics, were mutable.

Disruptions and Media Scrutiny

By the 1960s, many of these practices found their expressions in the world of the Youth International Party (better known as the Yippies), who were heavily influenced by pop culture, yet highly aware of the utility of media for social movement messaging. The culture-jamming project that the Situationists imagined found further expression with the anticorporate global justice movement that began in the 1990s. The disruption everyday life would become storied practice with the civil rights movement's lunch counter sit-ins, the Young Lords' takeover of Lincoln Hospital, and the Gay Liberation and ACT UP zaps. For many, the success of these practices was in how they shifted storylines to include the voices and perspectives of the counter-publics involved.

The utility of social movement presentation and performance stems from its capacity to speak to the multiple publics necessary to create change. In his study of dramaturgy in the civil rights movement, Dan McAdams suggested that to achieve a given goal, campaigns for social change must speak to at least six specific publics, all of which are capable of accepting or rejecting a given message: 1) potential recruits, 2) those working within the movement, 3) potential coalition partners, 4) media outlets, 5) public opinion, and 6) policy makers (1996). Success and failure generally unfold within a group's ability to communicate with these multiple constituencies. Some campaigns aim to generate media attention to a cause; others require direct contact with policy-

makers. Rarely is it possible to speak with multiple publics simultaneously (Lakey 2002). Thus, activists must be savvy about their appeal and approach. The case studies which constitute this report consider the various ways playful performance and protest speak to different publics.

A Need for Closer Scrutiny

While there is a long history of creative protest and play such as pranking and culture jamming, few of these elements of creative play have been seriously scrutinized or studied. The need remains for a detached study that considers the pros and cons of the politics of creative protest and play. The current resurgence in activism is based on a series of creative, playful innovations in protest tactics and interventions (Thompson 2004). The question remains: Is this a useful model of protest and community organizing? What is the goal of playful protest? Some activists aim to change external targets; other aim to build community. How do organizers define success? This study aims to consider how differing tactics of creative protest and play achieve success or failure, and why. In order to make this analysis, the study will borrow from the best practices and wisdom of activists.

Limitations of the Play Schema

There are a number of limitations to the play schema. Barbara Epstein (1991) suggests that the emphasis on prefigurative community organizing, based on immediatism, fails to adequately address the realities of political economy. There are certainly urban activists who do not consider creative protest and play to be useful. There

is a long tradition in left-wing politics that treats politics as a dour, sober consideration of interests, ends, and policy solutions. This approach is highly cognitive and calculated. It assumes political decisions should be made using cost-benefit analysis rather than emotions (Goodwin 2001).

The present study aims to consider the merits of this argument alongside the arguments of other contemporary activists who do not hold this view. The question remains: Which organizing models best address the needs of political economy: prefigurative modes, conventional models, a hybrid or both, or an entirely new model of protest? What kinds of conditions and actions are necessary to cultivate and sustain creative, world-making protest that will truly create a better, more caring world, one in which there is room for authentic experience? Can creative play serve these purposes?

At this time, there is a great deal of literature on increasing social controls (Garland 2001), which restrict social movement work. What is missing is research on the ways groups struggle against these pressures. There is much literature on the rise of the global justice movement itself (Mertes 2003; Notes From Nowhere 2003; Solnit 2004). Yet studies of protest tactics aimed at fighting increasing social controls are few; these tactics are not represented adequately in the literature. This study aims to fill this gap. Playful, creative protest represents a useful way to consider opposition to the right's push for the use of the criminal justice system to control disease and political participation (Shevory 2004, p. xiv-v). Few dispute the fact that social controls exist. What is not certain is how to fight them. This study will consider the proposition that creative play offers a generative model of inclusive community building capable of supporting many

different points of view. Within this proposition, the questions remain: What are best practice approaches to creative protest? To what degree does play sustain social movement groups? When is creative play useful? What are its limitations? When might other approaches be preferred?

V) Research Methodologies and Design Choice

Problem Statement and Research Questions

Before moving to the discussion of the relationship between research question and design choice, it is useful to reiterate the problem statement and core research questions. Some organizers have become involved in campaigns that utilized creativity and achieved policy wins; others involved campaigns that resulted primarily in community building. The question remains: Can social and creative play/organizing bridge these two streams of social change practice? And if so, what are the best practices in this work?

To answer this question, one must grapple with the questions: Is creative protest useful? How does it succeed, if at all? When does it fail? Is the goal to change the world or to create an idealized image of a model of the better world in which activists hope to live? This qualitative study will consider the role of creativity, pleasure, and play in urban protest and community-building practice. It will consider the history of creative protest, showing how this practice has changed over time and why.

Primary questions include:

- How do activists define success and find meaning on their work?

- Is success found through community building or achieving external successes or both?
- What are the strengths, limitations, and possibilities for the creative activist project born with the Yippies and Situationists, adapted by Gay Liberationists, and reinvented between ACT UP and the Battle of Seattle?
- Is creative protest and community building a viable alternative to traditional models of organizing and politics?
- Is creative protest most useful for connecting political actors with formal political channels or for creating a prefigurative image of a better world in which activists hope to live? And are these aims mutually exclusive?
- Given that there is a vitality in prefigurative community building and a social imperative of organizing toward material ends, can social and creative play/organizing bridge these two streams of social change practice?
- Is play a useful response to social controls?
- In what contexts can creative, playful, fun approaches to organizing practices result in practical shifts in people's lives?
- What kinds of cognitive liberation are necessary to inspire political engagement?
- To what extent does creative play contribute to or undermine social change activism?
- Is there something different about a "playful narrative" and a non-playful one? What is the strategic difference between the two?

Qualitative Design

So far, a problem statement has been presented, a literature review outlining concepts and key terms has been completed, and a list of question identified. When

thinking about framing such a study, the aim is to fit the purpose of the inquiry with the design choice, thus linking the reasoning with the argument. Based on the literature review, it is reasonable to suggest that the current state of knowledge about play and community organizing is in its exploratory stages. The purpose of this inquiry involves applied research about this phenomenon: play and community organizing.

Rather than seek to predict or test a hypothesis, as is the purpose of quantitative inquiry, this research seeks to understand, while making use of the researcher as an instrument (see discussion of participant observation to follow), rather then relying on standardized instruments (Yegidis and Weinbach 2002, p. 110). Data – the stories of activists – are inductively assessed. Given that the purpose of the inquiry is to understand how practitioners make use and meaning of creative play, with an emphasis on generating exploratory knowledge, the design choice involves qualitative inquiry. The point is to make sense of stories of play. Early qualitative researchers termed this effort effort at thick description as “verstehen” or "understanding" in a deep, empathic sense. Having detailed a choice of inquiry as it relates to the problem statement, the following will outline the design choices related to this qualitative inquiry.

Mix Method Analysis of Discourse, Narrative, and Historic Data

Building on cultural anthropologists Holland et al’s (1998) use of narratives of action, the proposed research will frame itself as a study of the use and limitations of creative protest and play. The study considers many of the control schemas and the responses by public space advocates who utilize forms of radical play, performance, and creative direct action to create counter-narratives to the panic. The following methods

discussion presents a brief elaboration on the nine components of the research: 1) basic design choices and tradeoffs within the guide instrument; 2) observation; 3) discussion of interview methods, choices, and processes associated with the development of the guide; 4) sampling strategy and choice; 5) reliability and validity; 6) data collection strategies and rationale, and a preliminary framework for considering data analysis; 7) feasibility; 8) human subjects; 9) a copy of the research guide/questionnaire and interview release form.

Basic Design Choices within the Guide Instrument

In order to adequately address the study's design and guide instrument, four elements must be assessed: 1) fit, 2) length/tradeoffs, 3) process and evolution of the guide, and 4) systematic structure of the guide. Full disclosure: I have spent years involved with the individuals and social movements at the center of this study, as both an activist and a co-participant. This personal experience contributes both to my access to key informants and to a critical understanding of the topic in question.

Qualitative research emphasizes an understanding of culture and its implications rather than a precise measurement. Thus, the keyword for qualitative inquiry is flexibility applied to a study's needs (Weiss 1998, p.83). In this case, the study must consider the shifting terrain of contemporary social movement work and its history. To achieve this end, the study will make use of an interview questionnaire designed to establish channels for the scope and direction of discourse (McCracken 1988, p. 24). Given that the inquiry seeks to consider cultural shifts and assumptions as objects of investigation, the

questionnaire should adequately capture the study's scope. (A copy of this guide is included in the appendix.)

In terms of length and tradeoff, the study makes use of a small number of information-rich interviews, rather than longer-term immersion (Patton 2002, p. 46). For the most part, the study builds on themes of interviews and the stories of those involved with the activist groups already described. The study will unfold from these community stories of survival, adaptation, struggle, and play. The goal will be understanding and depicting the real-world experiences of those activists and the movements in which they are involved. The long interview is different from participant observation in that it does not commit the researcher to long-term involvement in the community and scene in question.

Qualitative inquiry places an emphasis on the social process, the "in the meanwhile" of social change (Schatzman and Strauss, 1973, p. 6). While the study makes use of a questionnaire, it remains a naturalistic inquiry; as such, use of the questionnaire need not preclude the inquiry from assessing real-world circumstances with a flexibility and openness to whatever unfolds (McCracken 1988; p. 24). The study is designed to be adaptable to shifts in social terrain. The ground within a study of social movements is in constant flux. As such, a methodological emphasis on social process is essential for such a project to assess complex changes in social terrain (Weiss 1998, p. 83). The point is to consider the ways flux affects those involved. The guide offers open-ended questions designed to emphasize feelings, tactics, impressions, and stories as they connect a wide range of in complex processes.

Observation

The theme of observation in qualitative inquiry involves the question of what the researcher chooses to study. In this case, it is the interplay between social movement expansion and contraction, panic and play in public space, and the impacts on those who use that space. This study builds on the dramaturgical tradition of studies, such as those by Erving Goffman, of behavior in public space. This tradition considers moral order, interpersonal relations, and shifting social terrains. Studies of public realms represent an area of inquiry particularly characteristic of urban space (Alder and Alder 1994, p. 384).

Like most qualitative inquiries, this study involves a search for cultural themes and understandings (Alder and Alder 1994, p. 379; Janesick 1994, p. 215-6). The point is to find patterns within the data, allowing the groupings of stories to form the basis for the case studies within the report (see data collection and analysis below). For this process to work, the investigator must to be a research instrument, using his or her analytic and observational skills to assess shifts in social terrain and changing dynamics within the interview. The observer's close consideration of the interview subjects, h/her questions, tests of propositions, and comparisons with observed reality all serve to verify subject material. While participant observation is not the study's primary mode of data collection, it remains a component of the qualitative interviewing process, just as it would in a clinical interview. Clinicians observe affect, testing the reality of the stories they hear using clinical instinct; detectives compare stories to the evidence and other accounts, using years of experience on the street; and qualitative researchers utilize multimethod approaches to compare interview data with participant observations and theoretical understandings (McCracken 1988, p. 28). When a story fails to match researcher

observations and other theories, it lacks construct or theoretical validity (Kirk and Miller 1986, p. 22-3).

Yet qualitative research does not exist to verify material as much as it exists to tell stories. This is not to suggest that narratives are not built outside verifiable cultural terrains. This is not a zero-sum game. Observation has the flexibility to produce insights into vast new realities when used in conjunction with other, more structured forms of data, such as the long interviews and historical and theoretical materials deployed within the study. In fact, observation offers rigorous data when compared with other source materials (Alder and Alder, 1994, p. 382-3).

Throughout the process, the project will feature my perspective as a participant observer of many of the movements discussed (which will complement my questions during the long interviews) (see Butters 1983; Kohut 1959/1978; Kaminsky 1992, Lichterman 2002; Tedlock 1991). Thus, the study makes use of myself, the researcher, as an instrument (Yegidis and Weinbach 2002, p. 110). Studs Terkel (1967) has described the interaction between himself, the interviewer, and interviewee in a long interview as a jazz-like improvisation in which he uses different parts of his experience to question and listen and create stories. The same process took place in my interviewing, observing, and historicizing in this study of play and community organizing. In this respect, the reader is allowed to observe elements of the study of play interact as a narrative emerging in a reflexive process and coherent whole (Myerhoff and Ruby 1982/1992, p. 312).

Given Clifford Geertz's (1973) contention that all ethnography is part confession, my voice occasionally plays a role. I worked closely with a number of the groups involved for nearly a decade, disseminating materials, planning rallies and events, doing

outreach and research, and observing the groups at work. As an observing participant and principle organizer, I have engaged in activities ranging from outreach to sex workers to being arrested and put through the system, to being targeted by police once repressive structures started. Bolton (1992) suggests there are certain types of data that cannot be procured without direct participation. As Sullivan suggests in writing about the psychiatric interview, there is no neutral participation. Instead, the analyst makes use of himself or herself as an observing instrument and co-narrator:

> His principle instrument of observation is his self – his personality, him as a person. The processes and the changes in processes that make up the data which can be subjected to scientific study occur, not in the subject person not in the observer, but in the situation which is created between the observer and his instrument (1954, p. 3).

The proposed study borrows from Sullivan's notion of data collection through participant observation and reflection. My perspective will be used as a research instrument (McCracken 1988). Narrative emerges from this interaction, reflection, and narration (Coher 1982, 1994). Janesick (1994) has utilized the metaphor of dance to elaborate on the playful interaction between personal observation of social phenomena as an experience near practitioner and experience distant researcher of the same phenomena. Ann Rosen-Noran (1998) describes utilizing her whole life's experience and imagination in her work as a qualitative researcher and practitioner (1998, p. 53). In a similar spirit, I will employ my own experience as practitioner and organizer.

Interview Method

While dominant groups have no interest in knowing or working with subordinate voices, this study seeks to understand and make sense of the stories of those involved in

the counter-public of social movement activity (Harstock 1998; Hartman 1992; Warner 2002). The study seeks to understand these intersections in New York City. The best way for the study to capture this subjugated knowledge and experience is through structured interviews using an interview guide (Fontana and Frey 1994, p. 363).

This is not to say that the study does not also seek to make use of ethnographic field notes (Emerson 1995) or unstructured interview data, because it does. The deployment of a structured interview questionnaire does not preclude other open-ended interview and data collection methods. Yet emphasis is placed on data collected from the structured long interviews. Throughout the process, elements of oral history methods are borrowed to contextualize the movement narratives that unfold in the structured interviews (Grele 1996; Martin 1995). The structured interview conducted between a researcher and his or her interview subject departs from focus group interviewing methods (MaCracken 1988, p. 7). This is certainly a tradeoff, yet it is necessary to record and emphasize certain perspectives of subjugated knowledge at the study's core.

In order to learn about these points of view, this study aims to consider the specific stories of those who play in contested space in the city. Qualitative research emphasizes understanding of such points of view, rather than precise measurements. Many of the core assumptions about how to study small groups are based on anthropological ethnographic approaches to studying distinct aspects of culture. This study will concentrate on the unique stories of experiences of members of a number of counter-publics. The purpose of a case study is to represent the point of view of one group or individuals, not the world.

Sampling Method

This study will make use of purposeful sampling techniques (Patton 2002, p. 46) to consider the distinct points of view of a small groupof people (60) who have experience in creative protest. The study sample will be of community organizers who have specific experience with creative protest and innovative protest techniques. Table 4 presents proposed criteria for sampling. In order to reach a diverse range of subjects, it additionally employs a snowball sampling method (Rubin and Babbie 1993, p. 257, 367-8) to capture the points of view of cohort members and connections not readily accessible to the complete stranger to the scene. After each interview, the interviewer thanks the interviewee and asks if he or she knows any others who might enjoy being interviewed.

Table 4

Criteria for Participation

Self identification.	Must think of self as an organizer open to creative community practices
Values	Must identify with the values of community organizing

Current community organizing practice	Must be actively involved in organizing practices

Reliability and Validity

Employing a diversity of methods and combining multiple sources of data is perhaps the most useful way to avoid pitfalls in the logic of an inquiry (Kirk and Miller 1986, p. 30). While the use of multiple data sources and research methodologies may appear disorderly, such approaches are considered entirely relevant for qualitative inquiry (Shevory 2004, p. xiv). The case studies will make use of primary sources including newspapers articles, historical interviews (Grele, 1996), structured interviews, and ethnographic data (see section above), as well as secondary historical sources. These materials form the basis for the formation of case studies of social movements (Snow and Trom 2002). As Yin explains, "Case studies need not be limited to a single source of evidence. In fact, most of the better case studies rely on a wide variety of sources" (1994, p.7). The advantage of the use of multiple sources of evidence is that it allows what is understood as "triangulation" of data (Shevory 2004, p. xiv). The following outlines the study's approach to conceptualizing, triangulating, and verifying data.

Stake (1994, p. 244) suggests that the major tasks of qualitative inquiry involve:

1) conceptualizing an area of inquiry, drawing parameters around a case
2) selecting a theme, question, or phenomena on which to focus attention
3) looking at and studying patterns in data
4) triangulating essential observations and interpretations (more below)
5) considering other routes of interpretation

6) outlining essential assertions and generalizations about the case

Pertinent concepts and dimensions within the study include play and innovation in community organizing. The point is to assess how activists adapt as their spaces are controlled and regulated in ways that make them incompatible with their previous functions.

While reliability "in the traditional sense of replicability is pointless here," the logic of the method remains the case's illumination of the depth and dimensions of a common phenomena (Stake, 217).

Within this frame, issues of credibility continue to be germane to qualitative inquiry. Clifford Geertz notes: "There is no reason why the conceptual structure of a cultural interpretation should be any less formidable, and thus less susceptible to explicit canons of appraisal, than that of, say, a biological observation or a physical experiment" (1973, p. 24). Themes of validity, generalizability, and reliability usually determine the form and shape of the narrative of a qualitative report. Qualitative reporters rely on the literature of a subject – descriptions of persons, events, and places – as the cornerstones of their reports. Validity involves links between observation, description, and explanation. When all is said and done, the question remains: Does the narrative cohere? (Stake 1994, p. 217).

The core question of reliability is: Does the logic hold? A useful strategy for responding to the challenge of validity is through triangulation of more than one source of data for comparison, as outlined by Stake (1994). Four different methods of triangulation of data include: 1) data triangulation with a variety of sources, 2) investigation triangulation using different researchers or evaluators, 3) theory

triangulation applying multiple perspectives to study set of data, and 4) methodological triangulation using a number of differing methods to study just one problem (Janesick 1994, p. 215). Triangulation provides corroborating evidence through multiple data sources, rather that merely relying on one point of view (Shevory 2004, p. xiv-vi). For the purposes of this study, triangulation essentially involves the use three forms of data: historical materials on radical play, my observation of the activist use of play to counter panic, and interviews with activists involved. Qualitative inquiry generally makes use of combinations of interview data, personal observations, and excerpts from documents (Patton 2002, p. 47). The study in question will build on these context-sensitive frames to generate its theoretical contributions (Patton 2002, p. 41).

Data Collection and Analysis

Data analysis "involves working with data, organizing, breaking it into manageable units, synthesizing it, searching for patterns, discovering what is important and what is to be learned and deciding what you will tell others," Bogdan and Bilkin explain (1994, p. 145). Data collection and analysis for this study involve a basic grounded theory approach used to organize and categorize the data (Strauss and Corbin 1990). The principle of grounded theory is that theory emerges from data, and that data collection and organization is a useful approach to making use of and finding meaning in the data. Michael Patton suggests that there is a basic practical side to qualitative research involved in asking open-ended questions and observing real world settings and interactions (2002, p. 136). Data was collected in recorded interviews, interview notes, and observed field notes. The interview guide offers a useful way for the researcher to

compare the interview question responses from a wide range of interviewees. Theory will emerge from the organization and conceptualization of the material. This frame uses an inductive analysis to understand the symbolic world of those being studied (Patton 2002, p. 132-3).

Stake offers five key considerations for writing a qualitative report: 1) how much should a writer make the report a story?; 2) how much comparison should be made with other stories?; 3) how much should the writing formalize generalizations:;, 4) how much of the authors ethnographic confessions and use of self should be included?; 5) and how much should be anonymized? (1994, p. 244).

The study will be written with an emphasis on reflexivity (Myerhoff and Ruby 1982/92). That is to say, it will emphasize stories and impressions as they connect to larger forces of social change. Analysis will progress as the study continues, with an openness to developing new aspects of inquiry in response to new knowledge as it is gained. The emphasis of qualitative inquiry is on finding patterns and developing an understanding of the process of change in question (Weiss 1998, p. 85-6). Theory will be built from the details of stories received on the ground. This guide is designed to build on the real world stories and circumstances of those interviewed. In data analysis, the point is to find patterns within the data, allowing the stories to lay the groundwork for the report. Data will be organized in such a fashion that theory emerges from the ground (Strauss and Corbin 1990). Themes and theory emerge from the categorization, the bracketing of the data. This is why using an interview guide is effective, as it gives a clear basis for comparison of answers among different interviewees. Interpretation

unfolds with the clustering and organization of the data within the report into case studies (Janesick 1994, p. 215-6; Yin 1994).

Yet the primary focus of data analysis is on the life stories of participants (Cohler 1994; McAdams 1985; Runyan 1984) and their reflections on their experiences with social movements and organizations. The life story is as powerful tool for use in the analysis of social worlds (Plummer 1995). Much of the investigation emphasizes the narrative truths and interpretations rather than the historic realities (Spence, 1982) of those interviewed. The use and analysis of biographical data as a theoretical frame for the study of social movements is not new. This study borrows from Jasper's (1997) frame to consider how social actors make sense of and find meanings in their social words, their work, and their lives as social activists (Bruner 1990).

Life history research and analysis is viewed as useful because it allows the subject to tell his or her story on his or her own terms, rather than those of those of the interview instrument. Such a method allows the researcher to provide attention to the entire context of a life, its narration, and its social circumstances. This enables the researcher to collect data that allows him or her to attend to the complex emotional and cognitive motivations of the actor involved in social movement activity (della Porta 1992; Jasper 1997, p. 430). The central theme is neither the individual life experiences of the organizer nor the movements they are involved with, but rather the way in which they incorporate and maintain a spirit of play and/or creativity in their work. In that regard, the individual life story offers contextual data (Epstein 2005).

Feasibility

In terms of feasibility, the framework for data collection was quite manageable. I knew many of the potential subjects whom I aimed to interview. The other primary sources, newspaper materials, were easily accessible. The secondary sources, historical accounts, were made available to me through the collections of a number of activists, through my collection of materials at public meetings, as well as through archival research.

Human Subjects

In terms of human subjects, the current study is rather straightforward and uncomplicated. Neither socially vulnerable populations nor clients at my place of work were interviewed. As discussed in the case sampling section, the primary human subjects interviewed were community organizers and activists. While activists are not vulnerable populations, as activists they do occasionally break the laws, thus putting them at risk. Interviewees were instructed to preclude incriminating data during interview orientation.

Study Guide and Interview Release

With each interviewee, I introduced the purpose and parameters of the study. We discussed the informed consent forms which the activists signed. After signature was procured I turned on the tape and started the interview.

Part II

Chapter I
Play as Prank
From the Yippies to the Young Lords

The genealogy of protest is both vexing and reductive. While historians used to note, "All roads lead to Rome," for scholars of twentieth century U.S. social movements, all roads tend to lead back to 1968. I have never been as enamored of this era, and I am not particularly interested in rehashing the famous pranks of the Yippie past. But after they were mentioned by countless interviewees from this study, I started to reconsider their role. Andrew Boyd, the founder of the Billionaires for Bush (or Gore), specifically referred to the Yippies when formulating a way to think about play in social movement activity. "When we talk about the uses of play, the way I talk about it is using artistic strategies," Boyd explained, adding that this involves "an overlapping sense with play, thinking like an artist about doing political action. Abbie Hoffman says that all protest, and you can extend that to political action, is theater."

A highly engaging form of political theater would follow. During the G8 protests in Scotland during the summer of 2005 , the Clandestine Insurgent Rebel Clown Army (CIRCA) referred to the Yippies in much of their propaganda. The CIRCA website refers to Hoffman's Museum of the Streets, noting: "One of the worst mistakes any revolution can make is to become boring. It leads to rituals as opposed to games, cults as opposed to communities and the denial of human rights as opposed to freedom." Even long-time AIDS Coalition to Unleash PowerACT UP facilitator Ann Northrop referred to their work as a significant part of the history of play and pranks in social movements: "The

Yippies, in 1968 in Chicago, were doing all sorts of wild stuff. And antiwar protests in general had a lot of stuff going on."

And most certainly there was. Norman Mailer describes the Yippie presence at the "Festival of Life" during the 1968 Democratic National Convention in Chicago:

> . . . Lincoln Park on a Sunday afternoon in summer ... in the center of the southern part of Lincoln Park where the Yippies had chosen to assemble on an innocuous greensward undistinguished from similar meadows in many another park... they were a generation which lived in the sound of destruction of all order as he had known it... There was a mock charade going on, a continuation of that celebration of the Yippie Convention yet to come, when Pigasus, a literal pig, would be put in nomination. Vote Pig in '68, said the Yippie placards, and now up at the stage, music done, they announced another candidate to a ripple of mild laughter across the grass, Humphrey Dumpty was the Dame, and a Yippie clown marched through the crowd, a painted egg with legs, "the next President of the United States," and **en** suite came a march of the delegates through an impromptu aisle from the stage to the rear of the crowd... (1986)

As the embodiment of "a generation which lived in the sound of destruction of all order," the performance Mailer describes and the theatrics which followed seem to resemble a form of dark play. Richard Schechner suggests "dark play" is a heavier kind of expression. Within this form of play, gestures that begin as forms of simple bravado, like Pigasus or the clowns, can descend into a violent form of theater as it breaks its own rules (2002, p. 107).

But the rules would change. Much protest felt like a Kabuki ritual. Protesters arrive; the police allow them to scream; they know the end destination before they begin; no one gets hurt and everyone goes home. By 1968, it felt as if these rules had to change. Generations of activists had worked, marched, written statements, and yet the war was still going. "It is difficult to communicate at a distance the sense of helplessness and suppressed rage we all felt by the end of 1967," historian David Schalk recently recalled

of the 1960s American antiwar movement. “It seemed as though none of their efforts had made the slightest bit of impact” (2000, p. 501). All of that frustration –the frustration of a movement that, despite years of work, could not seem to make any headway, the anger of the police trying to contain it – needed an outlet.

Mailer recalls that a sense of foreboding was in the air that day in Chicago: “The air of Lincoln Park came into the nose with that tender concern which air seemed always ready to offer when danger announced its presence.” In contrast to the playful, yet angry performance of the Yippies, a much darker form of theater, characterized by violent confrontations between protesters and police, would take place in the days that followed the Festival of Light. The following year in the same park, a fraction of the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) dubbing themselves the Weather Underground would physically confront police during the Days of Rage (Ayers 2001; Varon 2004). Two years later, members of the Young Lords Party would battle police during the Puerto Rican Day Parade in New York City (Melendez 2003, p. 194-195).

Yet even the confrontational, far more assertive forms of direct action advanced by the Weather Underground and the Young Lords represented highly stylized, dramatized theatrical forms of lived fantasies. Although one common dynamic of dark play is that some of the players don't know they are playing (Schechner 2002), it is hard to think of confrontations with the police as play. In many ways, the forms of play and performance which emerged with direct action during the 1960s involved competing forms of protest: a contrast between the silly, yet subversive Situationist-influenced Yippie genuflections of street performanceand pranks, and the occasionally violent,

controversial forms of direct action advanced by the Weather Underground and to a lesser degree the Young Lords.

"From the Yippies to the Young Lords," the first case presented in this study, makes use of only three representative interviews from activists still alive today who were active during the late 1960s and early 1970s in New York City. As narrative representations of aging organizations, these interviews are slightly longer than some of the other interview data featured in later chapters. Several former members of the Yippies and the Young Lords have died in recent years. Abbie Hoffman, the founder of the Yippies, died in 1989. Enthusiasts burned garbage and hurled beer bottles during the 'Steal This Park' memorial festival held for Hoffman in New York Thompkins Square Park that April (Carr, 1993c). Two of the last few remaining members of the New York chapter, Dana Beal and Aaron Kay, speak about their life and work, and the pranks, slapstick, and play of the Yippies. Richie Perez, one of the leaders of the Young Lords, died in 2004 (Rivera 2004). One of the first to speak about Perez was his longtime friend and fellow activist, Vincente "Panama" Alba. Alba recalls his work with the Young Lords in this chapter. All three offer a representative overview of their work with their respective organizations. A little background on Hoffman and the politics of the Yippies is useful before moving on to the narratives.

Abbie Hoffman: The Politics of 'Prop'aganda, and the Struggle Against Boredom

The work of the Youth International Party, better known as the Yippies, has been described as "a politics of ecstasy and joy" (Jasper 1997, p. 212). Yippie founder Abbie Hoffman specifically noted that if he had to choose, his ideal revolution would be about

creating a space for "free play" (1989, p. 245). This politics involved a much lighter form of activism in relation to affect and pleasure. Hoffman's political approach can be understood as part of a nonlinear "assault on rational sensibilities" (Simon 1989, p. xii). Instead of there being a clear purpose for the Yippies' work, Hoffman explained, "I really did it because it was fun. That's what I tell my friends. To my brothers I tell the real truth, which is that I don't know why I did it... any explanation I give is made up" (YEAR?, p. 13).

Nevertheless, there was a logic to the Yippies. "The key to the puzzle lies in theater," Hoffman explained. Thus, the Yippies engaged in countless media stunts, including attending a hearing before the House Un-American Activities Committee dressed as Uncle Sam. "We are theatre on the streets: total and committed. We aim to involve people and use (unlike other movements locked in ideology) any weapon (prop) we can find" (1989, p. 17). The point was to involve as many people as possible, creating a context that invited multiple forms of participation – whether in support or in opposition. The aim was to support engagement and, to a degree, spectacle. "All is relevant, only, 'the play's the thing,'" Hoffman explained (1989, p. 17), giving a nod to Elizabeth's day when Shakespeare's plays and popular dramas were a central feature of public life (Bevington 1962). "Theatre will capture the attention of the country," Hoffman proclaimed (p.18).

The point was to demonstrate a more compelling democracy, rather than tell people what to think. For Hoffman, the old USA felt dead. People needed a new idea of the world. "Give them a new, positive, authentic frame of reference," he suggested. "Just do your thing; the press eats it up. Make News!" (p. 24-25). Instead of the usual dour

politics, Hoffman advocated the use cultural resources, pop culture, and even humor. “Do it all fast. Like slapstick movies. Make sure everyone has a good time. People love to laugh – it’s a riot” (p. 17). Yet for a person who claimed to be opposed to words, he was acutely aware of semiotics. The paradox of play seems to permeate this thinking. “Accept contradictions, that’s what life is all about,” he urged. “Have a good time” (p. 20). Indeed, Hoffman was painfully aware of the subversive implications of the humor he was advancing (Sanders, 1995): “...laugh – its a riot. Riot – that’s an interesting word-game if you want to play it,” he quipped (p. 17).

Hoffman was no fan of long speeches or ideological rants, rather he was keenly aware that public debate was taking place through signs, symbols, and the media. “MEDIA is the message,” Hoffman counseled, sounding very much like Marshall McLuhan. For Hoffman, the greatest tool an activist could have was a television set (p. 19). Rather than sit back and listen to speeches, people had to be included within the performance. Unlike the traditional left, which relied on a didactic approach to activism involving a heavy dose of indoctrination, Hoffman counseled, “Don’t rely on words... Rely on doing.” And once everyone is involved in the performance, shake it up, keep it fresh, he urged. The worst thing an activist can do is lose the sympathies of the crowd: “When they get bored, they are turned off. They are not receiving information. Get their attention, leave a few clues and vanish.” (p. 19).

For Hoffman and the Yippies, the biggest problem with “other movements locked in ideology” was that they were boring (p. 17-19). Yet, for many years, left-wing politics had felt tiresome. Bob Kohler, who was a member of the civil rights group Congress on Racial Equality (and whose story will be prominently featured in the next chapter),

explains that before the late 1960s there was “no humor in the old leftist movement.” Of course, this observation was not original to either Hoffman or Kohler. Years before, the Situationists had clearly explained that the ‘militants’ as they referred to dour political activists from the hair shirt left, made the process of organizing and political involvement unappealing. For the militant, “politics” is delineated from pleasure, fun, and personal desires. As such, the ends of politics – a free socialist utopia – were clearly separated from the means, which many felt to be undemocratic, hierarchical, top-down, and routinized. Thus, the Situationists suggested that boring politics had made activism into a form of “alienated labor,” giving rise to the expression, "Boredom is always counter-revolutionary." (What Ever Happened to the Situationists, undated).

It is no wonder that the Yippies were profoundly critical of the day’s overarching ideologies. Aaron Kay, who joined the group in 1972, suggests that despite all the clowning, the Yippies also maintained a sense of pragmatism. “When it comes to issues, there’s an old Abbie Hoffman line that I use. ‘Isms are wasms.’ We deal with issues, not dogma.” The Situationists described such thinking as part of a larger “critique of isms” (Vaneigem 1967/2003, p. 24). For the Yippies, pop culture and connection [to…?] were more important adherence to one ideology or another. Hoffman was a big fan of Frankfurt School philosopher Herbert Marcuse in part because the noted social critic was willing to spoke pot with him instead of forcing him to engage in a dialogue about aesthetics or dialectics. Kay explains:

> When we were thinking of dogma, we used to think of Groucho Marx and the Three Stooges. That’s got mass appeal. Nobody wants to hear about Karl or Lenin, unless its John Lennon. I used to call myself a Groucho Marxist and a John Lennonist. You have to use entertainment. You have to use what cultural tools are there.

It's no wonder the Yippies were so open to the work of John Lennon and the Beatles. In 1968, the Beatles released a psychedelic movie, *Yellow Submarine*, with a profoundly political message that was profoundly in sync with the times. "Our music fading," the Mayor of Pepperland laments at the start of the movie, "Pepperland is dying." The Mayor ends up sending a yellow submarine to get help for his town, while the Blue Meanies aim to control Pepperland by preventing music from being played. Fortunately, the Mayor finds the Beatles (as Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band) who perform "All You Need is Love," And John asks the Blue Meanies to join him: "Turn off what is sour, turn into a flower, and bloom, bloom, BLOOM!" (The Beatles 1968/2004). The antiwar message of the movie is undeniable. For many, the notion that "All You Need is Love" would become an abiding principle for those who believed in 'flower power'; others found it hard to take. For much of the history of play in social movements, the pranksters seek to turn the music up, while the Blue Meanies loom ready to turn it off.

Enter Dana Beal

Hoffman understood that effective organizers make an effort to understand what people need and then to provide it. This is how longtime Yippie Dana Beal first became involved with the group. "Dropouts dig flowers, don't give them I.F. Stone weeklies. Bowery bums dig wine, don't give them Bibles," Hoffman said. "Become aware of the most effective props…On the Lower East Side pot is an effective prop, it is the least common denominator. It makes us all outlaws, brothers." (p. 20). With this insight in mind, Hoffman recruited Beal, who had relationships with many of the pot smokers on

New York City's Lower East Side. Beal explained: "He was 27 and I was around twenty. There was about a ten-year difference. I was a younger guy who could get the kids to do a lot of stuff. I was able to bring people in." He continues:

> I was asked to join the Yippies about a week after they were formed. I was at a party at Abbie's. I was part of the scene that preceded the Yippies. It was Yippie in all but name. If you think of certain actions which were Yippie actions, like throwing money at the New York Stock Exchange or levitating the Pentagon, they were proto-Yippie. Because technically the Yippies did not exist until New Years Eve of 1968. They had come up with a name, but nobody had been invited to join. They came up with the name around Christmas time, and by New Years Eve they were having a party at Abbie's and they asked people to join.

In order to distinguish himself and the other younger Yippies from the older cohort, Beal and his friends sometimes referred to themselves as "Zippies," for Zeitgeist International Party (Moynihan 2001).

Beal, who was twenty when he joined the Yippies that New Years Eve of 1968, still lives in the Yippie Headquarters at 9 Bleeker Street. Also known as "the Yippie Museum," the old three-story brick building at Bleeker and Bowery served as the central meeting space for the quirky group for some thirty years (Moynihan 2001). As I arrived for the interview, cat urine fumes and the colorful political posters greeted me on the first floor; as I walked up the stairs the cat smell gave way to the smell of pot. At the top of the stairs was a sticker with the words "NYC – AIDS Disaster Area" from ACT UP's second anniversary action in 1989, when three thousand activists converged on City Hall for what was then time the group's biggest-ever demonstration.

Beal greeted me wearing his trademark blue jeans, bare chest, and cowboy boots. I asked what first got him involved in political organizing. He replied:

> The civil rights movement in 1963. I was a precocious protester. I tried to organize a protest when I was sixteen. The first real action was when the Klan

> blew up a church, which blew up the four little girls. I just loved demonstrations. I always have.

Beal went on to describe the relationship between the Yippies and the movements of the era. "The interesting thing is Abbie came out in[of?] the civil rights movement. His roots are not in antiwar, but in the civil rights movement. Abbie was working with Freedom Summer and something called, I think, Freedom House." It is not surprising that both Beal and Hoffman started their work with the civil rights movement, where songs and cultural resistance had become such a vital part of the struggle. A few words about this work is instructive for a study on the use of creative play to challenge social controls.

Culture Jamming, and the Struggle Against Fear in the Civil Rights Movement

Singing was a vital resource for communicating messages, maintaining group cohesion, and promoting strength for activists facing very hostile opposition in the apartheid US South, where activists had been killed simply for being members of the movement.

In the days after the "sit-in" wave of the civil rights movement, the Freedom Riders, who struggled to ride segregated interstate buses, made ample use of singing as a source of strength and resilience in the face of widespread opposition. Each busload of riders was met by antagonistic local residents, state officials, and armed police, who resembled a lynching squad. There were so many injuries on the rides that the Congress on Racial Equality (CORE) and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) had to constantly busy themselves with replenishing the ranks. After an ugly series of bombings and physical attacks, James Farmer, one of CORE's primary organizers, recalled the use of song to calm the nerves of Freedom Riders during a harrowing trip across state borders into Mississippi. "Our hearts jumped into our mouths," Farmer said,

as they saw the Mississippi National Guard flanking their bus with guns in hand. “One of the riders broke out singing, and we all picked it up. I remember the words: ‘I’m taking a ride on the Greyhound bus line / I’m riding the front seat to Jackson this time / Hallelujah, I’m a traveling / Hallelujah, ain’t it fine / Hallellujah, I’m a traveling / Down freedom’s main line’” (quoted in Reed 2005, p. 26). In many ways, this round of spirit-elevating song propelled the riders forward, helping them feel their way through a situation many of them had seen before, as they kept cool and remembered why they were there. Simultaneously, the songs reduced the strength of their foe’s primary tool – fear (p. 26).

Bob Kohler, who was a member of CORE at the time, explains, “It was the best way to break that awful tension, turning it around.” And, it seems, civil rights activists were well aware of this. The Freedom Riders also made use of the techniques of irony as a tactical tool against the repressive fearful dramaturgy advanced by the southerners. In many respects, the demystifying parodies of old church songs could be viewed as some of the first “culture jams,” or as Situationist “detourne” using words rather than signs. For example, the Freedom Riders wrote new lyrics to the old church song, “Jesus Loves Me, This I Know.” The point was to highlight the hypocrisy of the white Christian effort to stifle their efforts. “Jesus loves me cause I’m white / Lynch a nigger every night / I hate the Jews and I hate the Pope / Jes’ me, an my rope / Jesus loves me, the Citizens’ Council told me so.” A different culture jam involved novel verses sung to the familiar anthem, “We Shall Overcome”: “Deep in my heart, I do believe / We shall keep the niggers down / They will never be free / They will never be registered / We shall keep the niggers down” (quoted in Payne 1995, p. 263, 242-43).

The humor in these playful lyrics had a very serious end: to alleviate fear. Without this tool for lightening things up – when a feeling of "play," of theatricality disappears – fear seems to be all that remains…and overwhelms (Burdell 2003). Without that fear, a primary dynamic of the white apartheid system was far more vulnerable to the administrative remedies to come. Yet if the fear had remained, it is hard to imagine the civil rights movement advancing. Thus, the use of cultural resources such as songs, combined with a spirit of serious play, helped movement players stay the course (Reed,2005, p. 26-27).

These songs, in which everyone could participate, also helped break down the distinction between leadership and the rank-and-file. They also helped the movement renew itself and stay fresh and inviting. I asked Beal, who was involved with the movement at the time, how the use of cultural resources such as songs in the civil rights movement helped influence his work with the Yippies. "That was really important," he explained. "[If] you have a really good vibe and you are playful and joyful, you are going to be more attractive to people than if you are kind of somber and bummed out. I've always said that."

Love-Ins, Smoke-Ins, and Play in Public Space

By 1967, Beal and Hoffman "transitioned from civil rights to antiwar movement." Yet the struggle against police controls of their work continued.
In response to police, Beal explained: "We had gigantic smoke- inns." He elaborates:

> There had been a riot over in the park where the police beat up peace people. They manhandled people, even a pregnant lady. I guess the cops freaked out 'cause there were too many people on the grass. It was a big over-reaction. But

> that somehow set off nights of rioting. And so the smoke-ins arose as things just to pass out pot and pacify things. Actually, it worked quite well. You could see people calming down. Whereas if it had been alcohol, there would be fights. The cops have admitted this. Marijuana is really good for crowd control.

The some dynamic was taking place across the country. In Los Angeles, future Yippie Aaron Kay was involved in organizing a series of "love-ins" that were similarly received. "The love-ins, the scenes would kind of come together. The cops did not like the communities coming together. The repression was very big," He recalls. It seemed that cross-class contact around pleasure was seen as a threat. Kay described the dynamics and politics of a love-in:

> Basically it was a weekend hippie get-together. People would gather every Sunday in the park. And we'd have free music. Maybe people can smoke [pot] or people bring acid. Just party hardy. People came in from all over Southern California for that. The scene in Los Angeles was very fragmented. The West Side of LA is more affluent. Then you have the Venice scene and the Hollywood scene. People kind of don't interact too much. They are all in their own orbit. With the love-ins, the scene kind of came together. Everybody would know about it. The cops did not like everybody in LA coming together. They used all sorts of excuses. But what it was, was an all-class sort of situation. Upper-middle-class kids hanging out with kids who came from "the other side of the tracks," the ghetto kids from the bario and "white trailer trash," all hangin' together and partyin'. They did not like that at all.

Practical Pranks vs. Conventional Politics: Pieing and the Politics of Tactical Play

Kay got his start with the Yippies during the 1972 Republican National Convention (RNC). "I met Jerry [Rubin], Abbie, Ron, and Dana. I took part in some of the marches...We had a mass piss-in under the Office of Honky Culture[WHAT WAS THIS?]. Then we had Repression Day, where we took our clothes off."

Kay had been in touch with the New York Yippies for many years before he joined. For several years in California he had been involved with successful organizing

campaigns against crackdowns on public gatherings – including his love-ins in Griffith Park – and a ban on hitchhiking. “It took us over a year to get the issue thrown out by a majority of the city council,” Kay explains. He worked to galvanize opposition to this , through years of public hearings and back-and-forth in the local media. Yet the issue came down to enforcement. “The question was, how was the LAPD[LA Police Department] going to enforce this?” Kay explained. “And they couldn’t really come up with an answer. But the chief wanted the law, which would have meant selective enforcement. That meant most of LA wouldn’t enforce it, but they would have it on the books.” For Kay, the unintended consequences (Merton 1936) were clear: “You know the old routine, they could use it and they could abuse it.”

I asked Kay if he or the other organizers had made use of any playful pranks as part of the campaign. “We were being conventional with this one,” Kay explained, acknowldeging the need to be aware of the tactical strengths vs. weaknesses of the Yippies’ playful pranks. “We were trying to draw a broader element.” Kay responded that the prank is not useful for all circumstances – there are times when it is less useful than others. Similarly, Lawrence Bogad (2005a) has suggested that there are different tactical uses for the carnival. The same tactical understandings and consideration of the audience are useful.

There are different strategic uses of the prank. “Some things are more tailored for the prank type of situation,” Kay explains. He suggested that when a politician has been particularly hypocritical, it is sometimes useful to deliver a pie in their face – a tactic called “pieing.” “That’s like commiting a non-violent assassination without a bullet. You are dissolving their ego with a pie,” says Kay, who is perhaps better known as “Pieman.”

Over the years, Kay has hurled pies at the likes of former California Governor Jerry Brown, former New York Senator James L. Buckley, Nixon aide G. Gordon Liddy, one-time CIA director William Colby, antifeminist leader Phyllis Schlafley, and countless others (Moynihan 2001). "A pie in the face…has no equal in slapstick comedy. It can reduce dignity to nothing in seconds," explained Mack Sennett in *Pie Any Means Necessary*, a book about the practice and its modern-day practitioners, the Biotic Baking Brigade (Agent Apple 2004; Crane 2004).

I asked Kay who were the most appropriate targets for pieing. “Like Pat Buchanan, for example. He spoke on Cesar Chavez’ birthday. He deserved a Cesar salad pie in honor of Cesar Chavez and the farm workers,” he explained. Others deserve a pie because they are “turncoats” or just plain “obnoxious and pompous,” Kay adds. “Someone like that you want to take down all the way. Buchanan, I have my own ax to grind with him ‘cause of the anti-Semitism, he says the Holocaust didn’t happen. It’s totally obnoxious.”

Yet the question remains whether this slapstick tactic is part of the Ghandian repertoire of non-violent direct action. When the Biotic Baking Brigade pied former San Francisco Mayor Willie Brown, Kay said he did not feel it was non-violent. “I personally had a criticism of the Willie Brown action,” he says. While Kay understood why Brown had been pied because of his ties with real estate interests in San Francisco and his push to drive the homeless out of the city, he was also aware that such a tactic would be tried in the media. And the symbolism of three white activists attacking an African American man, albeit with a pie, was still not an effective form of politics. “Someone told me it was like the South,” Kay explains. “There is the color card that you’ve gotta be careful

about." After the pieing, the mayor's handlers explained that the mayor could have been hurt because of the incident. The Cherry Pie 3, as they were dubbed, would spend the next four months behind bars. Yet they retained a sense of humor about the incident. After his sentencing, Agent Cherry Rhubarb Tart explained, "Sticks and stones may break your bones, but a pie is just flour, sugar, water and fruit for fuck's sake. Get over it!" (Crane 2004a).

Cherry Rhubarb Tart's sentencing schtick is part of a long tradition among the Yippies and neo-Yippies, such as the Biotic Baking Brigade. The Yippies spent many years trying to borrow from the politics and comedy of Lenny Bruce and other comedians, such as Jerry Lewis and the Marx Brothers, to help make protests playful, engaging, and entertaining (Crane 2004a). Kay locates pieing within this tradition. He explained the roots of the practice: "It goes back to the 1940s. Pieing was way back with Charlie Chaplin. There was lots of pieing in Three Stooges movies... who would go in there and make fools of these guys." The point was to take someone down a notch without actually physically hurting them.

The Politics of Entertainment and Disruption

Yet pieing is not the tactic the Yippies are most famous for. In many ways, the contribution of the Yippies involved re-inventing the protest repertoire.

> "You are hippies and you are here to have a demonstration and we cannot allow that in the Stock Exchange," a security guard is said to have told Abbie Hoffman on his way to conduct one of the most famous Yippie actions. But Hoffman was not there to conduct a simple demonstration. "Who's a hippie? I'm Jewish and besides, we don't do demonstrations, see we have no picket signs," Hoffman replied, doing his best stand-up schtick. But that was part of the point. Beal recalls bringing actual stand-up comedians to actions. Hoffman was later

> admitted into the exchange because "the guards decided it was not a good idea to keep a Jew out of the Stock Exchange" (1989, p. 21).

Beal recalls what happened next: A few people went down. They had an open balcony at the time where you could look down on the exchange floor and they started throwing dollar bills. And it completely shut down the biggest financial trading thing in the world 'cause everybody stopped what they were doing and started chasing dollar bills, which of course were worth almost nothing. It stopped for a while, it created a frenzy.

The anticapitalist snub at the Stock Exchange would turn out to be among the most famous of the Yippie pranks, in part because of the way the story was covered by the media and told around the world (Moynihan 2001). Sounding very much like a stand-up comedian, Hoffman described his work with the media in this non-demonstration:

> When we got out, I carried on in front of the press...
> "How much money did you throw out?"
> "A thousand dollars in small bills."
> "How many of you are there?"
> "Two, three, we don't even exist! We don't even exist!"
> We danced in front of the Stock Exchange, celebrating the end of money. I burned a fiver. Some guy said it was disgusting and I agree with him, calling my comrades "Filthy Commies" (1989, p. 21).

Similar disruptions would continue for years. In 1972, the Yippies released white rats at dinner for Pat Nixon, "right through the Waldorf Hotel," Kay recalls. "[I]n one protest, a bunch of us streaked with Nixon masks." He describes the politics of slapstick and fun.

> They are the buffoons. Listen, everyone knows someone who should get pied. People would like to pie their boss, their landlord. It humanizes things, gets people to laugh. It breaks the barriers down. Some people are afraid of straight protest.

Kay explains why the Yippies aimed to disrupt the everyday lives of so many politicians. “These fucks disrupted our lives with the Vietnam War; they disrupted our lived with depression; they disrupted our lives with their stinking economic policy.” As a result the Yippie disruptions were intended to put those responsible “on notice,” he said. “When they woke up, they were not going to have serenity.”

Yet the point for the Yippies was to serve as an alternative to traditional models of organizing and politics. Kay describes the contrast between the Yippie prank model and conventional politics: “How does it contrast? Humor breaks barriers. Sometimes you gotta use silliness to open people’s eyes, because these people are dangerous but they are also silly. These people are very silly.”

The other prank the Yippies are most famous for took place at the Pentagon. While other groups, including Students for Democratic Society, wanted to march on Washington, the Yippies converged in Washington in 1967 to levitate the Pentagon. Hoffman explained why: “The peace movement has gone crazy and it’s about time. Our alternative fantasy will match in zaniness the war in Vietnam. Fantasy is freedom.” Within this fantasy, “The Pentagon will rise 300 feet in the air” (p.29). The call for the Pentagon action was very much in keeping with Bakhtin’s protest as carnival framework, which would become a mainstay of the global justice movement thirty years later. “Anybody can do anything.” Here, the line between speakers and audience would blur“No rules, speeches won’t do, leaders are full of shit. Pull your clothes off.... jump a wall, do a dance, sing a song, paint the building, blow it up, charge, and get inside” (p. 29).

Yet in order to get media coverage for such an event, it had to be more dramatic than a carnival. It had to create a controversy. Beal describes the situation:

> The people who did the action knew that if you surrounded the Pentagon, the government, the police would freak out because they had a regulation saying that you could not surround the Pentagon. So the second you said you would levitate the Pentagon, that made them really mad.

Indeed, part of the success of the action came from understanding and challenging the workings of the Pentagon bureaucracy:

> There is a regulation which states that the Pentagon cannot be surrounded by peaceful civilians at, like, a distance closer than 100 yards or something like that. And the guys did. I think they had an inkling of that at least. So there would be a big confrontation.

Like the Stock Exchange action, the Pentagon demonstration would become part of protest lore. Accounts of the 1960s are not complete without stories about the Yippie pranks.

Alienation, Violence, and the Limitations of a Model

Not every activist positively was impressed with the Yippie pranks. "We weren't interested in floating Monroe High School," quipped Panama Vincente Alba, a member of the Young Lords Party, situating the more serious Young Lords activism in contract to the lighter Yippie antics. But Beal explains what the Yippies were trying to do with their playful approach. "I tried to do something that was funny, not just like the left with a lot of slogans. The convention at the time was a bunch of people nobody really thinks about any more – the Trotskyites of the Communist Party."

While certain segments of the movement and the media found the Yippies incredibly entertaining, other segments of the left found them off-putting. David Graeber (undated) has suggested that the Yippies were profoundly alienating to the working

classes. The problem for Beal and many other Yippies was simple: “The thing about the old left was they were not very funny.” So the Yippies gravitated to the funnier, more subversive voices in the culture, such as Lenny Bruce, “who were just extremely funny. And the sensibility was they were not from the old – the kind of people who were running the country in the 1950s.”

For awhile, the Yippie carnival brought a lot of people into the antiwar movement. “There were a lot of positive responses from much of the left and the people they were trying to incorporate,” Beal recalls. “They were trying to get kids who were anti-establishment. How do you get to the hippies?” For many, the answer was to speak to their frustration with the war and the culture. While the Yippies did this with pranks and pot, for others, the preferred way to communicate was with a more extreme form of political engagement. “There were some groups who had some success, like the Weathermen, but even they were not that funny,” Beal explained, in a nod to the turn toward the use of violence within the movement. Yet as the war continued and the culture become more familiar with Yippie-type pranks, the limitations of the Yippie model become clearer and clearer. “The only problem was that then people started to get serious. And there was this kind of split in the left. People always resented us,” Beal acknowledged.

From the Lower East Side to the South Bronx

New York City’s Lexington Avenue train stops on Bleeker Street just down the street from 9 Bleeker, where the Yippies have met since the early 1970s. From there, it’s an easy to get to the South Bronx, where the Young Lords Party got their start in 1969

(Abramson 1971; Melendez 2003). Though relatively geographically close, the social and cultural gap between Bleeker and 149th Street is beyond measure. And the contrast can be seen in the differing approaches to organizing taken by the Yippies and the Young Lords. While the Yippies sought to keep activism light, playful, and theatrical, the Young Lords used every trick they could imagine to deal with issues of poverty, colonialism, and social inequality. The Yippies were primarily Caucasian middle-class hippies, while the Young Lords consisted of a cross-section of Puerto Ricans. While the Yippies had no dress code beyond the informal counterculture uniform of blue jeans, the Young Lords adopted the "revolutionary dress code of U.S. Amy-issued field jackets, combat boots, and purple berets with a 'YLO' button" (Melendez 2003, p. 94).

Yet despite these obvious differences, the groups had a number of similarities. Both, for example, were heavily inspired by the Black Panther Party. In the spring of 1967, as the Black Panthers staged one of their greatest power plays – the choreographed entrance of armed Panthers into the California state Capitol building in Sacremento (Reed 2005, p. 51), a nineteen-year-old heroin user named Vicente "Panama" Alba watched the event on TV (Alba 2004). For scholars of social movements, the Panthers' action could be viewed as perhaps the most thrilling bit of guerilla political theater in history (Reed 2005, p. 41). "The guerilla theatre siege of Sacramento was one of many dramatic moments in what was a very dramatic time," Panama explained. But for Panama Alba, the action had nothing to do with theater. It inspired him to think that someone was actually fighting back. Within three years, Alba had quit heroin and joined the Young Lords Party. He recalls:

> I wanted to be a revolutionary, not understanding what it took. I started off wanting to fight; I was motivated by anger. Yet I started developing a love of people. And I realized that if you wanted to move people from where they were from to where they were going, you needed to have organizing.

Notions of love of community compete with anger toward police throughout Alba's distinct narrative of his years as an activist. Born in Panama City and immigrating to the Bronx in 1961, Alba began his political activism protesting against the Vietnam war and joined the Young Lords in 1970. As the only representative of his organization I was able to access for an interview, the remaining sections of this chapter heavily feature the voice of Panama Alba, along with segments of a first-person narrative by Richie Perez (2000), another former Young Lord and Alba's longtime colleague.

The Young Lords: A Different Kind of Drama

The Yippies had organized around the notion of play and pranks in the Lower East Side. In the South Bronx, the Young Lords organized with a different approach and philosophy of direct action. I asked Alba about the line between work and play, and the tension within the movements in which he worked:

> The ones that used play were the Yippies, who had their parties in the Lower East Side. That appealed to the white youth. We were into the long hair too. But it was more appealing to the white youth. I think that the '60s was a time for the whole youth culture in the US. The most serious aspect of that was the antiwar piece. There was a lot of self-indulgence, a lot of theater, a lot of partying, free love, drugs, sex, and rock and roll. But as far as our communities were concerned, that was happening in conjunction with the rise of the civil rights movement and the Black Panthers, national liberation movements around the world, and the question of empowerment struggles in our communities. That's very serious. That's life and death. You are talking about drug epidemics that were killing thousands; you're talking about poverty; you're talking about hunger; you're talking about racial discrimination, racial prostitution – very serious stuff.

Still, Alba acknowledges, an element of play intermingled with the hard organizing work:.

> The Young Lords…(pause) had a bit of both. We had a little bit of both because we came out of that time period. OK, I remember many a time going to the office and we had the Stones and Santana blaring on the radio. At the same time, we were dealing with very serious issues. The media gravitated to the more dramatic stuff.

As result, the Young Lords advanced a starkly dramatic form of direct action around daily necessities, such as hospitals and garbage pick-up:

> In our community, what was effective was the dramatic. The garbage action was dramatic – and people could see the impact. If you throw garbage on the street and ran, or you hid among the people so they couldn't find you. (For additional accounts of this action, see Nelson 2001 and the Perez narrative later in this report).

I asked Alba about the Black Panther action at the California State House, which T.V. Reed described as political theater (2004, p. 41-51). While Alba's memoir (2004) highlighted his appreciation for the Panthers' work, he did not view it as theater:

> Again, this is where you talk about the cultural difference underlying this. That was not theater. That shit was dramatic. There is a difference. That was not about putting on a show. This is very serious when you go into the capital of a state. And you are carrying guns and you say, "All right, we are going to defend our right to bear arms here." But it was a dramatic moment so people interpret it as theater.

Understandings of pleasure, play and community-building are certainly culturally determined. Cultural approaches to play and performance, theater and direct action, inform the Young Lord approach. While the Young Lords did not consider theatrical group, a flair for the dramatic was always part of their approach to organizing. But this drama was informed by a distinct social and political milieu, as Alba explains:

> With the Young Lords, we had those kinds of moments as well. We took over the church, there was the theft of the X-ray truck. We were not into being theatrical, we were action-oriented. If a hospital was not working, we would make it work; if a janitor was refusing to make a repair in a building, we would organize a rent strike; if the trash men were not picking up the trash, we would burn the trash in the street until they picked it up.

For Alba, "All of those things had drama in them. But they were not theater pieces. We were very serious."

Do-It-Yourself Direct Action with the Young Lords

Yet much of the work of the Young Lords was also about a prefigurative do-it-yourself community-building ethic (McKay 1998). If part of the city was not working, the group sought to do-it-themselves, rather than wait for permission. Take the Young Lords garbage offensive mentioned above, for example. Perez, who played a vital role in this campaign with the Young Lords, describes the offensive:

> When East Harlem residents identified uncollected garbage as a major problem, the Young Lords, joined by the community, began sweeping the streets and stacking the garbage up on the corners. However, when the Sanitation Dept. continued to ignore the situation, we burned the garbage in the streets, blocking major traffic arteries used by commuters to leave Manhattan for suburbia. When the police came and tried to arrest people, fighting broke out. Afterwards, garbage started getting picked up regularly (Perez 2000).

(For a full account of the garbage campaign, see Melendez 2003, p. 88-111).

Alba recalls another example of a successful Young Lords campaign organized around prefigurative direct action – building the world activists hope to create in their actions. The story involves the theft of an X-ray truck. Alba recalls:

> There was an X-ray truck, run by the Health Department, that was parked right on First Avenue on the Upper East Side. It was there to provide community services, but it wasn't doing so. On the other hand, we had a program of healthcare for our

> people. And for a lot of reasons, because of the treatment that people received in the public hospitals, because of the lack of real public hospitals, for all those reasons, people were not receiving adequate health care. So there was a Young Lords initiative that was put together with members of the Health Revolutionary Unity Movement and a group of doctors based primary in Lincoln Hospital called the Lincoln Collective. And we used to go out on Saturdays and do TB testing, community testing around things such as the determination of lead paint poisoning. And that was years before they ever made a law that would address that. But there was a TB epidemic. And we were testing people for it, going and knocking on their doors. So we approached the Health Department and said, "Listen, you have an X-ray truck out there with nobody using it. Bring it to a better place where you have more access and we could bring people." "No." It was like, "Who the fuck are you to tell us how to run our program." So, a team of people went and hijacked the truck. As one was stealing the truck, a couple of guys were in the back with the technicians, being very cognizant that this could turn into a kidnapping, working at convincing them that when we got where we were going, that they should stay with the truck and service the people. Meanwhile, the people have been called to the front of the Young Lords Office, so when the truck arrives, there are hundreds of people there ready to get TB tests.

Through the group's understanding of the dramatic community dynamics and the need for services, they were able to frame the confrontation as a story about an inefficient, insensitive bureaucracy and a resourceful community. I asked Alba if the Young Lords had contacted the media. Yes, and then some, Alba explained: "The cops, everybody – high drama! High drama, but the fact was that there was so much community there that they didn't arrest anybody." (For other accounts of the X-ray truck takeover, see Chang 2005, p. 48; Melendez 2003, p. 88-111; Nelson 2001).

There are many diverse forms of political drama, and many are anything but light. When Martin Luther King knew that Bull O'Conner was going to spray fire hoses at his members and arranged for the media to be there, it may have been dramaturgical, but it certainly was not light (McAdam 1996). The point is that the world saw what happened. Alba notes that the groups he's worked with have planned any number of actions with a

similar focus – to push theirstory into the public sphere. Take, for example, the takeover of the Statue of Liberty in October 1977:

> [It was] a very dramatic confrontation. We had a number of situations that were like that. Everybody says that it was a Young Lords type action – taking over the Statue of Liberty – but it was post-Young Lords. But the people who planned it and executed it were all Young Lords – Richie Perez, Mickey Melendez, and I. A lot of the time, we did not have a full sense of how dramatic something would be.

As such, Alba, Perez, and Melendez were all concerned that their story would not make the news or get out to the world. They were not even sure *El Diario*, New York's Spanish language paper, would cover it. But as it turned out, he says:

> We were really way off target. Photos of the Puerto Rican flag on the Statue of Liberty went around the world. People sent us front-page pictures from the Netherlands, London, Paris, everywhere, Latin America. That action was designed specifically to dramatize the case of Puerto Rico. But in our imagination, we never dreamed it would go out like that.

The point was to help people find meaning and hear stories, such as the poem "Puerto Rican Obituary" (Pietri 1973/2004; discussed in more detail below), which had not been heard before. Part of the process is creating a compelling story that people can live in. Stories are reality-creating machines. "You got it. You gotta imagine it," Alba concurs.

For many others involved in the struggles Alba worked on, the story – the living example – was an important part of the activism. Alba recalls the story of a member of Fuerzas Armadas de Liberacion Nacional (FALN), who was locked in Bellevue Hospital and held at gunpoint in a room with bars over the windows. Yet he was somehow still able to escape his captors by crawling out a window:

> The fact that this guy would do this and get away was high drama. There were no pictures, but you can just imagine how this guy cut his way through bars and then lowered himself out the window with ace bandages. They captured people's imaginations there... it had that effect.

Jürgen Habermas suggested that the ideal of democracy is that everyone enters a public sphere where debate can take place. Yet Nancy Fraser (1989, 1995), Jamie Daniel (2000), and Michael Warner (2002) have long noted that differing outsider groups have limited access to this arena of public opinion, debate, and democratic participation. If one cannot vote because of a history of incareration, or if their voices are limited to coverage of outrageous events, then people must resort to creative ways to bring themselves to the table and into the national conversation. Here, drama is perhaps the primary tool of the political activist, As Alba explains:

> There is another dimension here. Unless there are dramatics as far as people of color and poor people [are concerned], the statistics are not going to be enough to get the media. The media are part of the corporate world. The only time the mainstream media covers our community is if people got killed, got raped, were murdered, were selling drugs, or burning buildings. Aside from that, we don't exist. So, for us, the value in taking certain actions felt very serious. Depending on the issue, we dramatize it to the point where mainstream America had to take notice of our plight. And it's because we're not playing on an even playing field here either. But the reason and the motivation were very different than when we saw Abbie Hoffman and Jerry Rubin going down to the Pentagon and saying we're going to levitate it.

The Young Lords had no interest in levitating Monroe High School [which was a South Bronx school where Perez had taught Alba when he was in high school]. "That's not what the actions were all about. So that's a fundamental difference," Alba concludes. What their actions were about was introducing a different kind of a story and perspective into the democratic conversation.

The Lincoln Hospital Campaign

If the Young Lords had a high point, it was the day-long occupation of Lincoln Hospital on July 17, 1970. Alba explains the reasoning behind the action:

> At the time, the hospitals were basically laboratories for medical schools. At that time, you had a relationship between Albert Einstein [College of Medicine and Lincoln]. And there were two problems, one was exploitation and two was a very bad dynamic between the doctors and the patients. Doctors that were recruited from Latin America and India – were from the elite of those countries – being brought because they were Latinos[people of color]. But they looked at the world from a totally different place.

In fact, Alba had a particular confrontation with an Indian doctor when he tried to help a friend who had not seen a doctor at the hospital for three days. Alba went to see the doctor, who called a security guard when Alba asked what was the hold up. The guard happened to be an old organizing colleague from the Young Lords. After Alba told the guard what happened, he recalls:

> The guard says, "Doctor, I think you owe this man an apology." And [the doctor] looks at him and says, "I don't apologize to patients." So that was his response. He was an Indian Muslim. In India, the caste system is not something that we can even comprehend here. But it's a super-duper class system. And this is the kind of guy who is brought in to treat people in a poor deprived community. Imagine the kinds of problems that were not being seen – until there were doctors there that actually spoke people's language.

The Young Lords pushed to have grievance tables staffed by people who spoke Spanish set up at the hospital, but still the problems continued. "When Carmen Rodriguez died during a brutal second-trimester abortion at Lincoln Hospital, we fought back. At the time, you couldn't challenge doctors, so we pushed to open up complaint tables for patients and the hospital heard us," Alba recalls. (See Nelson 2001 for additional accounts of the Rodriguez incident).

In the early morning hours of July 17, members of the Young Lords entered Lincoln Hospital, some through the windows, some through the doors. “We took over the hospital,” Alba explains. The group encountered little to no resistance from the hospital workers and, according to accounts, the patients welcomed them (LESN UNDATED]). Once inside, they set up a table where people could come,” Alba recalls, and the staff heard their concerns. Perez elaborated on the occupation and its outcome:

> The Lords, the Panthers, hospital workers (organized in the Health Revolutionary Unity Movement), and community people (organized as the Think Lincoln Committee) set up "patient-worker complaint tables" in Lincoln and other hospitals. Hundreds of grievances were recorded; but the hospital administration refused to address them. The old Lincoln Hospital was in a building that had been condemned and was severely understaffed and under-financed. After a list of demands and mass demonstrations were also ignored, the Lords occupied the hospital in the middle of the night. The next morning the media publicized the occupation and the issues that led to it. After hundreds of angry police surrounded the hospital, the Lords slipped out; and only two people were arrested. The publicity about the terrible conditions in the old Lincoln Hospital accelerated thebuilding of the new hospital that exists today (2000).

“The hospital changed,” Alba recalls. “They realized they needed to treat poor people, not just train their doctors on us or use us as research objects.” For Alba, just forcing the hand of the hospital administrators so they would pay attention to grievances was a victory that came out of that action. Before the occupation, the Young Lords had pushed to have a grievance table, with Spanish speaking assistants, at the hospital. After the occupation, this workable solution was made permanent. “And even today, thirty-some odd years later, when you walk into a hospital, you read on a wall a patient bill of rights. That came about because of those takeovers. Before the takeover there was no place for patients and grievances.” After the action, the rules of the game changed; the power balance was altered. That carries on today, however ineffective or diluted it has

become. That direct change came about in part because activists had advanced a winnable, workable solution. (For other accounts of the Lincoln Hospital takeover see Abramson 1971; LESN 2004; Melendez et al 2003, p. 1-2, 14; Nelson 2001).

Days of Rage: Violence, Community Involvement, and Prefigurative Politics

I think one of the key questions is how to build a better world. There is a romance to that. Yet sometimes one person's idea of romance is different from that of others. A primary example of this Rubicon emerged for the Young Lords at the Puerto Rican Day Parade in 1971, when the group sent in "suicide squads" to push back the police who were leading the parade. But the action was designed without full community input from those marching or watching the parade:

> Look, what I think is important is that it doesn't really matter what you and I understand, or what our organization understands, what really matters is where is the mass understanding of our situation? We in the Young Lords were very clear on the role of the police. We, back then as we say today, recognized them as an occupational force in our community and a source of brutality and death against people in our community. That's very serious. That was not the collective consensus in our community. By and large what happens is that people get to that point of consciousness very quickly when a loved one is victimized that way. We went and we planned this. I was invited to participate in a suicide squad in 1971. It wasn't killing myself, it was Weathermanstyle direct confrontations with cops, with helmets ready to fight. We certainly had the right to attack the police, who treated us as colonial subjects. Yet I think again when you have clichés that say that "true revolutionaries are guided by true feelings of love," those clichés are way more than clichés. At least the way I think about that action is, there are a lot of levels of questions to think about. I think that a lot of us, myself included, who went into the Young Lords and went into the Black Panther Party, we were motivated by feelings of rage and anger.

Certainly, the place of violence and anger in political activism has been the source of ample discussion in recent years. In the weeks after the Seattle World Trade Organization (WTO) protests in 1999, Rachel Neumann suggested there is a place for the kind of anger which inspires direct action (2000). But Alba is quick to differentiate between blind and directed forms of political passion:

> You know, there is righteous anger and righteous rage. However, that should not be the driving force behind what you should do. And I think that the cliché says that very clearly. I think that the consequences of what happened, like at the Puerto Rican Day Parade [in 1971)]… I think that the agents within the organization understood that that rage was there. That there was a propensity among us and some adventurism on our part, and maybe some romanticism on some people's part. And we had just lived a year, two years, [since] the Days of Rage in Chicago, and we should have learned. We should have learned.

In many ways, the 1969 Days of Rage have become synonymous with the Weather Underground, and with the rejection of Ghandian principles of non-violence that become such a part of the history of the US left. The shift began with a number of quiet conversations among activists throughout late 1967 and 1968 as the war went on and on. Why don't we really bring the war home? Because if you use violence, you became what you are fighting against, the oppressed become the oppressors. "You know, you can catch the very disease you are fighting, you want to stop the war, you become warlike. You want to fight inhumanity, and you become inhumane. It's a contagion through combat," said Diana Oughton, a long time SDS and early Weather Underground member, before she was killed in an explosion at the Greenwich Village townhouse where the group was assembling bombs.

But in the face of the political assassination of Martin Luther King and a still-escalating war abroad, the idea of bringing the war home never lost its appeal. "The

Vietnamese are more interested in us influencing our Republican parents than in us actually engaging in guerilla conflict," Oughton continued. Yet most members of the group were not interested. Tom Hayden and the majority of the old SDS leadership called for activists to expose the violence of American democracy at the Chicago Democratic Convention in 1968, and the results were spectacular: the whole world watched. But then Nixon was elected, the Vietnam war continued, and the secret domestic war known as COINTELPRO carried out against activists by the U.S. intelligence forces, both the FBI and the CIA, moved into high gear. The tension mounted everywhere, most of all within that faction of SDS now committed to the project of "bringing the war home."

A year later, the Weather Underground lead a rampage through the streets of Chicago during the Days of Rage, smashing police cars and getting beaten by the cops. Bill Ayers, who helped organize the action, later painted a picture of himself as an adrenaline junky: "I was on a freedom high, and all I needed to feed my habit was one more bit of action." Yet by the time he started losing friends to this pursuit, the jittery buzz had become a "high octane combination of panic and pain." Activists and philosophers around the world watched the events in Chicago with horror. Ayers would spend the next twelve years living underground as a political fugitive(Ayers 2001). But for Alba, a primary problem with actions like the Days of Rage and the Puerto Rican Day Parade was both that they betrayed his community and, more than that, were tactically unsound:

> It violates every tenant of guerilla warfare that you are going to take on a better equipped and trained enemy than us. That's not guerilla warfare. But we did all that. We set up what we called suicide squads. And we were going to take the police head-on on Fifth Avenue to prevent them from leading the Puerto Rican Day Parade. We understood that they should not have the right to lead a Puerto Rican Day Parade. That was not the understanding of the people. And again, I

> think that revolutionaries who truly love their people judge their actions by how is it going to benefit the people you live with and you are fighting for. The reason for the revolution is not so you can have an outlet for your rage. And I think that that coupled with ignorance, coupled with immaturity, coupled with police infiltration. And so we wound up in a place where we started battling with the police. Those of us that made it to the middle of the street got our asses whooped. We made a gallant effort at winning. But there was no fucking way we were going to do that.

And, he continues, the action had wide-ranging consequences:

> In the process, we brought on the wrath of the police department, not [just] on the Young Lords, but on the Puerto Rican community. When they retaliated, they did not count who was carrying a purple beret. They started stomping over women with baby carriages, it was nasty. And I guess in a sense correctly, the community held us responsible for that. And our relationship changed dramatically and forever after that Puerto Rican Day Parade. If we would have done the groundwork ahead of time and made an effort to hear the needs and concerns of the people, things might have been different. We didn't have the right to risk the safety of everyone else who went to the parade, but we did. And the police fought back against everyone. Part of it was my own fantasy to fight back against the cops, who we viewed as our oppressors, by actually organizing a confrontation. Fighting cops was romantic.

"Our goals, our values, our morality, must be visible already in our actions," philosopher Herbert Marcuse explained in one of the best definitions of the prefigurative political organizing. Marcuse wrote those words after watching the experiences of the social movements of the late 1960s. The discussion of creating a better world within their community-building efforts and social interactions was also a part of Young Lords' work. "We subscribed to the writing of Che," Alba recalls. "His essay, 'Socialism and Man,' was our inspiration."

Like the Situationists and the Yippies, the Young Lords were inspired to challenge their "isms." Yet the prefigurative challenge remains vexing, especially within the context of a violent culture. "The new human beings we want to create – we must

already be these human beings right here and now," Marcuse suggested (quoted in Neumann 2000). This type of thinking was part of the group's work, Alba explains:

> The new man was not just against the state, the struggle was also within. It was against the biases he had within the individual. The Young Lords was the first place I ever found open acceptance of gay people. We were into long hair. The concept of individualism was what was being challenged. The question was, are you challenging the internal "isms" – the racism, the homophobia, the sexism? We challenged internal forms of oppression and concepts of beauty – "ballo mallo, ballo bueno," bad hair, good hair. It was about teaching people to use meetings in ways which were useful, without personal attacks. You could disagree with someone without attacking them.

Nevertheless, the group's relationship to violence remained complex. For many, the Young Lords were not a pacifist organization. As Richie Perez explains, "if confrontation or breaking the law was necessary to move an issue or campaign forward," the Young Lords were willing to do it (2000, p. ??). Perez, who taught at Monroe High School and later at Brooklyn College, described the position of Black and Puerto Rican students in the struggle for open admissions:

> We weren't like the students in the south in one important way – WE WEREN'T PACIFISTS. WE WERE NOT COMMITTED TO A NON-VIOLENT ETHIC, a non-violent code of behavior. So when we integrated campuses, while our primary tactics were non-violent, we got to kick some ass too, punch motherfuckers out, throw racists down the stairs. We did non-violent actions – but it was a TACTICAL question, not a matter of PRINCIPLE. It was important that our antagonists knew this (2000).

This approach presented a double-edged sword, producing some beneficial results and some heat from agents provocateurs and other police, which undermined the group. "I dare say that was quintessentially how the Young Lords were destroyed," Alba concedes.

Probably the most difficult outcome of the 1971 Puerto Rican campaign was that it reduced much of the goodwill the group had garnered with earlier direct actions that served the practical needs of people in the neighborhood, such as the X-ray truck action,

the garbage campaign, and the Lincoln Hospital occupation (Melendez 2003, p. 162-78). For those early campaigns, the group had been able to garner support when the Young Lords, in Perez's words, "refused to be limited to tactics that were defined as "legal" as they intervened in the social issues of the day" (2000). "People loved us," Alba explains. "Before the Puerto Rican Day Parade, our community fed us, kept us warm, hid us when we had to run from the police. After that day, our relationship was very different."

The Use of Culture

While Alba and Perez speak very little about the role of play, elements of direct action, drama, and performance were integral parts of the Young Lords' work. Yet the world-making dynamics of poetry and culture are also part of the group's story. "What you had was the first generation on the mainland of a group of Nuyoricans (New York Puerto Ricans), Alba recalls. "There were some people who were very artistic". Poetry was part of advancing a counter-narrative about Puerto Rican identity. It was part of the activists' effort to narrate and thereby seek to create a more caring, compelling space. "Eddy Tiguero used to say, 'we are writing a script.' We had Pietro's poetry. What we didn't have was a cultural ministry. Yet we had cultural players," Alba explains.

In the summer of 1969, Pedro Pietri (1973/2004) stood up at one of the first Young Lords rallies and read from "Puerto Rican Obituary," a poem about the complex relationship between New York and Puerto Rican identity. The poem would be received and read all over the world. One of the long-standing achievements if this era of activism

was the creation of the Nuyorican poetry movement, which still exists to this day. Some have suggested that Pietri's poem helped launch this movement.

> Here lies Juan
> Here lies Miguel
> Here lies Milagros
> Here lies Olga
> Here lies Manuel
> who died yesterday today
> and will die again tomorrow
> Always broke
> Always owing
> Never knowing
> that they are beautiful people
> Never knowing
> the geography of their complexion
>
> PUERTO RICO IS A BEAUTIFUL PLACE
> PUERTORRIQUENOS ARE A BEAUTIFUL RACE
>
> If only they had turned off the television
> and tune into their own imaginations
>
> (Pietri 1973/2004)

In the End…

The Young Lords did not last much past the early 1970s. Like many activist groups from that era, they were hounded by government provocateurs until they ground to a halt. Yet Alba continued his activism. In 1977, he was arrested and spent six months in jail for alleged ties to Fuerzas Armadas de Liberación Nacional. Five years later, he was acquitted. Alba was involved in two takeovers of the Statue of Liberty as part of campaigns supporting Puerto Rican nationalist prisoners and in support of the people of the island of Vieques. He is a founding member of numerous organizations including the South Bronx Clean Air Coalition, the Vieques Brigade, and the National Congress for Puerto Rican Rights. In 2004, he won the El Award from *El Diario-La Prensa* as activist

of the year. He is currently an executive board member and delegate of Laborers' Local 108 (L.I.U.N.A.) of the AFL/CIO.

As for the Yippies, the group would continue in different incarnations. Members would welcome delegates at most every major party convention over the next thirty years – from the 1984 RNC in Dallas (New York Times 1984) to the 2004 RNC in their original hometown of New York City (Anderson 2004) -. Dana Beal recalls how the Yippies' focus shifted over the years:

> We had a smoke-in at the Democratic National Convention in 1972 and they said that the only issue was the war. The war, in case you didn't notice, is winding down and there were certain [other] issues, which we had put aside in 1968, but we never really dropped them. That wing of the movement sort of stayed in a snit over that. And we started organizing [marijuana] smoke-ins in 1972. They were extremely upset that we were using the name "Yippie" to be doing something that they didn't consider to be socially conscious. We were getting thousands of people out for the "wrong reasons." But when you have 10,000 kids marching to Central Park, that's a hell of a community.

And the group kept going, despite hundreds of arrests at their yearly pro-pot parades in New York City during the Giuliani era. "Giuliani was such a grim man," Beal reflected. Nevertheless, the parades and the community-building emphasis have continued. "We have survived it. If there is one thing they cannot handle, it's a sustained campaign of civil disobedience."

After all these years, for Beal, the high point of the Yippies' playful protests came at the 1976 RNC in Kansas City:

> The apogee, the highest point of the ludicrous protests, was the incident of the clowns. In 1976, Wavy Gravy ran a "Nobody For President" campaign. That was big that year. A lot of jokes about – who's gonna lower your taxes? Who's gonna solve all your problems – nobody. And we were going around in clown noses. So it got to the point where the Kansas City police were going around arresting people for no reason and they kind of cornered people and they were down an

> ally, and real quick, Wavy Gravy handed out all these clown noses, and they got away. They didn't get beaten up. They didn't get arrested.

Here, play was used as an effective response to social control. Over the next thirty years, similar tactics were employed by groups ranging from ACT UP at the Stop the Church Action in 1989 to Reclaim the Streets during the 2004 RNC to the Clandestine Insurgent Rebel Clown Army during the summer 2005 G8 protests in Scotland. Ideally, it is a tactic that shifts power relations. "It punctured the tension, particularly in that situations. That's a really good example to be talking about," Beal explained. But while the playful, ludic, and joking approach advanced by the Yippies can sometimes stillsurprise the elites, the suspense appears to have diminished as the years have worn on. Elites have become effective at establishing countermeasures. When disruptive routines become routine, they can become just another institution (Bogad, 2005b). Thus, over the years, countless groups have sought to reinvent the protest repertoire.

The Yippie and Young Lords stories offer countless insights about the role of play in community organizing in the late 1960s and 1970s. One group rejected the lighter elements or direct connection with the politics of play, which seemed more appropriate to the stark staging-ground of the South Bronx. The other advanced a framework for a politics of madcap antics. Both made use of drama and extreme situations to plant ideas and stories into the public consciousness. Both inserted their counter-narratives in the public sphere. And members of both groups stayed involved in similar struggles, including efforts to address the War on Drugs, HIV prevention, and humane drug policy. In the years after the Yippies hit their peak, others have followed Abbie Hoffman's pleasure-based approach to activism. Much of this ludic spirit would continue with Gay Liberation.

After I finished writing this chapter, I went over the Yippee to meet Dana for dinner. At one point in the evening, Dana informed everyone that Stew Albert, one of the Yippies who had helped nominate Pigasus outside the Democratic National Convention, had died. "There are only a few of us left," Dana noded. "Stew Albert, 66, Dies; Used Laughter to Protest a War," was the headline for the prominant obituary for the passing of the former prankster (Martin, 2006). The obit, which featured a a gentleman smile, surrounded in a multicultural crowd, as he burnt his draft card in front of a municipal building. It recounted Albert's absurdist lecture to the 82nd Airborn on the inherent lessons of the Lone Ranger in the midst of a march on the Pentagon in 1967. Ever the self deprecating clown, Albert inspired a great deal of amusement and laughter from onlookers after he was arrested during the Pigasus stunt during the Democratic National Convention in 1968. Once out, he recalled the banter with the police while he was locked up. "I have bad news for you boys," he recalled a cop telling the arrestees. "The pig squeeled on you," (quoted in Martin, 2006). While significant portions of the left found them offputting or insufficiently serious about serious ideas, the group continued to inspire laughter for a generation as some of the most effective proponents of a play based, pleasure seeking approach to organizing, which sought to inspire laughter not fear or guilt.

Chapter II
Play as Pleasure:
Gay Liberation and Movements for Sexual Freedom

> For many involved, desire and sexual play offered emancipatory possibilities, which could incite social unrest, create change, unite the diverse masses, and more importantly produce pleasure (Hollibaugh 2000).
>
> Homosexuality – fortunately but unwittingly – must inevitably play a progressive role in the scheme of things. It will broaden the base for freedom of thought and communication, will be a banner-bearer in the struggle for liberalization of our sexual conventions, and will be a pillar of strength in defense of our threatened democracy (Corey 1951/2001, p. 40)
>
> [T]he sexual act is composed of a multitude of corporal teasings, which recall the game of polymorphous perversion, a game neither productive, nor genital...The seducer's interest lies less in conquest or effectuation than in the plurality and the enjoyment of the potentialities offered (Maffesoli 1993, p. 23).
>
> I want to exchange nothing – not for a thing, not for the past, not for the future. I want to live intensely, for myself, grasping every pleasure firm in the knowledge that what is radically good for me will be good for everyone (Vaneigem 1967/2003, p. 139).

As the above epigraphs suggest, notions of play overlap with countless ways of thinking about emancipation, pleasure, and pluralistic democracy. Another trip back to 1968 is an instructive way to begin the next set of cases in this dissertation, on gay liberation and movements for sexual freedom.

Shortly after the raucous 1968 Democratic National Convention in Chicago, Allen Ginsberg was invited to conduct an interview about the counterculture. The poet, who had had experience with protests which verged on riots (Ginsberg 1965) ruminated about what Chicago could have been like if the flurry of energy had focused on creating an orgy of activism rather than a riot. His flights of fancy offer a narrative trajectory for what gay

liberation activism would look like. Here, a form of community building would emerge that focused on affect rather than rational ends.

For Ginsberg (1969/2001), dance and play, yoga and street theater, chanting and singing, would emerge as ideal alternatives to the riots and street violence that accompanied much of what was supposed to be a "Festival of Life." Instead of violence, a protest of pleasure would open up a trajectory of social change. In the face of mass police repression, he envisioned, "Organized chanting and organized massive rhythmic behavior on the streets, shamanistic white magic, ghost dance rituals, massive nakedness and distribution of flowers might have broken through the police-state hallucination-politics theater wall" (1969/2001p. 183). Ginsberg regretted that there was less of an effort to speak to a generative spirit. "Now, nobody got naked in Chicago, but the few times there was communal chanting of mantras, that proved helpful" (p. 183). Ginsberg hoped the chanting minimized what could have been a much more dangerous confrontation. "[I]t did stop the violence; it really calmed several scenes where police didn't have remote-control orders to attack. But it didn't stop all the violence..." (p. 183).

Still, the Festival of Light had its converts. "The day after Humphrey had been nominated, beaten McCarthyites came down from the Hilton and discovered that free territory in Grant Park," Ginsberg recalled. "They mixed with the Yippies, all eyes glancing at each other... and suddenly discovering a holy community on the grass." There, the Democratic Party delegates shared a space with "youngsters who had been considered dirty, despised, bathless, bearded terrorists." So at least part of the Festival of Light had successful moments: "A marvelous afternoon. So, beat also in the sense of crazy new feelings of joy vibrations right in the middle of America." (p. 185).

But the convention convergence had not been everything it could have been. Ginsberg regreted that there had not been more inviting, possibly transformative, play and Eros. “I can talk about the life I’d like,” he explained. This would include: “more contact with nature; and more occupation with exploration of subjective consciousness and enlargement of areas of inner and outer sensibility; more participation in rhythmic theatre; and liberation of sexual energy from population reproduction” (p. 189). Ginsberg imagines a space in which play and pleasure contribute to movements in a way that emphases affect and personal transformation, rather than reproductive, functional economic ends (D’Emilio 1983).

Here, liberatory play is a celebration of community, a function of the emergence of micro groups – “neo-tribes” – which reject linear approaches to living in favor of a sensual “we-ness” (Gardiner 1997; Maffesoli 1996). “[I]t seems to me that time has come for the orgy to become a communal form of ‘adhesive’ democratic festival,” Ginsberg explained in a reference to the Dionysian carnival thought to be capable of creating a collective frenzy that infuses meaning into everyday life (Maffesoli 1993, p. 39). “[W]hat should have happened in Chicago...was that the Festival of Life should have eclipsed the convention with the glow of thousands of naked bodies intertwined, making love...” (p. 189). Here, the orgy is seen as a resource, a sign of social vitality, an investment in passion which serves as a reminder that there is sometimes more to life than productivity (Maffesoli 1993, p. 8).

Rather than a “morbid” uniformity, Ginsberg called for a reinvigorating “theatricality of disorder” and pleasure capable of cultivating a truly pluralistic democracy (Maffesoli 1993, p. 9-11). When asked if he was kidding, Ginsberg replied

that he was quite serious. “Life should be ecstasy,” he explained. “We need life styles of ecstasy and social forms appropriate to whatever ecstasy is available for whoever wants it” (p. 189). Neo-tribes were already emerging around the country within such a spirit. The results would soon be witnessed around the world. Within a couple of months, Ginsberg would famously note, “The queers lost that sad look,” after he witnessed a different kind of political orgy during three nights of violence and rioting, play and panic, on the streets of New York City during the Stonewall Riots of June 1969 (Carter 2004).

The interviews highlighted in the gay liberation chapter involve a larger sample of seven core activist narratives. Three are from gay men actively involved in post-Stonewall movements for sexual freedom; a fourth gay man has been actively involved in movements for gay men’s health within a newer generation of activism around sexual freedom ; an a fifth was a highly aesthetic onlooker and participant, enjoying places for play from the 1970s forward. One of the men is a professor and longtime gay activist , another is an African American man who runs a sex party , and a third is an active member in struggles for public space with the Church of Stop Shopping Gospel Choir . Two women are also featured within this chapter The first has been involved with gay and lesbian politics and sex wars for well over thirty years, the second for a decade. Both women are actively involved in direct policy work – and employed as policy advocates – in support of movements for sexual freedom, including the bondage/disciplinesadism/ masochism (BDSM) community, in which sadomasochism and dominance and submission are considered a “safe, sane, and consensual” form of play (Mains 1984/2002; Rubin 1991,1997, 2000). All eight have differing approaches to the politics of sexuality, and all seem to disagree about the meanings of the politics of play.

What is This Play?

Many of the first formal discussions of homosexuality and gay liberation began with a discussion of play, or "homosexual play," as sexologist Alfred Kinsey and his team wrote in their famous study in 1948. According to Kinsey, "the homosexual child play is found in more histories, occurs more frequently, and becomes more specific than the pre-adolescent heterosexual play...much of the adult homosexual activity depends on the greater accessibility of the boy's own sex" (1948/2000, p. 24).

Herbert Marcuse's writings on play build on these insights: "The play impulse does not aim at playing 'with' something; rather it is the play of life itself, beyond want and external compulsion – the manifestation of an existence without fear and anxiety, and thus the manifestation of freedom itself" (1955, p.187). Thus, play established a context for the imagination to thrive. For Marcuse, "Play is *unproductive* and *useless* because it cancels the repressive and exploitive traits of labor and leisure; it 'just plays' with reality" (p. 195). It "just plays" with different rules – a point which can be viewed as a substantive aim of social movements. The point of these movements is to create spaces where "the realm of freedom" unfolds, where human creativity, innovation, imagination, and play really flourish. Here, notions of Eros evolve into life instincts and *jouissance*, which support generativity in contrast to Thanatos, the death and war instinct; neverthless, this generativity also maintains a darker, violent character, as witnessed in the streets of Chicago after the Festival of Light (Maffesoli 1993).

Thus, the debate remains: could the liberation of sexual relations, of free play, bring about social transformation, or did it just result in a quick fix that prevented

considerations of larger questions of social change? The left has long been ambivalent about pleasure. While many leftists have viewed pleasure as an unnecessary indulgence (Aronowitz 1972/1992; Duberman 1999), the burgeoning movements for sexual freedom saw pleasure as socially transformative. Marcuse supported the left line that saw sexuality as a quick release rather than a subversive possibility, but he also saw nothing wrong with this form of "repressive desublimation," as he called it (1969). For the later Situationists, personal pleasure was viewed as a necessary antidote to alienated forms of labor and social relations. Building on the writings of Wilhelm Reich, they recognized that desires needed to find a form of expression if creative social movements were ever to create a different world (Vaneigm, 1967/2003What Ever Happened to the Situationists, undated).

Could pleasure be a route toward a liberatory society designed around affect, not war? Or was play merely a distraction from the difficult work of community organizing for social change? Was it just for fun, or did play establish the context for a richer democracy? Was play an effective response to social control? These were questions that would vex movements for sexual freedom for years to come. Yet from the earliest days of gay liberation, queer convergences into cities and towns have been accompanied by the practical challenges of defending safe places to meet and play.

Gay Liberation and the Struggle for the Right to Play

Liddell Jackson is an African American man who moved to New York City shortly after graduating from Brown University in 1976 with a degree in applied mathematics. In between his careers in business and entertainment, including Broadway performances in *All That Jazz* and *A Chorus Line*, Jackson began his life as an organizer of spaces for gay men of all colors to meet and build community (Mandel 1995; Merrett

1992, 1993). The struggle for a place to play – for a right to connect – was always a central part of this struggle, as Liddell explains:

> We used to say in the old days, in the old Black and White Men Together days, at the beginning of my political activity that you have to fight for your right to party. That if you really want to party and have a good time and be openly gay and openly free, you have to fight for that. It's not a given. It just doesn't happen. Nowadays, everyone is just having a grand old time. But there was a time when we had to fight for it. And those of us who fought for it remember it very well. It took a lot of work to achieve the rights that we have nowadays. And it took a lot of work just to have an environment and make it free for us to be able to have a good time. And be able to party with each other. So we party nowadays and we play nowadays. Those of us who have really been through this activist world realize the value of our play time. It's a hard earned, hard fought for success.

Before gay liberation, homosexual identity was understood as a recognizable, albeit discreet, subculture. It developed through modes of dress, talk, gestures, and acts, all with specific meanings. Pubs, molly houses, movie theaters, gay bars, bathhouses, and even cruising spots provided a context for this identity and subculture, presenting homosexuality as more than a sex act or proclivity (Achilles 1967/1998; Bray 1988; Chauncey 1994). These spaces helped constitute homosexuality as a way of being in the world.

As such, attacks on homosexual venues served as attacks on gay identity. Emerging from the earlier homophile movement, gay liberation began in the late 1960s with the recognition that official intimidation constituted an all too regular feature of gay and lesbian social life. Liberation meant queers would fight back. Flashpoints included police raids and ensuing riots at the Council on Religion and the Homosexual's fundraising drag ball in San Francisco in 1965, at Compton's Cafeteria in the same city in 1966, and at the Stonewall Inn in New York City in 1969 (Stryker and Van Buskirk 1996, p. 41-42; Highleyman 2004, 2005a; Carter 2004). In the end, assaults on queer spaces spurred the call for gay liberation.

Fighting for the Right at Stonewall

"If I had known that Judy [Garland] died that night, we wouldn't have had the raid," Seymour Pine, the former Deputy Inspector of Manhattan's First Division of Public Morals who led the 1969 raid on the Stonewall Inn, explained during a talk at the New York Historical Society some 35 years later (Shepard 2004a).

Even at the movement's genesis, a sense of camp was part of the resistance during the five nights of rioting, in which street youths reset the terms for queer struggle. When the Tactical Police Force (TPF) rushed the youths outside the bar during the first night, a small group linked arms and, kicking Rockettes style, sang their old reprise with words updated for the occasion:

> We are the Stonewall Girls
> We wear our hair in curls
> We wear no underwear
> We show our pubic hairs.

The humorous kick-line was used to stymie the police as they tried to regain control of the streets. Whenever the TPF moved forward, the youths would taunt them with variations on their humorous routine, calling the police "the girls in blue" and "Lily Law." The youths would get about as close to the cops as they should, then they'd start to run (Carter 2004, p. 176-179; Duberman 1993, p. 200-201).

I asked Bob Kohler, a longtime activist and eyewitness to the riots, about the now famous Stonewall kick-line. Was it a struggle against attempts at control?

> At that point, it was totally impromptu. The kids just decided. Now what it did, whether they formulated this in their heads [or not], it broke the cops completely.

> It made fools of the cops. It also infuriated the cops. It was totally surreal, and that was what happens when you get a bunch of teenagers doing a kick-line and saying, "We are the Stonewall Girls," and you've got cops in helmets. What are they going to do? Suddenly, even the cop with the thickest head had to feel totally disarmed, totally exposed, totally foolish, and see this riot for what it was.

Thus, the playful, campy kick-line thwarted the police attack. Without the kick-line, all there would have been was "that awful tension," Kohler explained. "We all felt like, what's going on here – gays being beaten up in the streets." Another witness, Danny Garvin, observed, "It was the most amazing thing. What was more amazing was when the cops charged. That's when I think the anger started. Although "the cops were used to some kind of camp coming from us," the joyous kick-line was something new. Garvin continued: "that kick-line...I guess was a spoof on their machismo, making fun of their authority. Yeah, I think that's when I felt rage. Because...people were getting smashed with bats. And for what? A kick-line," (Carter 2004, p. 177-9). Jerry Hoose, another participant, summed up the experience of fighting back: "It was just, to me, more a feeling of joy" (p. 177-9). That joy offered a trajectory for a new model of community organizing.

On July 9, 1969, the Mattachine Society held a meeting to follow up on the Stonewall Riots. For the past decade, the veteran homophile group had approached gay rights with an apologist approach, asking for tolerance. After Stonewall, a new gay radicalism overshadowed this incrementalism, and a new group and movement was born. The group's name was Gay Liberation Front; the movement, Gay Liberation. Gay Liberation fought the culture's persistent negative reactions to queers (Weeks 1985, p. 13). Its goals: to free sexuality, to transform the family as an institution, to end anti-queer violence, and to develop a new vocabulary of the erotic (Altman 1972, p. 83). It was a social movement built on public visibility, exploration of personal growth, and an

understanding that oppression based on sexual identity took place in a broad social context. R.D. Laing's late 1960s slogan, “The personal is the political," was central to the movement’s understanding it itself. “Better Blatant than Latent!” liberationists declared, rejecting homophile notions of privacy, propriety, and incrementalism (Bronski 1998, p. 67).

Stonewall, the Faeries, and the Tribes

Donald Gallagher, another Stonewall witness, spent the next 35 years of his life as part of the various tribes – including the Radical Faeries and the Church of Stop Shopping – that sprung up in the wake of the riots. He joined the Church of Stop Shopping to participate in the "Save the Poe and Judson Houses" campaign, since he had his honeymoon at Judson House with his lover in 1966. These campaigns involved fighting the ever expanding New York University from razing the building where Edgar Allan Poe wrote ‘The Raven.’ Judson House is another historic building in New York’s Washington Square Park beside the Poe House. The Radical Faeries and his other tribes have been a source of joy for his life.

For Gallagher, the riots were an “amusing” affair, he says with a laugh, “because I never went to the bar. It was not my scene at all.” But for him, the most important part of the event was the abundance, the defiance that followed:

> One of the most fun moments was like a week or so later with one of the zaps. You just called people up on the telephone and had them just show up somewhere. And it was one time we showed up by Macy’s. And completely stopped Broadway and 6th Avenue. It was only, like, 40 or 50 people. But it was enough to just close the whole thing down.

When I asked Gallagher why they shut down Macy’s, he exclaimed. “To show that we’re not going to put up with this any more!” And he came close to breaking into a gospel

song: “No more. No more. Un uh. No more. No more.” I asked if he’d heard about the Stonewall chorus sing-along kick-line. “We are the Stonewall Girls. We wear our hair in curls. I forget. I think it’s something like we wear no underwear,” he replied. “We are very debonair” was the lyric he was looking for. “Yes, that’s it. I’m also a Radical Faerie and we have our own version.”

Gallagher described the Radical Faeries as a tribe. “Radical Faeries are like a huge international group of gay men, women, straight people. It doesn’t matter as long as you have a faerie sensibility.” The Faeries are part of a lineage of post-Stonewall tribes of gender-insubordinate gender queers, including the Cockettes (discussed below), the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence, who wear nun outfits and outrageous makeup (Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence, undated; Highleyman 2003), the Church Ladies for Choice who wear respectable women’s clothing while mocking anti-abortion protesters (Cohen-Cruz 1998), and several others. The Church Ladies, like many of these groups, build on the groundbreaking work of Jose Sarria, an activist drag queen who ran a tight race city council in the 1960’s. No lineage of the Sister’s camp is complete without him. Until 1963, Sarria performed at the Black Cat. At his shows, he’d have the audience stand up and sing, ‘God Save Us Nelly Queers’ to the tune of ‘God Save the Queen’ (Boyd, 2003). By the mid-1990’s, the Church Ladies for Choice, a group of gay men and women from ACT UP and WHAM, would borrow from this and sing ‘God is a Lesbian’ during the years Dyke Marches.

All these tribes embraced a campy sensibility. For example, Gallagher explained, “Recently the Sisters visited the Gates [an art installation in New York’s Central Park]. And it was a remarkable thing, how much happiness and joy there is in just doing

something like a Radical Faerie nun." The point, if there is one, in this non-linear play is to suggest there are other ways of being in the world. "Just to let people know that its OK to be completely crazy and outrageous in public space," explains Gallagher. "It's funny. It's just funny."

This capacity to be "completely crazy" was part of what the gay liberation movement was born to defend. The point of the gathering of tribes such as the Radical Faeries is to build on and validate the emotional solidarity that grows therein. These emotions emerge within the context of affect and feeling, rather than rational thinking (Maffesoli 1993, 1996). Nevertheless, there is a certain logic to Gay Liberation and other movements for sexual freedom, built as they were on the notion that there are multiple kinds of knowledge about how to exist in the world. While war and violence, capitalism and procreation represented one way, gay liberationists argued that pleasure and play offered an equally valid alternative.

Epistemological debates about such forms of knowing involve questions that works such as Max Weber's *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* have addressed for well over a century (Cohler 1994; Weber 1930/1992). For gay liberationists such as Kohler and Gallagher, the recognition of the possibility of different kinds of knowledge and expertise has been an abiding principle of their work as activists. Some 35 years after the Stonewall Riots, Kohler was interviewed about his insights. "[T]hey asked if I had any advice, and I said, yes I do. Listen to the crazies. This is the kind of thing that Sylvia Rivera could bring to a riot, that Marsha P. Johnson could bring to a riot."

It was in part this audacity, this lack of interest in playing by the rules,that helped translate the burning ambitions of the Gay Liberation Movement into legislative action. And Rivera, a young drag queen who took part in the Stonewall Riots, was among the most audacious of the street youth associated with Stonewall and movements for sexual freedom which followed. Years after the riots, Rivera was established as a leader/"mother" of queer street youth in the the 1990's. Her prime claim was as a fierce advocate willing to participate in direct action if that was what was needed.. Longtime activist Arthur Evans (2002) recalled, "My favorite memory of Sylvia Rivera was in early 1970 in New York City. The Gay Activists Alliance [GAA] was collecting petitions for a bill in the city council that would outlaw job discrimination against gays and lesbians… We took our petitions to a meeting of the Village Independent Democrats in Greenwich Village… Carol Greitzer, the liberal councilwoman from Greenwich Village, was present at the meeting. Greitzer refused to take, or even look at, the petitions. Sylvia Rivera grabbed the petition-laden clipboard, marched up to the front of the meeting, and hit Greitzer over the head with it. The liberals started to listen up…GAA leader Marty Robinson called the process 'climbing up the liberals'."

Rivera was ever-present, doing whatever it took to bring about the passage of the bill, including getting arrested with Evans and Marty Mumford. "I was the only drag queen that got arrested for petitioning for gay rights," Rivera later recalled. "We were included in their bill. All of a sudden, I started becoming more and more an organizer and a front-liner… Drag queens could be out there. What did we have to lose?" The fight would last well into the 1980s before the bill finally passed (Shepard 2004b).

For Kohler and many others, working with Rivera and the other early gay liberation activists translated into a defiant theatrical experience. "The [Stonewall] riot was the theater of the ridiculous," Kohler explained. "These kids managed to figure it all out. And that to me was one of the big things." I asked Kohler to explain what he meant by this "Theater of the Ridiculous":

> Well, the Theater of the Ridiculous was Charles Ludlam's theater over on Sheridan Square. That's what it was called. The Theater of the Ridiculous went on for years. And Ludlam put on these take-offs on plays. Charles made the whole thing so confounding. When he played Camille, he had a beard. It was gender-fuck. He didn't try to look like Camille, but you sat there and suddenly believed he was Camille without even believing it was this way. That's what made it ridiculous. Here you were looking at a total man with a beard going into these faints and all this high dramatic Greta Garbo stuff. And you were buying it. And that was every play he did. He was brilliant. He would have these actors with these crazy Russian names and it would just be some fat lady from maybe Brooklyn.

Started in 1967, the Theatre of the Ridiculous was an inspiration for many theatrical activists. This defiant queer sensibility would be a part of gay activism for much of the 1970s. Ludlam died of AIDS in 1987, the year ACT UP was born in New York City, and his campy queer sensibility was enormously influential for the new group (Kauffman 2002; Bordowitz 2004). Yet, this defiance dates back to earliest days of gay liberation.

Tribes of like-minded queers branched out throughout the 1970s as vagabonds tried to find new ways of being in the world. Part of what these tribes did was to create community spaces for those who did not fit into mainstream U.S. culture. One such tribe in San Francisco was called the Cockettes, a group of drag queens and hippies who went on to become a performance troupe. In the late 1960s, their founder, George Harris, a young actor from New York City who had garnered some fame when he was photographed placing a flower into the rifle of a National Guardsman during an anti-war

rally , had resurfaced in San Francisco as an anarchistic androgynous drag queen. Hibiscus, as he called himself, could often be found dancing in Golden Gate Park arrayed in flowing robes and glitter or singing show tunes in a tree (sometimes with clothes, sometimes without). Former Cockettes remember him singing 'Tropical Heat Wave' and he beckoned others to join him. While the gesture may not have been a conscious recruiting tactic, it was part of his life affirming embrace of all he saw around him. Eventually, others joined with him to form a pansexual communityof drag queens, perverts, gender benders, hippies, political activists, and hangers-on (Tent, 2004; Highleyman 2005b). Their impromptu debut came on New Year's Eve 1969, performing a ribald kick-line on stage during a movie intermission. They later did queer take-offs on well-known show standards – often complete with nudity – prompting author Truman Capote to remark after one performance: "This is the most outrageous thing I have ever seen!" However, after some members began steering the Cockettes in the direction of more polished performances, Hibiscus broke away and formed the Angels of Light, a troupe with a more tribal sensibility (Highleyman 2005b). For many, the diverse models of family constellations and alternate kinship networks, as well as community formations inspired by gay liberation, offered an image of just what a pluralistic democracy might look like. For longtime gay liberationists such as Donald Gallagher, the effort involved pushing to create a space for such communities within an often monolithic public sphere. Gallagher explains:

> People are so stuck in images of what they are supposed to be, what they should be, how high the building should be. Like this should be a forty-story building instead of a neighborhood, just to break through that miasma that people are in, like they were hypnotized somehow. We should break right through into a place with fun. Be who you are. Its allowed, no matter how foolish or silly that may actually be. Those things kind of go together, don't they?

Says David Pattent, an activist who came out in the 1970s, "Gay Liberation was about more than just coming out as queer, it was about allowing all people to come out as who they are" (quoted in Shepard 1997). The point was to break through what felt like a monolithic mystification with an active voice. In many ways, gay liberation was about a community of people who become active, rather than passive agents. The aim: to claim authentic voices, rather than live repressive, one-dimensional lives (Marcuse 1964).

Definitions and Differences of Play

The ambitions of a gay liberation project organized around pleasure are intimately bound within efforts to create and sustain places to play. Yet, even for those actively involved in movements for sexual freedom, understandings of the concept of play or its relationship to organizing are anything but monolithic. For some, play is about performance and cultural work; for others, the concept is related to psychoanalytic understandings of play as experimentation; for still others, it's about Eros. A review of these understandings is useful.

For Liddell Jackson, play is about pleasure.

> When I think about play, I think about sex. Even if I was going to open it up beyond the obvious sexual expressions of pleasure between me and another person or a group of people, even if I just thought of play as the physical enjoyment of each other. And there all sorts of things that come into play. Parties are play to me; however, I've always contended that everything we do is a political act. Even when Black and White Men Together used to go to the beach, it was a political act. The rest of the society would go, "All these black and white men together!" I was one of the founders of a lesbian and gay gospel choir. I kept saying to them, "Every time you go out on stage to sing gospel, no matter how much you enjoy it, and no matter how much the audience enjoys you, and no matter how great it is, remember you are making a political statement. You are a lesbian and gay gospel choir. There has never been a lesbian and gay multiracial gospel choir, so you are making a huge political statement. Don't just sing because you love gospel music, sing because you are proud that you can do it….

But play is also a tool for combating the symptoms of a sexphobic culture. The politics of play is part of a strategy that helps everyone feel a little more free, just by knowing that there are others out there truly experimenting with it. Jackson continues:

> I went on Donahue nude and got lots of calls, including one from a young black man from Boise, Idaho, who was inspired to form a GLBT Alliance. And that goes into the politics of play for me, which is to be proud of what you are doing. It's an expression of your physicality; it's an expression of your freedom of spirit. It's not just to get your rocks off; it's not just a means to an end. No, it's an expression of how you see yourself in the world and how you want the world to experience you. It's an expression of your body and how you feel about your body, how you want to share your body with the universe around you. We're the only ones who can just have sex at will, who can just play at will, and so we should be happy about doing it.

For Susan Wright**,** media spokesperson for the National Coalition for Sexual Freedom (NCSF), play involves a framework for communicating about and sharing pleasure. She describes what play means to the BDSM community:

> Play means people engaging in S/M. And more often people call [the places where they do S/M] "play spaces," which I think really indicates what it's about when you play with somebody, you have a mutual understanding of what you are going to do. "We're going to play cops and robbers." When you play with someone, you have rules. And you follow those rules of engagement and it's sort of for a set amount of time. "We're going to play this afternoon, we're going to play this evening." When you get together, you follow the rules, you play, you improvise. It's very imaginative and creative. And then when it's done, you go back to being equals, which is also a place from which you negotiate and communicate initially.

In psychoanalysis, one talks about play as a space where people grow and experiment and understand the limits of the world. Wright continues:

> This is a wonderful way for people to get to play sexually. People who want to experiment and push the boundaries a little. Who don't want to just have to be romantic. They want to increase their range of sensations, their range of emotions that they feel. They can come together in this space. It's very safe because there are other people there. They are usually monitored. People who organize the space, they usually have what they call "DMs"' or Dungeon Monitors or Play Monitors, "PMs." And these people go around and make sure that there are no

> problems, that nobody is saying the "safe word," that the equipment is clean, that nobody's touching somebody is unasked for. In these play spaces, there is always a list of rules up on the wall: Don't touch somebody unless you have their permission. Don't touch anybody's toys unless you have their permission. And that's what we call our equipment too, "toys."

Jackson concurs. Sexual play and play spaces bring people together. It is about healthy communication and diversity:

> [I]t brings safe guys and bareback guys together [men who have intercourse with and without condoms]. And the reason I do that is that it forces people to communicate with each other. If you see somebody or somebody approaches you, you are essentially entering into a contract. You have guidelines and you have a right to have your guidelines paid attention to. If the person with whom you are about to do something doesn't want to follow your guidelines, tell him to take a walk. There is another guy standing right next to him that will do everything you say. I don't care how beautiful he is, he is dispensable if he is not going to adhere to your guidelines. However, don't expect him to read your mind. You have to tell him.

Yet for others, such as longtime gay activist and professor Eric Rofes, the word "play" has negative, belittling connotations:

> I don't like the word "play." So I resist the word "play." I go back to Winnicott and to other people who look at children and play. With play, there is often an unconscious working out of learnings and growth and lessons that then become sustained in the psyche, or whatever you want to call it. I think what you are talking about when you are talking about more conscious things, or interventions that are being playful, I would argue that this is around cultural work.

Thus, for Rofes, play involves a series of cultural interventions including dance, carnival, food, and even gay liberation and ACT UP zaps. According to Joe Kennedy (1994) zaps are best understood as: "direct actions which confront oppressors," (p. vii). "The incessant "zaps" of groups such as Gay Liberation Front and the Gay Activist Alliance, "forced gay and lesbian concerns onto the public agenda for the first time," (p. vii-iii). . And, like Panama Alba in the previous chapter, Rofes suggests the term "play" is not the appropriate term for certain heavier endeavors. "I hate the use of the word 'play' in S/M

and other cultures. I think calling it "play" often disrespects the seriousness of what you are working on," he explains.

The paradoxes of play can be difficult to grapple with. At the end of our interview, Rofes suggested I take a look at Geoff Mains' (1984/2002) *Urban Aboriginals*, an exploration of leather community practices that makes frequent use of the term "play" for leathersex (slightly rougher sex with leather and rituals of the leather community). . For Rofes, who is himself involved in leather communities, the term "play" seems to betray an understanding of Eros, which involves some level of risk. Yet, he is open to appreciating that these light forms of play do involve notions of pleasure:

> Today I was at the library doing my research on "clones" in the 1970s. There was a cartoon, from '78 or so, showing a man talking to someone in the window of a brownstone, and he says something like, 'Can your lover come out and play with me?' Something like, can a boy come out and play? It's really an interesting kind of use of the word "play" then. And I see what they mean.

For many from this era [the 1970s], play is intricately involved withconceptions of a playground for pleasure, exploration, and imagination. For some 35 years, Barton Benes has lived across from the Hudson River piers on the West Side of New York, where gay men cruise for sex. For Benes, the piers were a place for playing and connecting. "I think of getting blowjobs as playing. Yeah, having sex was playing. What I was doing was playing."

Yet, the context for the piers' use changed with the setting of the sun. "During the day, I think of it as a different trip," Benes explained. "There was one pier here where people would just go and sunbathe." Yet, as a place to play, the piers were also a place to explore, imagine, and discover new worlds. "The piers started out as a secret place," he continued. "It was a secret place with all sorts of treasures, file cabinets, antiques,

lamps...I knew every hole in the ground." The Piers were open abandoned spaces on the West Side Waterfront of Manhattan. The space also included an abandoned warehouse which had feelen into disuse. Queers found other use and meaning within the space. Benes is an artist whose work involves building on found objects, gifts, and artifacts. Much of his inspiration for this work began after he moved into his building across from the piers. "I moved to this building in 1970," he recalls. "I found a lot of stuff on the piers. Desks, chairs, etc. There were doors. There were old tin lamps, old file cabinets." Here, Benes' exploration within the urban rubble, the treasures he found amid the seaweed, overlapped with a spirit of Eros. "That's how I got interested," he continues. "Every time I would go in, there would be two or three more people. It took a long time, but people found it was a secret place to go sunbathe." During those strolls, art overlapped with pleasure:

> I could go exploring and find treasures in people's desks. I didn't go out there to meet men, but then once I got this good blowjob, and I started. There is something more going on. Then, before you know it, more and more people. And it turned into a circus with people from all over the world going to the piers.

Play and the Politics of Gay Liberation

Gay politics would spread around the world with the same speed, the same spirit Eros and renewal, creativity, and public accessibility. Throughout these years, play overlapped with pranks and politics and an approach to political intervention called a "zap." Arnie Kanttrowitz, a long-term member of the Gay Activist Alliance, recalled the playful zaps used by the early members of the group. "We encouraged each other into more and more nonviolent 'zaps': into dancing together in front of a crowd of straight

people in Central Park, and into disrupting the taping of the mayor's television show" (1977/1996, p. 104).

That camp and joy would become a key ingredient of the burgeoning Gay Liberation Movement over the next decade. Implicit was the recognition of the possibilities in play when disenfranchised groups of previously isolated individuals converge on the streets – sometimes in righteous anger, sometimes just to connect, quite often both.

Hank Wilson, an organizer with both Bay Area Gay Liberation in the 1970s and ACT UP in the 1980s and 1990s, recalled the interplay of the struggle for pleasure and opposition to injustice during an organizing campaign in the late 1970s in opposition to Anti Bryant's reactionary 'Save Our Children' (from Homosexuality) Campaign:

> If they [homophobes] did something against us, we got in their face. We marched. The call would go up and hundreds of thousands of people would turn out. And we turned out because we cruised at those events and we still do. It was very, very exciting (quoted in Shepard 1997, p. 35).

These two notions – opposition to oppression and support for liberation – mutually reinforced each other. Here, a politics of pleasure overlapped with the exhilaration and the novelty of the burgeoning movement for sexual freedom. Throughout the gay liberation years of the mid-1970s in San Francisco, Harvey Milk, the one of nation's first openly gay elected official, used to sayt, "You gotta give 'em hope," especially during the famous Gay Pride marches in 1977 and 1978 (Shepard 1997). The politics of gay freedom combined elements of celebration and relief for those who had answered Milk's call to "come out" and had lived to tell the tale.

"We hope because it's a more powerful and more joyful way to live," wrote Rebecca Solnit (2004) building on Milk's ethos. For gay liberationists, the right to meet

in public spaces without fear of homophobic violence was tantamount to the most basic constitutionally protected demands for the right to public assembly and pursuit of happiness.

Gay Liberation and a Place for Eros

Queer theorist Douglas Crimp situates the place for play and pleasure within the struggle for gay liberation:

> Unlike today, gay men in [the] 1970s in urban America had a highly creative ethos about sexual pleasure; it was one of the few movements in the history of this country that built a culture on a great variety of forms of affectional and sexual relationships, a proliferation of variously organized friendships and community relations, which made for a great many options for obtaining pleasure and forming human connection and intimacy (quoted in Takemoto, 2003).

This model served as a stark contrast to the historical understanding of sexuality in culture and social life. Until the movements for sexual freedom in the late 1960's and '70's, sexuality was understood as private, not public realm. Pleasure was seen in contrast to social order – the pleasure principle versus the reality principle, as conceptualized by Sigmund Freud (1961). According to Donald Webster Corey (1951/2001), one of the earliest proponents of gay liberation, "The anti-sex culture pretends that it is heterosexual, in order the better to suppress all sex for pleasure." In the years before gay liberation, healthy and civilized people were seen as adult and straight, while those who play were seen as children. Those who enjoy pleasure were seen as others: outside the realm of social order and outside the realms of the normal (Bronski 1998, p. 240-41).

Rofes, who worked with Boston's *Gay Community News* collective during the early years of Gay Liberation explains:

> I think part of the problem is that both the right and the left have been anti-pleasure. The left refutes it as a bourgeois notion and the right say its anti-Christian and things like that. They live in this Neverland….People are looking for productive activity, and orgasm is not seen as productive…or some can argue that it is. *Pleasure* is not seen as productive. And I think that goes into deeper areas of the kind of social glue that is needed to pull organizing together in the long haul.

In his 1993 essay, "Capitalism and Gay Identity," John D'Emilio suggested that part of the threat presented by gay liberation stemmed from the notion of building community, kinship networks, and the like outside the prerequisites of accumulation. Pleasure outside of procreation is not viewed as productive; it doesn't contribute. It does not create widgets, labor, kids, or products to contribute to the economy.

But this view also traditionally permeates left-wing politics. "The left have not been there as advocates of pleasure in their organizing or their politics," Rofes explains. In contrast, gay liberationists recognized the importance of pleasure as a vital part of social and political life. Rofes elaborates on when he first recognized that pleasure could be part of organizing:

> I feel like I got that from my years at *Gay Community News*, from being next door to *Fag Rag*, which was putting that out really boldly. But also in Gay Liberation as I found it in the mid-1970s, there was a commitment to challenging the Marxist notion that pleasure was a bourgeois kind of indulgence. And I really do feel like gay men in particular contributed a lot to that. And to me, [that included] everything from public sex to drag and gender performance to Joan Crawford movies to the opera for some people. I do feel like Gay Liberation really showed that culture and politics really had to come together.

To this end, the movement sought to liberate not only queer sexuality, but sexuality in general. Instead of serving as a tool of production or an indicator of social status,

sexuality was understood as something pleasurable and relational (Altman 1972, p. 83; Bersani 1995; D'Emilio 1993).

Activists struggled to defend and make sense of notions of play within both private and public spheres of life. Rofes describes how such questions were handled at *Gay Community News*:

> I mean, we settled this at the *Gay Community News* in the late 1970s: what was the role of fun. And what could it mean that after we did layout on Thursday night, the guys would be in Herbie's Ramrod Room on their knees suckin' dick all night? Was that an informal part of it, something to be ashamed of? I mean, I just feel like sexual pleasure had not been on anyone's agenda.

The politics of play and the debates that accompanied it were a constant part of the practical work of the Gay Activist Alliance and its efforts to create safe places for queers to meet and build community in the years after Stonewall. The group sought to create alternatives to gay bars such as the Stonewall Inn, which was controlled by the Mafia, and thus invited police harassment (Carter 2004). "We needed alternatives to call our own," Kantrowitz recalled, adding:

> We also needed money. So we solved both problems by going into the business of giving dances. At first they were lovely work... e would dance our asses off, tripping on mescaline, the Welcoming Committee cooling our heated faced with fresh water from a sprayer, surrounding dancing couples with paper garlands and distributing glittering favors, rings and things that had a delightful carnival tackiness about them...A single "vibe" filled the room of writhing bodies... we were a single mass. We celebrated ourselves and our solidarity (1977/1996, p. 118).

Such undifferentiated connectedness was part of the life within the tribe. The group's Dionysian ethos translated into a distinctive, cabalistic feeling grounded in the rhythms of embodied, authentic, lived experience (Gardiner 1997; Maffesoli 1996).

For the gay liberationists, this raw, visceral trajectory favored feeling, the carnal rather than the clinical logic that had helped pathologize queer sexuality. During the post-war years after the rise of psychiatry, homosexuality was included as a diagnostic category of mental disorder by the American Psychiatric Association – despite the fact that the field's founder, Freud (1935/2001), had clearly written that queer sexuality was neither something to celebrate nor something to condemn.

One early achievement of the burgeoning Gay Liberation Movement was the push to remove this classification, which succeeded in 1973. For Columbia University law professor Kendall Thomas, an African American man who participated in the public sexual culture of the gay liberation years, the rejection of narratives which linked queer sexuality with pathology offered the marker of a new self understanding:

> That period of time for me, that post-Stonewall period for me, represents the moment of emergence of a distinct gay politics, which is not the politics of reform, which is not a politics that takes – accepts – the view of gay and lesbian sexuality as pathological sexualities. By 1973, American psychiatrists had rejected the definition of homosexuality as a mental disorder and that creates – it contributes to a collective sense of a gay self that I think was crucial to the creation of a gay consciousness as a political consciousness (2003).

A vital element of this consciousness was a rejection of the ruthless clinical logic of the pre-Stonewall world. For gay liberationists, it was that rationalized worldview that had consigned homosexual existence to the realm of mental illness and psychiatric wards (Foucault 1977, 1978, 1980). After Stonewall, this world view was rejected in favor of a less linear, more sensuous approach to living (Gardiner 1997; Maffesoli 1996).

Affective play was part of the world-making project of the movement. And, as with any world-making struggle, tensions certainly accompanied the endeavor. A number of these ideological conflicts could be witnessed within the post-Stonewall play and

politics of the Gay Activist Alliance. Debates over strategic use of pleasure as opposed to conventional politics were reflected in organizing events as simple as a weekend social. Kantrowitz, an active GAA member, recalled:

> The Pleasure Committee believed we could liberate our own heads and our sense of community through these dances, but the political people, believing we were diluting our purposes, accused the pleasure people of trying to "dance our way to liberation." We needed our money and our people for demonstrations, not for decorating dance halls, they maintained. But the money came from the dances, the pleasure people reminded them. The two groups clashed, threatening to tear the fledgling organization apart, holding dramatic late night meetings to confront each other, beginning to split into two separate camps and to heat[hate?] each other in the process (1977/1996, p. 118-9).

Conflict between the pleasure people and the political people could also be witnessed in West Coast gay liberation politics as well. Rofes, himself an active participant in the movement, has studied gay men's sexual cultures in San Francisco and elsewhere. He confirms:

> In my research, I ask all these men what was their relationship to gay political, social, religious, and cultural organizing in the 1970s. And basically, they had no relationship to it. They were getting laid. They were going to the bars or the baths or the parks. They were doing something else and the activists were going on fear... I don't think that activists did a good job of bridging it at that time. I don't think the people dancing to Sylvester in San Francisco... I think that there was more of a class division, and a certain fragment of the middle class did the activism and we thought, "Why aren't more people coming?"

Yet, there were times when the two camps did overlap. For example, throughout the struggle to defeat the 1978 Briggs Initiative, which would have banned gay teachers from public schools, aides to openly gay San Francisco city council member Harvey Milk could be seen in the city's bathhouses. The party people got involved with politics. And these cultures overlapped with the parties of impresarios such as Michael Moletta, one of the first San Francisco men to die of HIV/AIDS. These play structures were also used to do organizing (Shepard 1997).

In New York City, the pleasure people and the political people established a simple detente, with the compromise that the GAA dances would be decorated with political motifs. Yet "an ideological rift had been created, and for some it never healed," Kantrowitz recalled. "In the end, the dances proved to be neither political nor pure pleasure. The dances were good business" (p. 118-9).

The Baths as a Public Commons

Yet the split between the pleasure people and the political people was not insurmountable. "Going to a sex club is something many gay men do routinely because we have purposely developed a culture of sexual pleasure," Crimp explains (quoted in Takemoto 2003). Here, public sexual spaces offered a way to touch and be connected with many members of the queer body politic. For many involved in gay liberation politics, the very fact that in bathhouses, queers could find a safe place to play without harassment was a victory for the movement. These public sexual spaces were thought to cultivate a vital generative energy.

Building on this recognition, Stonewall veteran Bob Kohler spent the decade after the riots running a bathhouse in New York's East Village. He describes the space:

> At the bathhouse, we had this atrium. We had these huge palm trees, real live trees. For the people coming, you pay your money, there's going to be sex. Boom, boom. You walk in and there are birds singing. Here you are, you came to fuck. And suddenly you are sitting there and there is a jungle, there's parrots, and you've got to see a bigger picture. You've just got to. That's where there was a sense of theater. Especially at our bathhouse and at the Continental Baths.

As the decade wore on, the baths were increasingly recognized as vital public spaces. And with this, all the distinct features of New York City social and cultural life would follow. Local politico Bella Abzug used to campaign at the baths. The baths thus became a kind of commons. "We had Ronnie Eldridge come and make political speeches,"

Kohler explained. On other days, "Bette Midler used to sing to men in towels." High culture intersected with low as any number of cultural and political players frequented the baths. Kohler continues:

> You know what a bathhouse is, you don't really cover parts. And then there are a hundred men or so who have just fucked their brains out, who will go back and fuck their brains out [again?]. And here is this woman. Now take it a step further when you go from Bette Midler, who was kind of trashy and fit right in, to Sarah Vaughn.

In a mix Cole Porter would have loved, even opera singers performed at the baths. "Eleanor Steiber, the opera singer. Eleanor Steibert was one of the biggest attractions at the Continental Baths," Kohler explained.

It was the unique cultural intersection between pleasure and politics, Eros and democratic organizing, that made this early 1970s moment unique, with Abzug campaigning and Bette Midler making a name for herself as a performer within this public commons. And this distinct cultural understanding translated into gay liberation politics. For example, during the speak-out on Gay Pride day in 1973, the ever plugged-in Bette Midler is said to have heard that another riot was about to break out, and rushed to Washington Square, where the event was being held, taking the microphone from the GAA's Vito Russo and singing "You Gotta Have Friends" with Barry Manilow as warring factions, including Sylvia Rivera and radical lesbians, fought over who was going to speak next. Russo later confessed that only Midler's sudden appearance averted outright violence (Marotta 1981, p. 296-7). "Bette worked like a charm," Russo would explain. "It wasn't that the issues were forgotten, but she provided a tremendously healing presence. It was a great thing for Bette, too. She said later that it was one of the great things she did," (quoted in Marcus, 1992, 268).

Kendall Thomas recalls:

> [S]ome of the most tender, open, vulnerable, authentic moments in my own sexual autobiography are moments that involve the relative anonymity of public sexual culture in New York City in the late 1970s. And I would dishonor the achievement that the very existence of that culture represented if I said, as many said, "Well that was a bad world," or that I was excluded or had nothing but bad experiences in that world (2003).

While tensions accompanied many of the struggles around gay libation, the baths remained an island of warmth within a cold world for much of the 1970s and early 1980s. Kohler's favorite moment running his bathhouse occurred some time after that 1973 Gay Pride day:

> I think the most telling thing, which will sum the whole thing up, a good customer came in and it was Christmas day, or maybe New Years. We had all the attendants taking the towels, everybody, me, wearing tuxedos. And everyone else was naked in their towels. And we had this huge feast out in the atrium, turkey, champagne, cocktails, and whatnot. And one guy, when he left, snaps his fingers like he forgot something. I said, "What's the matter?" He sighs and says, "I forgot." I said, "What did you forget?" "I forgot to have sex." I think that sums it up. He came and he just got so involved in all the other stuff that he forgot what he was there for.

As Kohler suggests, "these places were [about] far more than just sex." In fact, Kohler met a lover he was with for thirteen years at "the old Everhard baths on a Sunday afternoon." Others, including GAA's Arnie Kantrowitz have noted that they met longer-term lovers at bathhouses.

Yet for others, the baths built on a Blanche DuBois-like "I have always depended on the kindness of strangers" kind of ethos. Here, strangers and friends met, party people and politicos shared kinship, talked, connected, and thrived as part of a tribe and a community. People in San Francisco who I interviewed in the past (Shepard 1997) also said the baths were just a place to see everybody, to walk in and relax at the Jacuzzi, and

see everybody you knew. In the same way that the union served as a public commons for trade unionists (Aronowitz 2003), the baths served as a public commons for queers in 1970s and 1980s. They functioned as "a living room," for the community, Kohler says. "We called it the living room. It was as big as this apartment. Leather furniture, a huge television. We had complimentary donuts on Sunday mornings. You got breakfast. It was just an incredible kind of atmosphere." As Kohler explains, people were free to talk and be themselves in these spaces:

> It was amazing to see. People would come out of a big orgy room, fucked everyway but sideways, coming down and having a discussion. I used to get into long political discussions with these people. There was a whole give-and-take which ended when the bathhouse era ended.

One of the most important elements of these public sexual and play spaces – such as theaters, movie-houses, baths, and clubs – was that they offered a venue for cross-class contact (Delany 1999). As Liddell Jackson explains:

> One of the thing I like best about the gay male community is that you cross class lines, you cross race lines, sometimes you even cross gender lines when it comes to meeting each other. And there is something very exciting about being able to get together and meet each other in the way that hetero society is not able to do… When you are gay, you just meet everybody. You meet bankers, you meet artists, you meet bums. You meet people from Detroit; you meet people from Amsterdam… And there is something very, very exciting about the freedom of being able to do that. And knowing that deep, deep down, we're the only ones doing that. Nobody else is doing this.

In these spaces, everyday people who were coming just to get away from the real world could intermingle with stars in a fantastical, theatrical space that felt open to all. "There was this grand staircase and [Rudolf] Nureyev used to come all the time, and he used to pose at the top of the staircase," Kohler recalls. "It was very theatrical.". Within

such a context, Jackson suggests these spaces could be considered utopian social experiments:

> I always say that in my mind's eye, in two or three hundred years from now, I see the gay male community as part of the forefront of the society. And others replicating it. Simply because we've created so many structures that worked and just created them ourselves, because we had no one to make them for us. And we weren't going to go without.

Yet while they had their idealistic aspects, they were also very practical, "very necessary" utilitarian spaces. "These were places where people could be clean. And [where they could have sex] not in the bushes where[the threat of violence and arrest was constant]," Kohler explains. "We had the health clinic come in once a week for[STD] testing. We had condoms before they [the Department of Health] tried to have condoms. We had literature there. We had political literature there. The bathhouses were beyond sex."

But most important for Jackson, these are spaces where people could just meet and be together. For him, this is a success in and of itself:

> It's not one or the other. Everything that I do, even if its just creating a sex party, is to me as important as creating a christening for somebody's baby. The thing that I like best about these things is they bring people together. It's very important for people to come out and come together. The Beatles had it right. It's very important for people to really figure out ways to come together. It doesn't make sense for us to operate in our own little shells and our own little circumscribed worlds. It's vitally important for us to figure out ways to interact with each other.

In these spaces, Jackson has been able to witness amazing pansexual possibilities emerge:

> A couple of years ago I did this series of pansexual play parties. It was one of the most liberating things I have ever done in my entire life... I so enjoyed that. For six months, we did play parties for heterosexuals, lesbians, gay men, leatherfolks, everybody. And they always started the same way, gay men would get things going, cause we have it down… Everyone would watch until they finally got comfortable. And then lesbians would tear down the walls.

Within such contexts, dynamics of pluralistic democracy, of 'pursuit of happiness," take full form and expression. Democracy stops being a concept, it becomes a reality in which people give and take and share. In this respect, movements for sexual freedom loosen up other aspects of democratic life. "It becomes an educational process for everyone involved," Jackson explains. Of all the experiences Jackson has had with organizing parties, "The leather play parties stand out tremendously because of bringing all of those different orientations together. And having people watch each other and play." He recalls a group of leathermen watching two lesbians doing a play scene at their party and everyone applauding their sense of pleasure. He concludes:

> You share those things and then people start to realize there is more to heaven and earth than to dream over your philosophy, Horatio. It's just more than you could possibly think of. There is more happening out there than you are possibly aware of.

Scenes such as those described by Jackson and Kohler hearken back to the earliest liberatory aspirations of the Gay Liberation Movement. For liberationists "gay" was a revolutionary identity capable of dismantling institutions that pathologized sexuality. They believed their movement would free sexuality from the constraining cultural prerequisites of sex and gender. To the extent that homosexuality did not conform to normative understandings of sex and gender, liberationists sought to subvert these categories, emancipating a new and unmediated sexuality for all people (Jargose 1996, p. 37-41). Sex roles and monolithic categories of heterosexuality and homosexuality were bound to fade out in favor of a potential bisexuality. Instead of serving as a tool of production or an indicator of social status, sexuality was understood as something pleasurable and relational (Altman 1972, p. 83; D'Emilio 1993). For many, the all inclusive sense of gay in the 1970's gave way to a stricter boundary policing.

Broader Divisions Within the Movement

While the ambition of the movement was to create a more free democracy in which the masses could play, broader social divisions over race, class, gender, and sex accompanied this struggle. In the weeks after Stonewall, the Gay Liberation Front (GLF), a queer direct action group that formed to continue the struggle after the riots, recognized that the forces of gay liberation could only succeed if they worked in coalition with other movements. GLF sought linkages with Third World struggles, Black Power, feminism, and other leftist movements. Even in its slogans, the borrowings were obvious: “Gay is good” mirrored “Black is beautiful,” “gay libber” echoed “women’s libber,” “Gay Power” came from “Black Power.”

Despite GLF's outreach, the Black Panthers and the women's movement initially distanced themselves from the group (Bronski 1998, p. 67). Nonetheless, intersections slowly emerged. There were converts. Black Panther co-founder Huey P. Newton was one of them. In a 1970 letter, Newton asked the Panthers to get over their "insecurities" and recognize the interconnected nature of the oppression of women, homosexuals, and African Americans due to society’s sexism, homophobia, and racism. Newton explained: “Homosexuality is a fact that exists, and we must understand it in its purest form: That is, a person should have freedom to use his body in whatever way he wants to." Further, he linked the colonization of bodies that African Americans have historically experienced (Fanon 1952/95) with homophobia and women's oppression. The letter was a rejection of the notion of competing oppressions. "Maybe the homosexual is the most revolutionary," Newton concluded (quoted in Teal 1971/1995).

Yet while the goal of overcoming all oppressions was noble, the practical route was elusive. Sexual civil liberties activism and consciousness-raising were difficult principles to operationalize within a formal structure. Robert's *Rules of Order* was the first GLF casualty. "The queen with the loudest mouth usually wore everyone down,"

Kohler recalls. And the group would not last long. By 1971, a moderate faction left to form the Gay Activist's Alliance. The GAA sought legislative reforms, stating in its constitution: "GAA is exclusively devoted to the liberation of homosexuals and avoids involvement in any program of action not obviously relevant to homosexuals." Exposing a split that would continue for the next three decades, GLF loyalists accused the GAA of being overly white, patriarchal, and assimilationist (Teal 1971/1995). But despite its short existence, GLF established a lasting legacy. Looking back, former member Karla Jay suggested, "there were neither villains, nor victors. There were no other models. So we did the best we could." And gay liberation continued long after GLF faded into memory (Teal 1971/1995), and the movement only advanced throughout the 1970s.

Gay liberation serves as one example of sex-positive activism. GLF's vision spread around the world, story by story. Storytelling was a central part Guy Hocquenghem's first meetings with the French *Front Homosexual d'Action Revolutionnaire* in 1971. He recalled: "Some of them had been to the States and had seen what had become of the Gay Liberation Front there. They dreamed of doing something like it in France." Building on GLF's message, they called for "Abortion and contraception on demand and free of charge. Homosexual rights and rights to all sexualities" (1972/1993).

These foundations anticipated a movement in the history of ideas. Hocquenghem's wanderlust and Newton's integration of homophobia and sexism into his vision of racial and cultural oppression created a foundation for what scholars a generation later would call "Queer Theory." This philosophy built on gay liberation's vision of unshackled sex and gender roles and revolutionary zeal. Queer theorist Leo Bersani's 1995 call to liberate "the homo in all of us" echoed gay liberationist Carl Whitman's 1972 exhortation to "free the homosexual in everyone.". Queer theorist Michael Warner (1992) locates queer theory's roots in these early gay liberation writings. Yet while a new philosophy of engagement was born from this struggle, many historic difficulties may also be located

within this trajectory. Despite the GLF's positioning as a “unisexual” group, many lesbians were torn between gay liberation and the women's movement. "We have to have our chance as women to realize where we are,” one woman in GLF explained. “We're here because we do relate to men's and women's gay liberation, but we must reserve the right to make certain decisions by ourselves." Some lesbians in the group came to feel that the “unisexual” argument had been used to force women to accept a single party line. A number of lesbians left GLF out of frustration with the chauvinism within the group. "There was a change when the women left," says Kohler. "I felt abandoned; the energy was gone. A lot of energy was arguing" (Teal 1971/1995, p. 139).

The breakdown of the GLF was a sign of was followed by separatist positions (Crimp 1993, p. 314). Many lesbians felt sizable cultural distinctions between themselves and gay men that needed to be acknowledged. Beyond GLF, the tendency had its own life. Adrienne Rich (1978/1993, p. 318-319) suggested that while lesbians and gay men share a common cause, differences such as "lack of economic and cultural privilege relative to men" and interpretations of sexual freedom allow lesbians to experience a separate "profoundly female," homosexual experience. Rofes (1998B) recalled organizing in the 1970's: "The fragile linkages between lesbians and gay men during this period made me cautious - few relationships of the time seemed to survive intellectual disagreement, social offenses, or political errors." With a number of notable examples, separatism lasted the rest of the decade.

Race, Larger Social Conflicts, and Black and White Men Together

Many acknowledge that while they cherished their experiences with the public sexual cultures gay men created throughout the 1970s, these spaces were not devoid of

the social fissures within the larger culture. Liddell Jackson says he felt the racism of the larger culture even in gay men's play spaces. Kendall Thomas had similar experiences in New York's public sexual spaces: "Sure, I also had some of my most profound experiences of racism in that world" (2003).

These experiences of racism even in supposedly egalitarian spaces designed for play create difficulties when building effective organizing structures. After all, as Eric Rofes explains, "Community organizing is the hardest thing to do. It's hard to do among like-minded and like culturally people. It's really hard to do across differences." When experiences such as those reported by Jackson and Thomas continue to take place, the possibilities of engaging in effective cross-cultural organizing are vastly reduced. "What we need – especially between white people and people of color – is [to learn] how to build community over the long haul that can sustain the huge, wrenching divisions that occur," Rofes suggests.

By the 1980s, such models were beginning to take shape. Jackson, whose experiences with discrimination in public sex venues served as a catalyst for his work as an organizer, was among the leaders who sought to tackle the issue of race in public sexual spaces head on. One of his first experiences in organizing began with attending a social club where African American and Caucasian men met to play – "a gloried fuck-club," as Jackson describes it. Yet he saw that the club could be something more. The story of Jackson's involvement began in July 1980, when he met his lover Mitchell, who was white and Jewish. By September, Jackson first heard about out about Black and White Men Together (BWMT), which had just formed. Jackson recalls:

> Mitchell said to me, "Why don't we go to a meeting of Black and White Men Together?" And I said to him, "I think that's a great idea." I loved the idea that

> there was a black and white gay men's group. I think that's just revolutionary, you know. Here is a gay men's group that is actually getting together across racial boundaries. Now of course the original idea behind Black and White Men Together was to be a mixer. Black and white men getting together, meeting each other, and going to have sex with each other. That was the idea, the original idea.

BWMT started the previous February in San Francisco, and the idea quickly took off, with chapters forming in New York City, Boston, and Washington, DC, within a few months. "Talk about an idea whose time had come!" Jackson thought. And he had his own ideas about what the club could be:

> All the other chapters followed the paradigm set by the San Francisco founding chapter of being a mixer. Well, of course the New York chapter had to be different, right. Within weeks of its formation, the New York chapter started saying, it's not just about getting together and meeting and finding who you were going to sleep with that night, this is a rare opportunity. We should actually talk about this. Well, that was actually the kiss of death. (Laughs). Consciousness-raising or rap sessions on racism in the gay community (Laughs).

Yet, despite his fears, the group survived and thrived. By 1981, all the chapters of BWMT were scheduled to gather for a convention in San Francisco. There, the New York chapter would meet the other chapters:

> By the time we arrived at the convention, we had become known as the firebrand chapter, the chapter that everyone had to look out for. "Here come those New Yorkers." And we descended upon San Francisco within a maelstrom of activism activity and we scared everybody. We didn't mean to. We were just excited. But we scared everyone.

At the San Francisco gathering, the New York chapter also showed everyone they could have a wonderful time with pleasure and play while addressing a range of issues, including organizational structure. When Jackson got back to New York, he built on his observations from the San Francisco meeting:

> We noticed a few very, very interesting things. All of the other chapters throughout the country, and at that point there were about twelve of them, were

> started by a white man, including the New York one. All the other chapters were run by the white men in the group. And black men would just join. The New York chapter was run by the black men in the group, with the white men joining in. Now, the reason why that was the case was that between October, the time that Mitchell and I joined, to somewhere around January or February, I was one of about five or six black men in the group who said, "You know, everything that is being done here is being done by white men in the group – the newsletter, calling the meetings, getting the refreshments, and all we do is just show up. That actually doesn't make sense."

So Jackson proposed another consciousness-raising session, an idea that was met with trepidation. He continues:

> So, the black men in the group decided that we would have a black caucus. The white men went ballistic. They said, "Why did we start a group like this if you are just going to leave?" I said, "We're not going to leave, we're just going to sit in the evening as black men and talk to each other." But not realizing that this was a frightening concept to the white men in the group, because it's not to say that they were actively subjugating us, but you don't want the slaves talking to each other. But what we did discover in that very, very valuable conversation, that went on over about four hours that night, was that we didn't fear taking on positions of authority, what we feared was having our authority questioned by white men. Deep down many of us felt that we had the expertise, but the second we would try to do something, we were afraid to have the white men patronize us or question that. We were afraid. Once we faced that fear, we were fine.

Out of this experience, Jackson started organizing. What had started as "a glorified fuck club" had become a way for organizers to address a wide range of issues in the gay community. When African Americans were turned away from queer sexual spaces, BWMT organized NAACP race tests for admission, just as civil rights activists had done a generation before to test housing admissions. The conditions in which play took place thus became a framework in which to look at mechanisms of power in everyday life. When BWMT had a potluck that turned into an orgy, they then had a meeting the next day to talk about the night before. In addition, Jackson reached out to women such as Adrienne Rich, Audre Lorde, and Jewelle Gomez for help in mentoring

the new group. Their advice and counsel would be invaluable. And when the AIDS crisis hit, Jackson would build on this experience to create public sexual spaces and parties where people of color and their friends could meet to share pleasure and safety (Mandell 1995; Merrett 1992, 1993). And the debates about the social and cultural meanings of sexual play would continue.

Conflicts over Sex

As this chapter suggests, inherent tensions between pleasure and political organizing can be witnessed throughout the gay liberation years. Much of this split takes place around notions of pleasure and play. When I interviewed Eric Rofes, who was involved in much of this organizing, I read him a paragraph by Scott Tucker, writing about a frustrating moment at a conference of the National Organization of Lesbians and Gays (NOLAG) in 1979:

> During the conference, a "disgruntled caucus" went out one evening to a denim and leather bar called the One-Way. It was packed and steamy. While we nursed our beers and wounds, three fascinating men entered the bar together. Plainly dedicated body builders, all three were stripped to the waist, their muscles oiled and gleaming. All three wore black leather boots, jeans strained at the seams with flies half-undone, and black leather executioner's hoods laced tightly at the napes of their necks and fitting their skulls like skin. In the United States, where the cops blow people away like flies, it freaks some folks out to see grown gay men *play with power*. I am increasingly drawn to the pure theatre of leather bars and leathermen (1997, p. 15).

As I finished reading the paragraph, Rofes looked curious and asked what year the conference took place. "I was there for this," he said, recalling that it was actually the NOLAG post-March on Washington meeting at the University of California, Los Angeles in 1979. "I was actually in that caucus and at the One-Way that night." I asked him about his experience of those guys and their contrast to the formal conference business. He explained:

> Well, what was interesting to me was that that meeting was the meeting that split around the sex issue. And I'm not even sure what side Scott was on. But that was conference in which the issue was "kink" and "leather" and then "boy-love." And people lined up on two sides of the room. Robin Tyler, the head of this caucus. Maybe Gayle Rubin and me, the head of the other caucus. Amber [L. Hollibaugh], this was some of the first work we did together. Scott I hope was here... It basically killed the organization. I remember that because Michael Marrell was getting a blowjob in the bathroom while it was happening. There was a lot of pleasure that was going on there. And it was just a question about the role of sex and pleasure in the movement overtly. That was a famous weekend.

Sexual play was on people's minds, and movement organizers were no exception. The question remained: What was the appropriate place for play within the burgeoning Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender (GLBT) movement? Certainly there were those, such as Rofes and Hollibaugh, who suggested that sexual play should be an open part of movement organizing (Hollibaugh, 2000, p. 118-37). As the slogan went, "The personal is political." On the other hand, there were those who suggested that play should not be part of the movement's organizing efforts (even if it was part of organizers' private lives).

Rofes actually had a funny run-in with one of the organizers who was opposed to the formal recognition of pleasure within the movement:

> I don't think it was the same bar, [I think] that I later went out to some other sex club and went to piss on the guy in the bathtub and it was this man who on the other side arguing [the anti-sex line at NOLAG] getting pissed on.

Here, I pointed out to Rofes that later in his essay, Tucker said it would have been nice if the hooded guys had been invited to the conference. Rofes replied:

> But those guys wouldn't have been there because [the NOLAG organizers] have nothing to offer them. Those guys would come to a kink weekend, maybe. They might come to International Mr. Leather. What does it mean that International Mr. Leather gets 10,000 people and the annual Creating Change [the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force's meeting for activists and organizers] gets two or three [thousand]?

As a matter of a fact, San Francisco's Folsom Street Fair, an annual gathering of people of all sexual orientations into leather and BDSM, is bigger than the Rose Bowl Parade. "It's bigger than Gay Pride these days, at least it feels that way," Rofes commented. The point is that the pleasure people are out meeting and organizing – and playing – but it may not be in the same ways the political people are meeting and organizing.

As the interviewing proceeded, I asked Rofes about the prefigurative use of play and pleasure in organizing. Had he created the world in which he hoped to live with his organizing, or one where such a possibility could emerge? Rofes explained that this is why tribes, which Maffesoli (1993, 1996) talks about, are so important. "I would look at the places around intense political experiences where people get the real meaning," he said. And much of this does not take place within formal political channels. It takes place during the breaks or at the bar after the political work is done:

> For example, at Creating Change, after the workshops are done at 6:30 or 7 at night, Carmen Vasquez and Amber Hollibaugh and other activists are just hangin' out smoking and drinking and telling stories and gossiping at the bar. And how meaningful and pleasurable that is for people. You know, Creating Change always tries to have a dance going on. I haven't been for years. But from what I can tell, the dances never work. But people will go to the local disco or the local circuit party or the local sex club and do their own dance there.

The debate over the meaning of pleasure, pornography, public sex, and BDSM play would only accelerate as the 1980s continued. Here, debates about moralism, censorship, and self-determination overlapped with discussions of the importance of pleasure. While some called for suppression of of sexual play viewed as dangerous or oppressive to women (both the real thing and pornographic depictions), othersfelt

betrayed by those who called for such restrictions, setting off a battle dubbed the "sex wars" (Califia 1994; Hollibaugh 1984;Vance 1984).

The Lesbian Sex Wars: Dangerous Play or Violence Against Women?

Much of the controversy that sparked the "sex wars" began with the Scholar and Feminist IX Conference, "Towards a Politics of Sexuality," held at Barnard College in April 1982 (see Vance 1984 for conference papers). Legal scholar Nan Hunter notes the expression "sex wars" refers to a series of cultural and political battles between 1980 and 1990 (Hunter 1986; Duggan and Hunter 1995). The roots of the conflict can be traced to tensions that arose within the sexual revolution as sexuality underwent a vast commodification, including the wide distribution of pornography. Many feminists viewed the sexual revolution as "male oriented," perpetuating gender inequality. They studied and theorized about the role of pornography in women's oppression. Anti-porn crusaders predicted that porn consumers (both male and female) would be contaminated by the all-consuming force of male desire. The result was a culture war that continued well into the 1980s (Weeks 1985, p. 19).

Years before, American feminist Ti-Grace Atkinson had contended that lesbianism was antithetical to the feminist agenda because it "involves role-playing and, more important, because it is based on the primary assumption of male oppression" (quoted in Echols 1989, p. 211). Times had changed, but not fast enough for many. By the early 1980s, attempts by one branch of the women's movement to weed out oppressive patterns, sexual abuse, and sexism were seen as stifling another segment's need for creativity, experimentation, and play. Butch-femme and BDSM/fetish communities were still marginalized within the movement. Pro-sex feminists – many of them lesbians – craved sexual autonomy, places to play and organize. Much of

uniqueness of the lesbian experience, even the power of women's sexuality itself, seemed to get lost, submerged within in all the talk about “women identification” (Stein 1998, p. 560). As this chapter suggests, play means different things to different people. No one likes having their play labeled or repressed.

Sexual expression versus. regulation lay at the root the sex wars. While one group of feminists, working within the anti-pornography movement, favored heavy government regulation and censorship, pro-sex feminists fought to place freedom of speech and self-expression at the top of the women's movement agenda (Stoller 1997, p. 175-176). The different groups disagreed about issues such as legal protections for queers, public funding of “obscene” art, public school curricula, reproductive freedom, the content of safer-sex education, and what constituted pleasurable play.

Anti-porn feminists labeled dissenters "collaborationists" with the patriarchy. Lisa Duggan recalls having to defend activist communities of sex workers, butch-femme dykes, and those who engaged in lesbian S/M play from attacks by other feminists (Duggan and Hunter 1995). The Feminist Anti-Censorship Task Force (FACT) was formed in 1984 to articulate a feminist response to Catherine MacKinnon and Andrea Dworkin's proposed ordinance to define pornography as violence against women. The brief filed by FACT was persuasive enough that the Supreme Court struck down the ordinance(Hunter 1986). Common sense prevailed against censorship in 1986, and untimely the pro-sex, anti-censorship wing of the movement prevailed within the feminist movement (Duggan and Hunter 1995). (Though some of the anti-sex/anti-porn faction went on to work with the Religious Right to support programs such as abstinance-only sex education.)

One of those who helped organized against the Dworkin/MacKinnon ordinance was Marla Stevens, the Director of Public Policy at Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Fairness Indiana (LGBT Fairness). "[T]he Dworkin/MacKinnon ordinance, we had to fight that in Indianapolis. You know, I worked really closely with the American Civil Liberties Union, and I worked as part of their public policy team for a while." The struggle against the ordinance was part of a larger struggle against restriction of sexual civil liberties, which included bathhouse closures in the mid-1980s, at the height of the AIDS crisis. "[I also worked] with the bathhouse owners," Stevens recalls. "And there were also anti-bath related ordinances that we beat back."

For Marla Stevens, a policy director, organizing has often been accompanied by notions of play. Her first memories of organizing have to do with pulling together the party favors at a friend's house as a young child. "I was about seven years old in Tim Williams of Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil, I believe it was, in Savanna (GA). That was the very first thing." That was in the mid 1960's. By her late twenties, Stevens was living in Savannah, Georgie, "not too long after Stonewall," she recalls. "[P]eople were getting beaten up on the streets, and that wasn't OK. And then Anita Bryant [leader of the anti-gay "Save Our Children" campaign] was coming to town, and we organized around that." By the mid-1970s, Stevens had begun working as a full-time lobbyist, dealing with a broad range of issues including LGBT concerns. "And then there were all the issues around the lesbian sex wars," she notes.

One of Stevens' peak moments during the sex wars unfolded during the struggle to find a place for kinky play at the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival. "We kept running into problems with the festival organizers [about us] not being too open, wanting to put people who wanted to play into areas that were not accessible for the large

numbers of challenged people that we had. Suddenly, it got very unpleasant and confrontative," she recalls. The controversy mirrored many of the larger issues of the sex wars. Free expression and play versus political marginalization at a lesbian event – core issues of the lesbian sex wars – was at stake. "The festival was presenting itself as being sexually open and available to everybody and [was] not being honest about the level of enforcement against S/M and open sexual, hearty play, which involved things like throwing people out and disrupting," she continues.

Ever the activist, instead of getting mad, Stevens made some media calls and conducted an interview about the issue with *The Advocate*, a national GLBTnewsweekly. She included this interview, as well as information about a resolution on sexual freedom from activists in San Francisco, on a flyer to distribute at the festival. She recalls:

> I wasn't interested in standing in the hot sun and confronting people wanting to get into the festival. So I looked at my wife and I said, "Well, I think what we should do is rent a plane and drop these things on the festival from the air." And she did one of those, "Yeah, honey, whatever you think..." looks, thinking that that would never happen. But somehow we made it happen – and with FAA permission, on First Amendment grounds no less. Finally the weather got clearer. A lot of [the flyers] landed in the swamp. And there was so much interest in getting a hold of some of them that people were going out and retrieving wet copies from the swamp. It was certainly the talk of the festival. Performers talked about it from the stage. It enraged the festival organizers. One of [the flyers] landed at their feet. It got people talking for a while. Talk is always good.

And eventually, the festival changed its ways. "I've been doing this for a long time – defending against attacks on public sex," Stevens concedes. For her this has included tactics such as "talking with people about the utter insanity of doing things that increased what they didn't want." Here, Stevens highlights the unintended consequences and logical implications of these attacks, including "unconstitutionally targeting people in an unequal enforcement sort of way." Another part of her strategy has been encouraging policy research on issues including "code language that the police use that at least one academic researcher found to constitute a violation of entrapment laws." In addition, she encourages sex-positive people to get training in the law, a strategy "which produced

some very good case law in Indiana and stopped the practice of attorneys who didn't know sodomy had been decriminalized in the state of Indiana a decade before still attacking it."

A major battleground in the sex wars involved questions about public and private spaces. The best way to effectively organize around public sexual play involves helping people see their issues in a broad framework of the law and social justice. Thus, it involves recognizing play as part of a broader organizing strategy for sexual freedom and social change. For activists such as Stevens, it also involved practicing what one preaches. "Especially strong public play, like the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival, where people dance, that are open to everybody that wants to come. It's the equivalent of street theater," Stevens explains. "It's by example."

From her efforts at the music festival, Stevens went on to work to displace misunderstandings about S/M play. Discussion of sexual play became part of a broader democratic conversation. Yet more than anything for Stevens, the politics of play is about keeping people guessing. "Where people were expecting, like, scary clothing – or what to them was scary clothing, with lots of leather and lots of black – I would wear pink and do an S/M fairy number." This was part of her strategy at the music festival. "Sometimes I would do things at play parties in Michigan, or San Francisco, and do a Little Bo Peep number." The strength in these gestures is light-hearted, even self deprecating humor. "You know, I am six feet tall, a big woman. And comfortable in pink frou frou. (Laughs). And laughing and having a very good time."

Bottoms Rule: Play as Lobbying

For Stevens, fun and play are underrated tools in the struggle to create change. They are part of a larger organizing focus around wholesale and retail politics:

> At the greatest level, at the deepest level, they happen one person at a time. You have to do the wholesale to prepare people for the retail. Lyndon Johnson used to talk a lot about wholesale versus retail politics. He firmly believed that all politics was retail. It was that one-on-one human interaction. Of course, he may have been the last person before the mass media stuff really kicked in to do that well. He may have been the last great congressional practitioner. And at that point, one of his conflicts with the Kennedys was that they were so dedicated to wholesale politics. And they were great choices with broadcast television and all that kind of stuff.

Yet for Stevens, both wholesale and retail politics are necessary for a coherent organizing strategy, especially in fighting referenda. The policy changes often happen through micro level interactions among peers. Yet, they take place within a broad social context. "That you prepare it and reinforce it with the wholesale. But the big change happens in those door-to-door retail encounters." Those human interactions are where changes in political positions take place. Stevens once pointed out to a court reporter whose column was read by everyone in the state that she found it odd that the reporter was writing stories about the police arresting someone for doing what heterosexuals do all the time on Lover's Lane. Stevens suggested that this might not be an appropriate use of police resources. And the court reporter exclaimed, "I've never thought of that." For Stevens, her strategy was "being able to communicate to people that finding someone attractive and saying so is not an excuse for an arrest, even if the bulk of that action happened in a public place."

Stevens, who is a bottom in her personal relationships, bottoming and lobbying go hand and hand. The bottom is the receptive partner, the receiving source. She explains:

> Who is better able to articulate sexual issues and better able to manipulate power than the people who use it for visceral play? It's a form of advocacy. It involves good service, very good service. You are being a good servant to your community. You are providing very good service to legislators. A good bottom has to be able to talk to power in ways that do not enrage power, that cuts through, [enswages] power. That's just lobbying 101. And at the same time to understand that you too have great power as a lobbyist. And a lobbyist has the power, owns a chunk of the electorate that the policy-maker wants.

The point, of course, is to bring some of the skills of sexual play into politics. For Stevens, the politics of seduction is the most potent element in the politics of play. It's all about shifting power dynamics. Part of the vitality of the Gay Liberation Movement, part of what made it so successful, was its campiness, even in the face of repression. Bob Kohler suggests that this is a form of defiance and a way of disarming an enemy completely:

> It's like a woman who fucks a man. And the man does not necessarily have to be a bottom. Suddenly, she's in control and she's fucking him. It just turns it around and shows it for what it's all about. And somehow we have sort of lost that. There's also girlish laughter.

Without that sense of humor and comfort, the politics of play loses its vitality. Stevens concludes: You carry it with you. For one thing, if you have that general approach to your existence and your organizing, one of the things that creative play and good sexual play, good S/M sexual play, does for people is, in order to be safe, you have to be articulate. And if you can put that into use in your personal sexuality, it's a lot easier to put it into use in your politics. And also, it increases your comfort. And when you bring a comfort with it and pleasure with it…I'm not going to have sex with the officer that I am speaking to, but I am going to bring the comfort of my sex to that

discussion. I am going bring that I'm Ok, and that's going to translate that it's OK. This is just ordinary stuff.

Its all part of a coherent organizing strategy, combing message, a clear ask, communication, and data. . "You have to have data to back it up," Stevens says. Without it, efficacy is limited.

In the End

The debates over sexual play that unfolded throughout the sex wars rehashed core questions about democracy and social status that Americans have argued over since the Civil War. The sex wars represented extensions, both specific and metaphoric, of conflicts over citizenship that have been debated from Reconstruction through the Reform era and the New Deal (Bronski 1999, p. 22). At the center of these debates is a series of competing narratives about the meanings of queer sexual play. While opponents viewed queer sexuality as illness, gay liberationists advanced a storyline of sexuality as pleasure; while opponents saw homosexuality and S/M play as signs of pathology, queers organized around notions of sexuality as democratic experience and exchange.[I

These debates would continue to rage over the next two decades, as the AIDS crisis and the Supreme Court's 1986 *Bowers v. Hardwick* sodomy law decision further consigned queer sexuality to the realm of outlaw status. To sustain their fight against this ongoing attack, queers would look to civil society, to the public sexual sphere created during the gay liberation years. As Kendall Thomas explains:

> [B]y 1983, clearly there was a network – for gay men, at least – of bars, of clubs, of bathhouses. There was indeed, a kind of gay civil society outside the commercial realm of gay men who came together, because of the kinds of sex they liked, because of the kind of clothes they liked to wear, because of the kind

> of sports they liked. And so, there was a gay civil society that existed, and an expertise – initiation – in the cities, at least, of coming out. There was a sense that there was a gay world, that we had made a world, and existence of that world clearly made ACT UP possible. There was a Gay and Lesbian Community Service Center. Ten years before, no such thing had existed (2003).

Yet as the AIDS era emerged, these public spaces were threatened. Bathhouses were closed from coast to coast (Bérubé 1996). With dwindling numbers of places to meet and to play, queers felt the squeeze. As Kohler explains, "When [the baths] closed, people lost more of a central meeting place than they did [a place to have] sex. There was always going to be another place to have sex. But there wasn't going to be another place to forge the bonds." And queer civil society was threatened by this loss.

Chapter III
Play as Resilience:
Eros vs. Thanatos in ACT UP

Much of the early years of AIDS activism can be understood as a struggle between Eros and Thanatos. Eros, of course, was the Greek god of love; he represented a monumental generative force (Hendricks 1974). For Sigmund Freud, Eros came to represent a life force, a sexual pulse that inspired creativity and libido; Eros was a force capable of preserving life itself. In much of Freud's work, Eros is pitted against Thanatos, the death instinct. Thanatos represents the absence of Eros; it indicates the loss of a struggle. As Eros wanes, quiescence returns; actors return to the underworld (Freud 1989). Others have conceptualized the battle of life and death as a struggle between Dionysus and Apollo – the gods of pleasure vs. the god of logic (Brown 1959; Euripides 1954; Maffesoli 1993).

Here, Eros is useful concept for describing the life affirming energy which propelled the study's third case study, on the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP). To think about play and ACT UP, one need look no further than the group's name, which employed a "playfully gay cultural coding," T.V. Reed explained (2005, p. 187). In the face of death, this spirit was a crucial feature of the AIDS movement of the late 1980s and early 1990s. The name indicates an imperative to act, to struggle for life, to be defiant, and to play.

Chapter three utilizes interviews with several long-term members of the group, as well as oral history interviews collected by the ACT UP Oral History Project, and

memoirs of the period. The overlap between my interviews and those of others is a useful source for data triangulation. In addition, the memoirs and oral history interviews that use the word “play” further indicate that the term is indigenous, rather than a term the interviewer lead the participants to discuss. “Play” and “fun” were common words among ACT UP members, since play and fun were essential to the group. The struggle between Eros and Thanatos, after all, inspired the group’s very formation.

1985: The Struggle Intensifies

"No matter how you look at it, you're being pushed," Vito Russo screamed at a crowd of 700 as the bathhouse closures were taking hold in New York City. "And I don't want you to jump out of the windows. I want you to push back," (Marcus, 1992). The night was November 14, 1985. New York Governor Mario Cuomo had just signed legislation prohibiting "high risk" behaviors – oral and anal intercourse – in commercial establishments, i.e. baths, tearooms, etc. Vaginal intercourse was not included in the ban, and GLBT activists cried foul (Bérubé 1996). The bathhouse closures fit into a pernicious homophobic script that AIDS only advanced, while highlighting forms of discrimination against which gay liberationists had long fought (Marcus 1992).

Bad news continued in 1986 with a Supreme Court decision that further legitimized state-based attacks on homosexuals. The story of *Bowers v. Hardwick* began in 1982, when Georgian Michael Hardwick was arrested in his own home for having sex with another man. He appealed the case all the way up to the Supreme Court, which upheld Georgia's sodomy law in 1986. With this decision, the Supreme Court ruled that the constitutional right to privacy does not extend to what gay people do behind closed doors. In his dissent, Justice Harry Blackmun argued that the issue facing the court involved a fundamental question of self-determination (Blackmun 1999). Blackmun, the

author of *Roe v. Wade*,held that the right of people to choose with whom they would like to form intimate bonds must be considered along the same lines as the right to sovereignty over one's body in a pluralistic democracy.

"All of those issues that we claimed existed – discrimination in jobs, discrimination in housing, hatred for gay people on a very basic level because we're different," explained Russo, a former Gay Activist Alliance (GAA) member, "have been made palpable by the AIDS crisis" (quoted in Marcus 1992, p. 416). Yet, instead of just screaming, Russo worked with Larry Kramer, Eric Sawyer (who was interviewed for this chapter), and a number of other queer activists to form ACT UP in 1987 Russo's anger exemplified the beginning of a revolution in activism.

ACT UP was formed under the rubric "Silence = Death" to condemn the placators. As Douglas Crimp and Adam Rolston (1990) explained, "'Silence = Death' declares that silence about the oppression and annihilation of gay people, *then and now,* must be broken as a matter of our survival" (1990, p. 14). The group's *raison d'etre* was to reverse the homophobic script propelling the AIDS crisis.

ACT UP as a Legacy of Gay Liberation

Members of ACT UP could see the erosion of much of the progress made during the gay liberation years of the 1970s. Thus, in its early years, members of ACT UP succeeded in linking their message with the fierce anti-homophobic agenda first outlined by the Gay Liberation movement. At its peak in early 1991, ACT UP chapters thrived in 54 U.S. cities, with another ten in cities outside the United States (Levy 1997). A longer

digression on ACT UP's work would and could be instructive, for the group helped create or revitalize many contemporary elements of protest. Suffice it to say, ACT UP is too important not to be given grateful acknowledgement in any study of creative activism. Excellent and moving accounts of ACT UP's use of creativity and play in combination with effective research are available in several studies (ACT UP/NY Women & AIDS Book Group 1990; Crimp and Rolston 1990; Gamson 1991; Epstein 1996; Kauffman 2002; Moore 2004; Sawyer 2002; Shepard, 2002a). In addition, the ACT UP/New York website provides a wonderful list of resources on the history and theory of the group. The ACT UP Oral History Project (www.actuporalhistory.org) has collected many first-person oral histories of the ACT UP experience. While there have been distinct studies of the range of emotions that propelled ACT UP's work (Gould 2002), the specific play element, which helped the group find a balance between anger and political engagement, and the group's roots in the queer aesthetics of the gay liberation movement, have not been fully considered. This chapter seeks to tease out some of the instrumental, expressive, and external projections of play within the ACT UP.

Historian John D'Emilio credits ACT UP with advancing an "imaginatively militant activism" (quoted in Freiberg 1997). Aspects of this activism included a range of pranks and theatrical displays including sit-ins, die-ins, and kiss-ins, as well as street demonstrations and zaps reminiscent of those of the gay liberation era. These tactics were framed within smart, glossy advertising posters; a great deal of research; and frank, sometimes sarcastic signs held aloft by people who felt they had little to lose. The group's range of media-grabbing, sometimes playful, often highly dramatic stunts helped the counter-public of queers, injection drug users, sex workers, and others stigmatized by

AIDS to create publicity that pushed their message from the margins into a far larger sphere of public attention. Through its well-honed understanding of mass media, ACT UP advanced a storyline that AIDS was a public health issue worthy of the highest levels of government attention – rather than the silencethat had characterized the Reagan administration's response to AIDS (Brouwer 2001; Freiberg 1997).

ACT UP would employ a wide range of social and cultural counter-narratives. Here, the idea that Sexuality = Life became a key foundation of AIDS activism. Faced with the bathhouse closures, *Bowers v. Hardwick*, and AIDSphobia, ACT UP sought to reverse a cultural narrative which defined AIDS through a moralizing lens (Murry and Paine 1988). Legal and medical discourses advanced this script by utilizing science to label people with AIDS in terms of deviance and stigma (Treichler 1988). Storylines were drafted in contrasting black-and-white terms: hetero or homo, natural or immoral, clean or dirty, pure or impure. Themes of morality and retribution, death and cancer, dominated a story cast with injection drug users, sex-crazed fags, whores, victims, disease carriers, and crack babies (Gamson 1991). This normalizing script privileged heteronormative cultural practices while utilizing the full administrative power of the state to punish anything that deviated. Through a series of direct-action techniques and pranks, ACT UP aimed to turn this storyline on its head. Russo brought his tools and skills from his days with the GAA, including an appreciation for camp, pleasure, and movies, as well as a flair for the dramatic.

At an ACT UP demonstration at the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) in Washington, D.C., on October 10, 1988, Russo situated himself and ACT UP

within a struggle and claimed a place in history. “AIDS is really a test of us as a people,” he said. “When future generations ask what we did in this crisis, we’re going to have to tell them that we were out here today”Russo, 1988 Looking to the future – a future Russo, who himself had AIDS, knew he would not be around to see – he asked the crowd to consider:

> Someday the AIDS crisis will be over. Remember that. And when that day comes – when that day has come and gone, there’ll be people alive on this earth – gay people and straight people, men and women, black and white – who will hear the story that there was once this terrible disease in this country and all over the world – and that a brave group of people stood up and fought, in some cases gave their lives, so that other people might live and be free (1988)

Yet, Russo concluded, he would survive and make sure no one would forget what the AIDS crisis felt like: “After we kick the shit out of this disease, I intend to be able to kick the shit out of this system, so that this never happens again.”

Russo’s words echoed SDS president Paul Potter’s recognition of a “system of oppression,” which spread war abroad and apartheid at home, at the April 1965 SDS anti-war demonstration in Washington (Varon 2004, p 223), Russo’s exhorttion opened up a vast agenda for ACT UP. Fighting the AIDS pandemic meant fighting institutional racism, sexism, and the class system, as well as homophobia. Over the following eighteen years, “kicking the shit out of the system” would grow to mean fighting undemocratic international trade and patent laws, the prison industrial complex, poverty, unresponsive government, budget cuts, a disaster in health care, and countless mechanisms of a bureaucracy that puts profit ahead of people. Russo and others recognized that this “system” had allowed the AIDS epidemic to spread unabated. “When I was told that I’d contracted the virus,” artist and ACT UP member David Wojnarowicz wrote, “it didn’t

take me long to realize that I'd contracted a diseased society as well" (quoted in Carr 1993b, p. 289).

Russo was a film historian, a culture person, a man who enjoyed and fully participated in the public sphere that queers had built over the previous decade. This included spaces for play. Wojnarowicz was an artist who made his defiance against the homophobic discourse of the 1980s a centerpiece of his work. This work also included an implicit acknowledgement that pleasure and desire had to be part of the struggle against illness. Queer aesthetics would be a primary tool for the new group. Yet this queer Eros was always threatened by a cancerous Thanatos that pulled at those involved in the struggle. In the days after the Washington speech, Russo, was bedridden. "I worry that friends will slowly become professional pallbearers, waiting for each death, of their lovers...polishing their funeral speeches; perfecting their rituals of death rather than a relatively simple ritual of life such as screaming in the streets," Wojnarowicz (1992) read at a fundraiser for a New York syringe exchange program in 1992. He would not live through the end of that year. Despite and because of such losses, the group would continue "screaming in the streets."

Play in ACT UP

For members of ACT UP, play would with be a cornerstone of their struggle between the generative Eros of the gay liberation years and the Thanatos that accompanied the disease, which seemed to be consuming everyone involved in those years and the group that was fighting it. Lighter forms of play at meetings, rambunctious zaps, absurd defiance, and life-affirming energy accompanied this battle against death

during the group's peak years. Group members fought to reconcile a profound anger at the society that allowed the carnage to spread.

This joyous life affirming defiance expressed itself in countless ways. Kendall Thomas (2003) remembers just one of the many characters he encountered who came through ACT UP. "[O]ur numbers were not that great, frankly," Thomas confessed. He was asked about black men and women in the group. "But in this little group, there was Ortez Alderson, who had come to New York, I guess from Chicago, who was the most militant queen I have ever seen. He seemed to derive a perverse pleasure from threatening to chain himself to the desks of powerful officials." Afterall, Thomas confessed freedom meant someone like Alderson had nothing left to lose. "He would get arrested anytime. He did not care, because he had nothing left to lose." This "perverse pleasure" was one of many ways that activism overlapped with a spirit of play in the group. A larger cohort of interviewees talk about how play emerged within ACT UP's work. For Walter Armstrong, who worked with an affinity group called the Delta Queens, play was part of living a fantasy; ACT UP was a means of expression. For Mark Harrington, who left ACT UP to form the Treatment Action Group (TAG), a playful spirit, expressed in fabulous campy chants, became a sort of litmus test for the group; when the great chants ended, so did much of the group's vitality. For long-time ACT UP facilitator Ann Northrop, play was one of many theatrical textures that helped the group communicate its messages and kept the community of ACT UP members feeling cohesive; without that community, the group vitality would wane. For others, such as James Wagner, ACT UP offered a way for the quietest of personalities to participate with a sartorial, theatrical flare; play was thus a part of an engaged Zapatismo, a way to

participate invisibly, yet effectively. For those who worked in Wagner's affinity group, Action Tours, much of the play of ACT UP involved combinations of queer aesthetic engagement of a secretive, clandestine nature; here, there was a joy in the subversive dark play of planning a banner drop, of bringing ACT UP's message into unexpected public places.

While there are countless ways to consider these forms of play within activist movements, Johan Huizinga's lucid 1950 conceptualization incorporates many of the threads established in this discussion of ACT UP's work:

> Summing up the formal characteristics of play, we might call it a free activity standing quite consciously outside the ordinary life, as being "not serious," but at the same time absorbing the player intensely and utterly. It is an actively connected with no material interest, and no profit can be gained by it. It proceeds within its own proper boundaries of time and space according to fixed rules and in an orderly manner. It promises the formation of social groupings which tend to surround themselves with secrecy and to stress their difference from the common world by disguise or other means (quoted in Caillois 1961/1979).

The clandestine element of ACT UP's work overlaps with "the formation of social groupings" and the emphasis on "free activity standing quite consciously outside the ordinary life."

The joy of getting away with some of their subversive pranks involved both Richard Schechner's (2002) notions of dark or risky play, as well as high-octane combinations of tension and joy, which Huizinga characterizes as distinct forms of play. Where ACT UP's efforts diverge from such notions of play is that, while Huizinga suggests that play is not to be viewed as "serious," ACT UP' s work – like that of the Young Lords – was often the diametric opposite: anything but "not serious."

Yet for ACT UP, the play element was often instructive, rather than external. The Eros got people to the meetings and actions. Play was part of the means to achieve a larger purpose – ending the carnage of AIDS. But street theatrics and rituals, which involved both playful and dramatic performances, were also part of the external organizing project. Here, play was effective as part of a larger holistic organizing strategy, which included a coherent messaging approach and clearly articulated policy proposals, buttressed by a great deal of research and sound counsel.

Nevertheless, there were many times when ACT UP reached the limits of its capacity to play. Julie Davids, now the executive director of the Community HIV/AIDS Mobilization Project (CHAMP) and an ACT UP Philadelphia veteran, confessed that it's hard to play when your friends are dying. Yet as Walter Armstrong notes, sometimes playing becomes the most important thing for someone with very little time left, as was the case with a member of his affinity group. Within social movement activities such as those used by ACT UP, play is understood within a paradoxical, tragicomic context. Play wasn't everything, or even a majority of the group's work. Yet it did offer an important outlet and counterbalance to what might otherwise have been a dark, overwhelming task in the midst of a death-saturated culture.

In the face of these dire conditions, there were those for whom the politics of pleasure was a useful response. For Armstrong, the link between Eros and Thanatos presented a profound dilemma. On the one hand, he explains:

> I guess I would say one thing to you which is connected to all of this. I met someone named Randy Snyder in ACT UP and we were in the same affinity group. First we were called the Delta Queens because we went to the Republican Convention in 1988 in New Orleans. That was with Heidi and Maria, so it was a very mixed, sophisticated group. Anyway, me and Randy met there and we dated for a while and then we became best friends. He died in 1996. And in the last

> couple of years of his life, I really was able to see someone play in the face not only of death, but really of the most grotesque kinds of deterioration. I'll never forget; I just think about him all of the time and how he wasn't able to think anymore, and we used to find ways of sort of joking about his condition and what it was like.

In this respect, play was part of a gallows humor; humor as a resiliency. Charles Garfield, who ran San Francisco's caregiver trainings and organized the Shanti Project, talks about being able to laugh when the guy who has dementia is pulling the toaster all over the room and saying it's his cat (Garfield and Spring 1993). Within this context, darker satirical magazines, such as *Diseased Pariah News*, were born of the AIDS crisis. Armstrong suggested such humor kept his friend Shaw going:

> It was very important to him. He wrote some very beautiful things like "Queers Read This" and then, "I Hate Straights." He wrote two pieces in those[broadsheets] that are really beautiful. In those two pieces he records some of that. It was his way of living right up to the very end.

Queers Read This (undated) appeared as part of an anonymously published broadsheet first distributed at the 1990 New York City Gay Pride parade. In it, Shaw situates his struggle for life within a struggle for the right to be different, the right to difference: "Being queer means leading a different sort of life." Sounding very much like the authors of the Dada manifesto who promised never to ask about the fatherland, Shaw suggested that being queer has nothing to do with "the mainstream, profit-margins, patriotism, patriarchy or being assimilated. It's not about executive directors, privilege and elitism." What being queer is about is difference: "It's about being on the margins, defining ourselves; it's about gender-fuck and secrets, what's beneath the belt and deep inside the heart; it's about the night." Thus, being queer is about authenticity, pleasure, and play.

Echoing the earliest gay liberation messages that "an army of lovers cannot fail," Shaw wrotes: "We are an army of lovers because it is we who know what love is. Desire and lust too. We invented them." But for queers, the right to intimate connection is a struggle against homophobia and death. "We come out of the closet, face the rejection of the society, face the firing squads, just to love each other!" Within this context, sexual play is a defiant act: "Every time we fuck we win." Yet instead of being satisfied with that, Shaw called for queers to move forward, to fight to inject a queer pulse into the very geography of the city. "Let's make every space a Lesbian and Gay space. Every street a part of our sexual geography. A city of yearning and satisfaction. A city and country where we can be safe and free and more." Play, love, freedom, Eros – these would all be part of the aggressive approach to building a better world that ACT UPers such as Shaw advocated.

But it was by no means was it a smooth process. And in countless ways, individuals failed to live up to this promise, even Shaw's friends. As Armstrong explains, "I have to say, a lot of his friends, very close friends from his affinity group, abandoned him. They couldn't deal with it. They couldn't bear to see him in such bad shape." For some, the onslaught of death was more than they could bear. Another ACT UP member, David Feinberg, who was HIV positive himself and died before these words were published, wrote that when the crisis first started, "Maybe then it was like *Love Story* and tragic and dramatic and poignant and full of pathos and grief. But now that everybody's dropping like flies, who even notices? This is not an attention getter. This is everyday life," (1994, p. 24). The banality of death becomes difficult to withstand. Still Feinberg is said to have cursed the general body of the group for not saving him during one of his

final Monday meetings with the group in 1993. Giovanni Boccaccio wrote about it with his heroines in 13th century Florence during the Black Plague in *The Decameron.* Armstrong thought Shaw's friends felt the same way: "They actually felt that he should take his life and they really would have preferred that. In my opinion, they killed him..."

As Armstrong's story about Shaw suggests, the level of care and advocacy involved a range of challenges, not all of which people could handle. This makes those who could even more admirable. Sometimes people did not have it in them to manage the task, as Armstrong notes. The greatest drama of the AIDS crisis, Tony Kushner's 1993 play *Angels in America*, involves just such a dilemma. In other cases, the caregiving, the bearing witness, became part of the ACT UP's work. Here, street theater overlapped with a form of public ritual and direct action, as saying goodbye became a focal point on an activist trajectory. Mark Harrington explains:

> A lot of times, groups were suddenly being pulled offline by having to take care of somebody or having to react or grieving. So you had that incredible series of political funerals where people would go right from the loss of the person right to the White House or wherever. And bring the body or bring the ashes.

Throughout the process, these emotions demanded a release and a counterbalance. Even in the darkest of those moments, elements of a liberatory playful spirit – including gallows humor, camp, and joy – accompanied the anger.

Profound Love and Profound Rage

This spirit of play proved an invaluable element of resiliency for those who watched hordes of friends and community members die. Thus, play intermingled with a full range of emotions – from despair to pathos, from pleasure to terror. Charles King, a veteran of ACT UP New York's Housing Committee, which evolved into Housing

Works, of which King is now president, explained that these combined feelings of joy and anger fueled the group's work:

> I actually think it's a combination of the two...The AIDS movement in the 1980s was fueled by this amazing combination of taking grief and anger and turning it into this powerful energy for action. But in the course of that, developing this comradely love. Yes, the anger was the fuel. It's what brought us together and taking that anger and not just sitting with it…not just letting grief turn into despair. Bringing it into some sort of action was very cathartic, but also what was cathartic in the process was all the loving that was taking place. That was an important part of it.

Faced with the choice of despair or joy, King suggests many, including his now-deceased lover and Housing Works partner Keith Cylar, chose to embrace a way of living that included both righteous struggle and pleasure. Countless speakers at Cylar's funeral in 2004 recalled his wild, exuberant approach to living. "Keith loved life. He didn't fear death. He hated death. More than anything else in the world, Keith loved to dance," King proclaimed in his tribute, "Psalm to an AIDS Warrior," at Cylar's funeral. "Keith loved to dance because he saw dance as a celebration of all that is good in life. He used to tell me the dance floor is the one place where I can truly be free and without care."

"We love you Vito! We love you Vito!!," the ACT UP contingent at the 1989 Gay Pride parade shouted from the streets of Fifth Avenue up to the balcony of Larry Kramer's apartment, where the famously amiable Russo, now bedridden, sat watching what he knew would be his final pride parade (Kantrowitz 1977/1996, p. 211).

The sentiment exemplified a part of ACT UP that few consider – the caring, affective side, motivated by love for people like Russo, who had found a place for themselves through the rejection of shame and the embrace of pleasure, play, and camp, which were central elements of the Gay Liberation Movement. When Russo died in 1990,

his funeral became an occasion for many to consider what it was about his life-affirming passion and gayness that had so inspired them.

Crimp, who by that time had become a bard of sorts for the group, recalled then New York City Mayor David Dinkins' eulogy at Russo's funeral. The mayor informed the hostile crowd that he had paid a hospital visit to Russo, who regaled him with stories, political philosophy, and even a quote from Edmund Burke. After Dinkins left, Russo's friend Arnie Kantrowitz informed the crowd that in case anyone was thinking they'd found out something new about Russo – that he was an American history buff –everyone should know that the lines from Burke he'd recited to Dinkins were from the film version of the Broadway musical, *1776*. Relief was discernable. In a way, the resulting laughter brought back the Russo everyone had known and loved. This, Crimp explained, was "the fierce activist who was very funny and very queer, a very funny queer who knew and loved movies, who knew better than anybody how badly the movies treated queers, but still loved them" (Crimp 1993, p. 301). Crimp's story about Russo says a lot about a camp sensibility that served as a mechanism of resiliency for many in ACT UP. "What is extravagant in an inconsistent or an unpassionate way is not camp," Susan Sontag (1964/2001) wrote, elaborating on the uncontainable, queer sensibility of this disposition. "Neither can anything be camp that does not seem to spring from an irrepressible, a virtually uncontrolled sensibility…"

It is not a stretch to link Russo's passion for show tunes and the "irrepressible" anger that helped drive the early years of ACT UP. Sarah Schulman notes the group's paradoxical nature in describing a group of ACT UP members standing doing some

clandestine work wearing their pink and black "Silence=Death" t-shirts: "The shirts were angry but the men were smiling" (1990, p. 47). And the work was righteous. Armstrong concurs:

> It has been widely observed by many people, the style of ACT UP was so deeply informed by gayness. All of that was brought to bear. And I think both camp and the complex irony, the sense of humor that homosexuals have about themselves and other people. There's all that stuff. That was with some of the deepest resources that people used in at least the trappings of their activism.

Steve Quester, another long-time ACT UP member and later Church Lady, confirmed, "That was integral to ACT UP, always, always, always. Who's going to come up with the most fabulous chants?" So camp and play were vital parts of ACT UP's work, but they were also part of the work of other groups in which Quester had been involved. "It was actually part of the apartheid stuff too," he recalled. "We'd be dancing to 'Free Nelson Mandela.' We'd have really cool chants. It was important to us."

ACTing UP against Bozo

Faced with the neglect that had characterized most of the Reagan era – Reagan did not so much as murmur the work "AIDS" until six years into the epidemic (Johnson 1991) – ACT UP offered an opportunity for a different kind of response. Mark Harrington, who like many first became involved with the group soon after the 1987 March on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights. "There was something really joyous about fighting Reagan with a bunch of people," he recalls. The group's caring affect helped Harrington feel like he could do things he'd never done before, including get arrested: "I didn't go in thinking I would do CD [civil disobedience]. It just felt like you would be taken care of." Once this wall was broken down, group members such as

Harrington started pushing their own personal limits and producing results. “It wasn’t like we were ending anything at first,” he says, “but as we became more and more sophisticated with tactics, we began to have an impact.” The low-threshold, playful group approach helped members with no political experience find a distinctly queer entry point into a political struggle that otherwise might have felt insurmountable. “In the face of the death, it was extremely joyous and a release to feel that love with others,” Harrington recalls. “Playfulness was an extreme part of it.” This playfulness took countless forms: “If people were angry, they would plot a zap – sometimes even an unauthorized zap in the meeting, sometimes with others. In other cases, they’d wear drag in an office takeover.”

By 1989, Tim Miller, a Los Angeles-based performance artist, found ACT UP’s blend of anger and sexual energy a potent combination. Further, the group offered an outlet for passions which otherwise felt like they would be wasted. “[W]ho had time to worry about that eccentric uncle when all that made sense was ACT UP?” he wrote. “We focused our attention on trying to stop AIDS. We also saved quite a bit of energy for acting out” (Miller 1997, p. 203). For Miller, ACT UP seemed to channel a queer energy not witnessed since the days of Harvey Milk: “The kettles were boiling as a generation of good queer boys and girls got gnarly” (p. 203). The energy of ACT UP was an ideal response to the isolation and panic that had characterized so much of the early response to the epidemic. “ACT UP mobilization was exactly what I had been waiting for,” Miller recalled. “At last, my lefty programming and queer erotics had a social movement to saddle up with” (p. 203). Before ACT UP, the fear of AIDS had been “paralyzing.” Yet, with ACT UP, “suddenly, those scary worries inside were not alone. These feelings were

able to come out, linked with other people who had also been crushed under the same fears" (p. 203). The group offered an alternative set of outlets for what otherwise would have been a horrendous situation. Says Miller, "After many years of being so damn afraid, I felt great getting pissed off instead" (p. 203).

The coalition that emerged within ACT UP combined many of the same divergent factors which Russo, Kantrowitz, and Bob Kohler had watched battle each other during the gay liberation years, as the movement struggled between reform and revolution – politics and pleasure – and as the GAA battled the GLF (Marcus 1992; Shepard 2001; Teal 1995). "There were distinguished homosexuals with white boy jobs, who had forgotten that they were queer until AIDS came along and everyone else reminded them," Schulman wrote (1990, p. 158). While the white collars had initially relied on legal tactics and orderly picket lines, the government's inaction in the face of AIDS pushed them to join the civil rights direct action types. "[S]oon the two factions were able to unite in anger and commitment to direct action" (p. 158). In addition to former gay liberationists such as Russo and Marty Robinson, "There was also a contingent of old-time radicals of various stripes who had rioted in the sixties at Stonewall, in Newark, with the Young Lords, with SDS, and hadn't done a goddamn thing since," said Schulman (p. 158-159). Ann Northrop, ACT UP's long-time facilitator, elaborates:

> There was a lot of experience in the room too. There was a great mixture. When Mike what's-his-name stood up and announced he had been national secretary in SDS in the 1960s, it was a very important moment. There were a lot of us who were part of the feminist movement and the antiwar movement. There were a lot of people who brought a lot of experience and knowledge and educated the youngsters. And luckily, it was a group that was intelligent enough to be willing to learn. That was important.

Those doing the listening were members of a younger cohort of queer activists with more of an appreciation for the campy play element of the struggle. Yet, it was also a two way street; elder activists seemed to be learning just as much from the younger activists as vice-versa. What was completely absent was a condescension from either side. Sitting around listening to 'learn from your elders' lessons would not have worked for the group. Instead the group offered a context for true dialogue. A younger cohort of activists brought a distinctly queer sensibility, which offered a post-modern approach to the blurring of categories of sexuality and knowledge. "There was an affinity group that was fondly called the Swim Team," Harrington recalls. "And those were all of the really cute guys with great bodies." In addition, ACT UP was filled with women with direct organizing experience in the women's movement who helped the group combine this queer Eros with a prefigurative process, a way to combine pleasure with action and a feeling for equality and direct democracy that been missing during the gay liberation years (Epstein 1991).

Meetings as Theater

"There used to be little drag puppet shows at the meetings to get people to come to actions," Steve Quester recalls. The creativity that sustained ACT UP's work was cultivated in a meeting atmosphere that resembled gay bar culture and functioned as a radical experiment in direct democracy. Patrick Moore, another ACT UP veteran, explains:

> To look at ACT UP as a loose space filled with creative individuals has the added benefit of removing the idea of leaders and stars. In the same way it is impossible to assign credit or membership to a free floating group that came together in a bar, it is fruitless to assign credit or blame to individual members of ACT UP. Those who quietly attended committee meetings or who only marched in demonstrations

> played just as important roles as those who spoke fiercely from the floor or were quoted in the press. Individuals were relatively unimportant in the larger cultural action that was created by the group. ACT UP outwardly detested the idea of star players (2004, p. 124).

Charles King has described ACT UP meetings as being similar to a church service, with proclamations of the word, the response of the choir, and so on. A theater is another useful metaphor for the venue necessary to combine the tragicomic nature of what was going on throughout the ACT UP meetings.

"I certainly considered the meetings themselves as theater that needed to be choreographed by me as a facilitator," explains Northrop:

> I was doing it seriously, but I was throwing in a lot of theater too. I threw in what I thought of as a lot of humorous fun to lighten things up or move things along. And calling on people and the rhythm that I did it with and the choreography of who got called on when, was all a kind of live production theater, unrehearsed and unscripted. The point of that was to produce a productive discussion, instead of having chaos or idiosyncratic voices that had nothing to contribute take over the room. So the whole point was to make it a good productive experience with the cooperation of the room, 'cause it was a collaborative experience.

An example of the use of play and theater in the meetings is useful. On October 15, 2005, I walked through the Lincoln Tunnel with Eric Sawyer, one of ACT UP's founders, for the kickoff rally of the Campaign to End AIDS. Sawyer and I talked about ACT UP's early days. I recalled reading about him in Maxine Wolf's oral history interview (2004). Wolf refers to a moment early in ACT UP's existence, maybe 1987 or early 1988, when it looked like infighting and poor group dynamics might do the group in. Within the context of constant death, it would not be surprising to witness such a group collapse on itself and implode. As we walked, Sawyer explained: "Well, at the

time, there were warring factions in ACT UP. And everyone was at each other's throats. People were threatening to break away from the group."

In order to lighten up the mood at one of the Monday ACT UP meetings, Sawyer, who at the time usually wore a business suit to meetings after work, decided to go to the bathroom and change clothes. At each meeting, the facilitators would ask "How many more need to die?" So Sawyer put on a dress in contrast to his usual suit, and people called him Harmony More. He explains:

> Something needed to happen to make people lighten up. And not take themselves so seriously. And having been one of the more serious suits in the group, I kind of felt like I needed to make that clear. And the easiest way I could do it was to be totally out of character. And just say, "Come on, fucking lighten up!"

One of the most amazing aspects of ACT UP was that capacity to lighten things up. So as members worked to try to end the epidemic, they were also playing with burlesque, with camp, with self-deprecating humor as part of the group's do-it-yourself activist project. Thus, play was an instrumental part of the group's progress. This help created a space within the movement where judgement was not a central motivation. There was an acknowledgement that we're human beings and we're messy and complex. After all, he added, "if someone who is a corporate clone cannot put on some heels and make everyone hug their neighbors, then the worlds a sad place."

Yet for the process to succeed, there had to be a collective will for members to work within such a broad coalition. Northrop elaborates:

> It wasn't just the facilitator doing it. It was the whole room collaborating with each other. It was a really miraculous vehicle and it really did produce open debate that, I would say, inevitably produced the right decision. I was always impressed by the fact that that system worked to produce such brilliant solutions time after time after time.

But there was another element to this collective will. It has been said that the richest form of Eros is intelligence. For many, this intelligence, combined with the Eros in the room, made the imperative to work together compelling. "I think the core element in ACT UP was intelligence," Northrop continued. Part of the intelligence of ACT UP was that it allowed people to bring their own diverse sets of skills to the table, even if those skills were not immediately apparent as part of the activist repertoire. Another member, Ron Goldberg (2003), explains:

> There were a lot of reasons different people were there, and people were coming from a lot of different places. And so to me, it was about allowing all of those people to get what they needed out of the group, and also to allow the group to do what it needed to do. We had a very large task ahead of us, and I wasn't a science geek, and I don't have a real mind for science – so, I couldn't contribute there. I was Chant Queen – my unofficial position was always Chant Queen, which was really just about getting everybody enthused, but also on topic. I mean, part of that – the key there, to play back for just a minute –is not only just rhythm and enthusiasm, but also how do you get a sound bite? "Health care is a right" is not poetry, though it does have a rhythm if done correctly. That's what we're here for. Everyone can practice that. The chants can also become the sound bites of people, when they're picked out to speak to a reporter. They would go, "Well, we're here because health care is a right." And it sort of became part of the text.

One of the group's great chants, "Health care is a right" included an interspersed refrain of "Pump up the budget!" "You get those counter rhythms going – that is always a big one," Goldberg recalled.

While Goldberg brought a playful, campy quality that translated into an intelligent way to advance a policy goal, others, such as attorney William Dobbs, brought legal skills to the group. Before Dobbs was in ACT UP, he had done legal work research on slumlords. "[T]hat work would not have been possible without the inspiration of others who had the nerve to challenge power," Dobbs explained (undated). Yet this work, like the work he did in ACT UP, turned out to be thrilling. "It turned out to be exhausting,

scary, and fun,' he recalled. "There's always got to be some rewards in doing activism even if you hit a brick wall."

For many in ACT UP, part of the reward was the people. "It was a smart group of people," Northrop elaborates. "And I guess you could add any number of descriptions to that." In addition, many in the room "were HIV positive themselves," Northrop continues. And the shoddy treatment was a source of a lot of anger. "I[I]t was mostly white gay men who thought they had privilege and were shocked to find out they didn't when they were hit with HIV and most of the world was ready to let them die." Once this community was angry, they became a potent force, ready to mobilize a massive store of resources, including political capital leftover from the gay liberation struggle. ACT UP had a cohesive sense of community as well as social, political, cultural, and economic capital. "They could get together and fight back," Northrop explains. But they could also get together and play, as they had done for a decade after Stonewall. The social Eros in the meeting room, and that collective history of playing together, helped bridge these social and political ambitions.James Wagner, a member of Quester's "Action Tours' affinity group, suggests that perhaps his best moments with ACT UP involved the cheers and affirmation he got from the floor when reporting back on a successful zap. This affirmation created a joy that made continuing in the face of a death-saturated culture worth doing. Sarah Schulman remarked on the Eros in the air at ACT UP meetings, which helped bring together the many factions of the group:

> "We like dykes," the guys would chant every once in a while when the women did something that was really great. And there were lots and lots of handsome young men who intended to live to be handsome old men or even just aging queens. There were the organization's best recruitment force...." (1990, p. 159).

This social Eros helped bring gay men and lesbians together in ways not witnessed since the days right after Stonewall.

Cruising in Meetings and in the Streets

After all, Schulman explains, after fierce activism, the next obsession for the men in the group was "the boyfriend parade." "[T]he fact that a lot of them were in the room to find dates brought them together," Northrop elaborates. " It gave them power because that became an organizing principle." It was an old lesson of Gay Liberation. Cruising is a reason for people to show up. It's a resource, resiliency, and distraction in the face of mass death. I have been cruised on countless occasions within the context of queer organizing, including at the final showing of the AIDS Memorial Quilt in Washington, D.C. in 1996. David Feinberg wrote about making out with someone he'd just met, in an act of "social disobedience," during the first quilt display in Washington in 1988, describing it as"love among the ruins" (1994, p. 37).

This cruisy approach helped create a social fabric that tied tribes of queer men together. "I'm saying it was a good thing. It was one of the elements that made [ACT UP] successful," Northrop says. Like play itself, cruising wasn't everything, but it was one of the ingredients for building the ACT UP coalition. "[T]here were a lot of things that brought it together and made it work," she concludes. "Playfulness yes, but we were right and we knew the facts. And we were willing to go out and fight for them." Play – including cruising – was thus a vital ingredient in ACT UP's success.

When interviewing Liddell Jackson, whose story about organizing Black and White Men Together and Jack'o Color is featured in the previous chapter, , I noted that I've always thought that ACT UP's pro-sex message was part of their vitality. Jackson replied:

> That wasn't lost on people. Many of the sex guys were in ACT UP, especially the ones who were like artists and freelancers, not corporate people. And they would be in ACT UP meetings and then be in sex clubs later. It used to be in the first years of ACT UP, the joke about ACT UP was that it was the best cruising you could do on a Monday night. You could go to ACT UP and have a date before that meeting was over.

Goldberg concurs:

> It was a very sexy group. Just in terms of the people who were there, but also the activism and passion – particularly about something like the good fight, and it's really important – is very sexy. There was an article that Maria Maggenti got blasted out of the room for – it was in the *Village Voice*, talking about "the sex in that room." But it was. You were seeing these incredible parts of people. You were seeing great bravery. You were seeing something people really cared about, and that's very, very sexy, attractive. I don't know how well I knew people necessarily in ACT UP, but in some senses, I got a real essence of them, and it was very powerful (2003).

Harrington continues:

> [There was] cruising at demos and also cruising at meetings. And after the meeting everybody would go out and have dinner at Benny's burritos and deconstruct the meeting and also cruise. And then, they would finally go out, out. Sometimes ACT UP had benefit parties at the World [a local club] or some other places.

While certainly there are limitations of cruising at political meetings, as G'Dali Braverman (2003) notes in his interview for the ACT UP Oral History Project, the fact was that this was part of the ACT UP experience for many. For Braverman, the cruising took people away from the work which needed to get done. It got in the way. Others concur. Quester suggest the cruising was 'ancillary.' And most certainly there were

other dynamics including fighting, anger, grief, frustration, and resentment and the other elements which accompany such a practice. And for many years, this did not get in the way. Instead, it seemed to serve an instrumental, rather than an external function for the group. Itt did contribute to the powerful sex-positive energy of the group's activism. To a degree, it helped people feel nourished to act. As the work of Wilhelm Reich (1970) suggests, the freedom of energy from inhibition toward pleasure opens up many a route toward a more authentic liberatory way of being in the world.

Many, such as Goldberg wanted to be part of something larger than themselves. Yet, the decision about how to get involved had as much to do with Eros as with his commitment to the movement. "I joined the Logistics Committee because – here's some principles for you – because I thought Michael Savino was cute," Goldberg recalls (2003). There was, of course, a strategy to getting people involved in activism via their interest in pleasure. Goldberg (2003) further articulates the politics of seduction deployed by ACT UP.

> If you do this major outreach – and pride was always on outreach, because you wanted to tell the community something – you wanted to send some sort of message to them and pull them in. And since we were an activist group, the point is, once you do that, you then don't sit them down in a meeting. You get them into the street, you get them into a protest, you get them to do something – because that's the drug. [Laughs]. That's the thing, because once you can get people involved on that level, they'll sit through the other stuff that needs to be done. But once they sort of see and experience the "empowerment" – to use a phrase we bludgeon to death – that's when people start putting the pieces together for themselves. So you always want to get people involved actively, as quickly as possible. Don't get them to sit at a meeting. Get them to join us, and make it easy. You show up at the rally, then these people will get arrested. It doesn't have to be the people you're getting at the outset – but just so they can sort of see how it works, and sort of get the sense of what the fight's about, and what that energy is about.

And, for ACT UP, part of what that energy was about was sexuality. Kendall Thomas (2003) suggested that the sexual energy was part of ACT UP's vitality. The group benefited from the interplay between public sexual cultures and a public commons of baths, bars, a culture of collective pleasure and a civil civil society of public engagement, the combination of which created a dynamic energy. This helped that contribute to a distinct form of political engagement. Thomas explains:

> I don't want to claim any simple, unmediated continuities between the world of the baths, the world of political action, on the one side – or the community services model and political action on the other. I do want to say again, that the conditions of possibility for collective, political action, of the kind that ACT UP undertook – and an understanding specifically of culture as both an arena and an instrument for political struggle – those would not have been possible, if people hadn't shared this experience.

The Aesthetics of AIDS Activism

As the alchemy between the streets and the baths, the meetings and cruising congealed, what emerged with ACT UP was "a distinctive cultural politics." Harrington, who briefly worked with one of ACT UP's visual collectives, Gran Fury, offers a useful example:

> They were a closed group. They decided to open briefly and temporarily during the Nine Days of Action in 1988 when ACT UP was trying to figure out how to dramatize as many actions as possible. They thought if they did nine different days all in a row, focusing on different issues like homophobia, so they had a kiss in, or syringe exchange, or "men use condoms or beat it." A lot of the posters came out of that period.
>
> Anyway, they were temporarily open for new members and I had heard about it. And I had a photo with me, it was like a World War II porno photo of two sailors kissing. That was when we made "Kissing doesn't Kill,"…no, the "Read my Lips." And so I was involved with Gran Fury for a few months after that. I also did the bloody hand poster.

Read My Lips (girls), 1988,
Gran Fury. Poster,

Men Use Condoms or Beat It, 1
Gran Fury. Flier, crack-n-peel st

The Government Has Blood on Its Hands, 1988, Gran Fury. Poster, offset lithography, 31 x 49"
AIDS Now, 1988, Ken Woodard. Placard.
Art is Not Enough, 1988, Gran Fury.

(For source of graphics, see Gran Fury, undated).

The ACT UP "Silence = Death" logo, designed by the Gran Fury arts collective, found its genesis at an art show aimed at presenting the word about the epidemic at the New Museum in New York in 1987 (Crimp 1988). Over the following years, this simple slogan found its way into hearts and minds across the world. "Silence = Death" stickers and posters were an instant draw for ACT UP's Monday night meetings, and became an immediate part of the images of the streets of New York City (Solomon 1998). Patick Moore recalled a feeling of awe, of being "forever changed by something as simple as a poster" when he first moved to New York. "In 1987, I began seeing a remarkable poster on the streets of downtown New York," he recalled. "The poster seemed to resonate with a new kind of energy, with its glossy black field interrupted by a single pink triangle." Small type at the bottom of the poster questioned: "Why is Reagan silent about AIDS? What is really going on at the CDC? Turn anger, fear, grief into action." The posters and stickers were instantly effective at speaking to and drawing gay men and lesbians to participate in ACT UP (2004, p. 121-2). (For more on Gran Fury see Crimp 1988, 2002; Gran Fury 2003; Takemoto 2003).

For ACT UP, the politics practiced was unique and consistent with queer aesthetics and the patterns of gay life, which included play. This was a distinct kind of politics, explained Thomas:

> An aesthetics of gay life. An aesthetics whose central tropes were pleasure, sex, sexual play, are written all over the textual or visual record of ACT UP… So, that would be in the nature of a specification of the relation between that world, on the one hand, and the political projects of ACT UP…. And, again, I say that what ACT UP may well be remembered for in the history of the later, new social movements is a kind of aesthetic politics. Very often, we would go straight from the meetings to some bar or club. Work would take place there (2003).

Sexual Energy in Community Organizing

These tropes of gay life became part of ACT UP's politics. And, of course, they included a recognition of the political possibilities of pleasure in community organizing. There was much darkness in ACT UP's story that cannot be neglected, as it overlaps with the still-death saturated project of AIDS activism Nevertheless, the life-affirming, caring, and generative motivations and workings of an activist project aimed at keeping people alive and in a world worth living in was a vital part of the group's work. Much of the same ethos could be witnessed in ACT UP's meetings. "One of the first things we realized when we went to the ACT UP meetings was, 'There are a hell of a lot of cute boys here,'" recalled Robert Vasquez-Pacheco (2002), a former ACT UP/New York Coordinating Committee member. And, as was the case during the earlier gay liberation years, those "cute boys" were quite a draw.

Keith Cylar, a member of the Majority Action Committee recollected his first ACT UP meeting in 1989 in a similar fashion. He did not know there was a meeting that night, yet when he saw "all these guys in black leather jackets," he decided to stay a while. "It was the lit[??] that made me stop. It was the black leather jackets that pulled me into the room," (quoted in Schindler 2004). Countless other key organizers in ACT UP recalled being initially attracted to participate after they took a glimpse at the room full of the intelligent, savvy activists participating in the Monday night meetings. In oral histories of the ACT UP era, Thomas recalled cruising a young man at one of the meetings; others simply remember the sexual energy in the room (Shepard 1997, p. 113-14).

Eros and Thanatos intermingled within the group's meetings and actions. Some days they felt like funeral services; others like cruising sessions. Cruising at meetings,

using camp – these were central ingredients of the Gay Liberation Movement of the previous next decade. Implicit was the recognition of the possibilities in play when disenfranchised groups of previously isolated individuals converge, sometimes in righteous anger, sometimes just to connect, quite often to do both (Shepard 1997). For gay liberationists, the right to meet in public space without fear of homophobic violence was tantamount to the most basic constitutionally protected demands for the right of public assembly and pursuit of happiness.

ACT UP ignited activism by pumping sexual energy into organizing. If anything, the group helped countless people recognize the significance of the political principal of pleasure. While ACT UP rejected right-wing discourses linking social and sexual liberation with societal decline, the core point of the group's AIDS activism was that pleasure and creativity were the only ways to halt the epidemic. For ACT UP, the most effective way to fight a culture of sexual shame was through a vision of sex as liberation and joy (Crimp 1988; Bronski 2004). ACT UP helped teach us that without pleasure, there can be no justice (Shepard 2002a).

For ACT UP, the lesson involved creating a new sort of culture of life and activism, which was inspired less by guilt than by life-affirming joy and vitality. Moises Agosto explains how ACT UP became a sort of queer family for him when he moved to New York from Puerto Rico:

> The beautiful thing about ACT UP, that I miss so much now, was that sense of camaraderie, not just in a political sense but in a community/personal side. We knew how to have fun with what we did, because our hearts were there 300 percent. But also there was no judgment, to be a naughty boy, or to have fun and go out dancing. Even I remember a couple of those fundraisers at the Pyramid. So in terms of social life, it gave me a very strong social structure in New York. So, if it hadn't been for ACT UP, it would have taken me a long time to find a family of friends in New York. ACT UP gave me that in a very – it was not a shallow

> way. It was a very, here, in your face, real life, and these are your friends, and these are your friends that are dying, these are your friends that are getting sick with you. And fun. It was fun. We would go out and do a demonstration, and then we would go out and party. Any kind of thing you could think of would happen. There was no judgment (2002).

For many, ACT UP offered a way to find meaning and community through struggle within a very difficult situation. For Ron Goldberg, the play element was a primary draw. After pages and pages of stories of grief and death, Goldberg recalls a play element within the group that kept him involved:

> One of the things – among many talents – we, ACT UP, would have – and actually, this is something that was actually really key to the organization, in a funny way, which is that we played a lot together. For all the yelling and screaming and emotion – there was a lot of emotion – but it was a very funny group. There was real camp sense of humor, which was part of demonstrations often. It was part of certainly the floor [at meetings], and we would have these talent shows to celebrate. The first anniversary, we'd have a talent show. The second anniversary, we'd have a talent show. And people would go on and do all sorts of stuff. And I would do my Julie Andrews does the Tracey Chapman songbook thing. Bradly Ball, who was one of the founders of ACT UP – the first secretary of the group, and co-wrote the original document – was incredibly central to getting the organization on some footing. And he was handed a piece of paper and told, "take notes." And that's how he became secretary. And it was lucky he was picked. Whoever it was, handed the right person the notebook. And we would sit around and re-write songs at dinner. Yes, it was an AIDS organization, but so much more of it was also – for me, and I think for a lot of people – as a gay man, as a gay woman – that our lives have value, meaning, absolutely down the street every day. We've not asking for your – please give us this thing. We're people, we demand it, its part of – there's no discussion here, it's our rights. That was sort of the turning point (2003).

Humor and activism were part of finding meaning in the face of mass catastrophe. To a degree, there was a sort of social Eros, a connection among souls as well as bodies, which propelled this culture of activism. Within both Agosto's and Goldberg's narratives, one can witness the interplay between the formation of a queer family of choice with the struggle for justice for ailing family members, and genuine care and revelry among those

remaining. And the sexual charge was by no means only between men and men. What emerged in ACT UP were a series of blurred lines and boundaries, across which different kinds of queer kinship networks took hold. “In the world of ACT UP, flirtations, love affairs, and simple fucking were fairly common between gay men and lesbians who had formed new, powerful relationships that came without rules of precedent,” Patrick Moore recalled (2004, p. 122). ACT UP was able to capture the life-affirming pulse among activists involved in the solidarity of a grand struggle, much as the American civil rights movement aimed at changing the world. “You cannot build a movement on anger,” Cylaronce said. Hence, what emerges is an unrepentant, unapologetic pursuit of pleasure, justice, and community building.

The other aspect of this social Eros involved a prefigurative community-building process by which activists buttressed their counter-public by creating a more compelling image of the world in which they wanted to live in those little moments. For ACT UP member Elizabeth Meixell, part of the process was breaking apart social isolation and connecting:

> It’s like coming out and finding out that there are so many others with the same opinion as you. If you have this opinion and you stay home with it, you’re not connecting. But if more people are out on the streets saying “This is how I feel”…And “My nephew is a wonderful gay man. You’d really like him. Here’s his number.” You are making more connections that way. You are coming out

This ability to connect is one of survival skills necessary to survive catastrophes such as AIDS. Viktor Frankl (1963) emphasized that those who forged tight bonds had a much better chance of surviving the concentration camps during the Holocaust. If the politics of play and pleasure is about anything, it is about helping people stay involved in their

communities. Herein, the play of exchanging phone numbers and flirting is also part of expanding a tribe (Maffesoli 1993, 1995). It involved taking apart soul-crushing alienation and replacing it with an authentic struggle; connection, affect, and fun served as vital ingredients.

For many involved, ACT UP was a new, authentic first experience with political engagement, a space to combine aesthetic, sexual, and political ambitions. Tim Miller, a National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) grantee who made national headlines after suing the NEA for withdrawing a grant under political pressure, spoke during a seven-day vigil in which members of ACT UP/Los Angeles slept on the grounds of the county hospital to push for better care and funding for people with HIV. "Something's been happening here," Miller pronounced, seemingly referring to an existential condition as well as the encampment. "Some people have passed seven days and seven nights in front of this building together.". He continued, "Soup has been made. Stories have been told. Performances have been done. TV cameras have been pointed. Wet, sloppy, sex has been had by those two perseverant ACT UP dudes in that tent over there still wobbling and shaking" (Miller 1997, p. 216).

Sex was part of the story; but so was the care combined with the rambunctious fun. "The humor set the tight WASP part of me loose too. A crazy place in my mind laughs to keep the world and my heart from breaking in two. I felt that laugh now" (p. 216). ACT UP was part of a more connected, emotionally vulnerable way of being. "Powerful gestures have been made as we in ACT UP/LA have actually seen what each other looks like before coffee in the morning, and yet still we are here" (p. 216). For Miller, it was part of a more authentic experience of community, where he could connect

to something larger than himself. “Maybe – it will begin to seem to more of us that it is at least as important to get people who need it proper health care as it is to shop for a new leather jacket.” The humor also helped them make light of the heavy parts of their lives. “Believe me,” Miller said, “I’ve made my share of those” (p. 217).

That authentic experience of self-expression was part of the aim of the struggle. Within a context of an AIDS crisis that threatened to wipe out the advances of the gay liberation years, ACT UP built on the lessons of gay liberation as a human rights movement that said it was OK, whoever you are, to come out as who you are. And people came out in lots of ways. “There is this huge pressure among gay men not to be who you are,” Steve Quester explained. ACT UP fought this pressures.

Play, Paradox, and the Public Defense of Pleasure

For many, the challenges experienced by gay men were best represented by the 1986 *Bowers v. Hardwick* ruling. Elements of justice, camp, sex, joy, and creativity overlapped into public calls for pleasure. Allan Clear, a leader in ACT UP’s syringe exchange committee, recalled: “I remember Walter Armstrong. There is a picture of him. I think it was in Provincetown, wearing a sign, I think it said, ‘LEGALIZE BUTT-FUCKING.’ And it upset people. I thought it was so funny, a funny sign.”

I spoke with Armstrong about the sign. His answer clearly establishes the sometimes paradoxical approach to play employed by many in the group, given the death-saturated moment they were experiencing. “In terms of play, I guess for me, personally, it’s been hard for me to find my playfulness as an adult,” he explained. “I will say my mind was on the very angry side and wanting to do something about AIDS. If

anything, I made the mistake of being way too serious and really missing out on a lot of that stuff." Yet his response to this set of feelings was anything but dour. For Armstrong, the 'LEGALIZE BUTT-FUCKING' sign was certainly campy. But it spoke to the desperation of the post-Hardwick context, in which sodomy had been confirmed as illegal, thus consigning queer sexuality to criminal status. The legal case arose because two gay men were arrested for having sex. It's message was that such an approach to policing sexuality was a valid response.

Armstrong spoke about the paradoxical element of acknowledging anger while saying pleasure, joy, and Eros were valid feelings in a pluralistic democracy:

> Just to speak about that sign. I think it started out as 'Legalize Butt-fucking.' I don't remember. We were all doing a spontaneous demo somewhere and we were each given a poster board and a magic marker and told to write something. And, I guess, I was literally discovering my sexuality while this was going on and I had just gotten fucked for the first time. And it was something I'd never even fantasized about. I knew that it was a very meaningful experience. The realization that this was illegal, in that moment this just seemed so outrageous to me. The impulse beyond it was just to say in as simple a way as possible, my sense of what was right or wrong, that this was just wrong. It was kind of a naive gesture. There wasn't a lot of thought. I knew that it might raise some eyebrows, but I really believed in it. And for me as someone who writes and works with words and finds they are the most viable way of expressing, speaking honestly has always been incredible useful to me. And so in my activism, I always wanted to make it personal and make it mean something. And then I saw what kind of response I got and the sign went through a bunch of transformations.

Armstrong then commented on some of the responses to the sign.

> People loved it or hated it. There was no in-between. I just thought that was very exciting to be able to see, like, on the one hand, you can thrill people but also you can horrify them. As someone who had been in many demonstrations, to have something that was able to provoke that kind of a response and still take it in was really educational for me. For me, as someone participating in a demonstration, it was like taking it somewhere else with a message. And being able to play at that moment with getting people to respond.

The play that Armstrong speaks of can best be understood as a dark, risky form of play, a form of political engagement that may involve actors who are not necessarily aware they are playing. Yet they are willing take enormous risks as they propel their counter-public message into the public sphere. ACT UP's primary mode for such forms of political engagement was the zap.

Playing Secret Agent, Zaps, and Adventure Games

The term "zap" dates back to the early days of gay liberation. The term describes taking a message to a target with a simple prank or action aimed at distracting or shifting the terms of debate. Zaps tend to involve some sort of clandestine work. As much as any tactic used in the activist repertoire, the zap most closely resembles the dynamics of dark, risky play discussed by Schechner (2002).

Arnie Kantrowitz always felt like he was a "guerilla making forays into straight territory" when he was involved with zaps, such as takeovers of the offices of homophobic opponents during the GAA years. "It was more thrilling than the movies," he wrote (1977/1996, p. 128). In the days after the demise of the GAA, Vito Russo involved himself in a series of zaps aimed at interfering with the production of a blatantly homophobic film shooting in 1979. His description of the spontaneous community response illustrates that characteristics of a subversives form of improvisational play. "There was no plan; it was a very spontaneous community action," Russo explained. "By this time there was no longer a Gay Activist Alliance. People just did whatever they wanted to do. For the entire six to eight weeks of the shooting, it got to be like a guerilla warfare game" (quoted in Marcus 1992, p. 412).

Many interviews and accounts from people involved with ACT UP characterize the group's zaps in a similar fashion. Huizinga's definition of play suggests it involves group dynamics that thrive on life outside of regular life, as well as combinations of tension on the one hand and joy on the other. For interviewees who took part in zaps into television studios, such as Action Tour members Wagner, Meixell, and Quester, the actions entailed the tension around possibly getting caught, as well as fun an exhilaration of pushing the limits. For Quester and others, their forays into televised political conventions and television studios are sources of pride and mementos they hold onto. Meixell describes a feeling of "joy to be running down the street laughing cause you got away with it" after a zap is successfully accomplished.

There was also a lot of solidarity created within the clandestine nature of these risky zaps. A foxhole camaraderie of a secret society is apparent in Sarah Schulman's descriptions of the interactions between a movie ticket-taker and activists dropping off information in a scene from *People in Trouble*, her novel based on the ACT UP years. "Wait a second will ya?" her protagonist explains in front of the theater: "I have to drop this off." Knowing what was going on, the ticket-taker smiled. "One guy got into the full spirit of things by saying, 'Thank you sister,' flashing a victory sign with two fingers on his right hand followed by a fisted salute." Even here, the playful gesture has countless possible political and personal meanings. "Either he was an old radical or he was showing off the manual technique he'd picked up at the Mineshaft," Schulman explained (1990, p. 110). The Mineshaft was an underground gay sex club where fisting and leather play were the rage.

Many early ACT UP actions took on this clandestine, playful, “Secret Agent Man” dimension. Cylar, who frequented leather spaces such as the Mineshaft, described a number of these elements in his first arrest with ACT UP:

> My first arrest was actually kind of amazing. It was at the Waldorf, probably ’88 or ’89. And it was an affinity group, whoever was president was coming there, right. And we thought we were so cool and so smart because we had rented a room (laughs) under somebody else’s credit card, not tied to ACT UP at all. You know, we all filtered in one by one and made our way up to the room. And we were doing a banner drop. And we thought we were going to handcuff ourselves on that big expensive clock in the middle of the lobby. We were going to leaflet and we had all the multi things going on that we were going to do while a banner was being dropped out of the roof. There was a demonstration on the outside and those of us going in were so cool. We were (whispers) and we had a password, all of that, all of that… just total covert.
>
> So we finally all get into the room and we have it timed, boom, boom, boom, boom…very James Bond, right? I go to the door of the fucking door of the hotel room that we are renting under this name and the fucking Secret Service had reversed the god damn keyhole. They were fucking watching us…(laughs). You know? So we do the whole thing. We’re handcuffed behind the great big clock in the middle of the lobby. And the banner drop happens the demonstration is going on – all this craziness. And we’re arrested and we’re handcuffed. And my partner Charles was there to walk me through it (2002).

The risky, secretive element of this work enables dark play in countless ways. For Schechner, it involves "’playing with fire', 'breaking the rules,' 'getting away with murder'; it’s a form of play involving deception, risk, and thrill (2002, p. 106). Part of the game is that some players do not know they have been included in the antics; they may not know they are playing. A primary goal of such play is to include those not knowingly involved in the play – such as police, security guards, members of the media, etc. – as part of a performance which shifts plot lines for a drama thathas otherwise been drawn within restrictive storylines.

Action Tours was one of the many ACT UP affinity group that made thrilling use of zaps to propel their counter-public narrative into public debate. Quester, Meixell,

Wagner, Jamie Leo, Karen Ramshacker, and a number of others I interviewed were members of this group. I asked Quester about Action Tours. "It was an affinity group of ACT UP and of WHAM [Women's Health Action and Mobilization]. If you had asked me at the time, I would have said it was an entity shrouded in mystery," Quester explained. "We met weekly and there were a lot of us." He explains why the group was "shrouded in mystery":

> [The reason] we did not wish for ACT UP to be aware of our activities was we wanted the authorities to think there was a generalized insurrection. We didn't want them to know that the same people who had interrupted Dan Rather on the air were the same people who dropped the banner at the Statue of Liberty were the same people who interrupted the state legislature in Albany, etc, etc. We didn't want that.

Within this Zapatista-like invisibility (Marcos 2001), the group was enormously successful at shifting the contours of everyday discussion of the epidemic. "We were a really hot group for years," Quester explains, his eyes flashing with the subversive imagination that served as a catalyst for the group. The Dan Rather intervention is one of the many for which the group could take credit. Shortly the before the first Gulf War in 1991, ACT UP planned its "Day of Desperation" (a name that eludes to the Weather Underground's "Days of Rage"). The night before the action, on April 22, ACT UP members – who had procured passes into the CBS news studios – made a cameo appearance on a national news broadcast. Quester recalls:

> John Weir and John Peck show up on the screen in front of Dan Rather at the beginning of CBS news and they are chanting, "AIDS is News. Fight AIDS, not Arabs!" And they chant it twice and it goes to black, not even a commercial, but to black. And then they come back and Rather says, "I'm sorry, there were rude people in the studio" and he continued with the news. But on every single CBS affiliate all over the country at eleven that night, the top story was that Dan Rather got interrupted, so for hundreds of times around the country, you have this image of John Weir bobbing up and down saying, "AIDS is news…."

As one of the grand disruptions of everyday life, Weir's brief appearance on the *CBS Evening News with Dan Rather* is the stuff of activist lore. Yet CBS was not the only newscast interrupted that night. The *MacNeil/Lehrer News Hour* also had visitors from ACT UP. Here, Robin MacNeil actually actively participated within the game to advance ACT UP's message. As Schechner explains, part of the play is that sometimes actors don't even know they are playing. By responding to the situation on the air, MacNeil forwarded ACT UP's primary goal: to speak through the news, not at the news. MacNeil told his audience:

> There's been a demonstration in our studio; it was a group of non-violent demonstrators from ACT UP who complained that we and the media are spending too much time and attention on the war in the Middle East, which they say will never kill as many people as are dying of AIDS, and I told them that this program has spent a lot of time on the AIDS matter and will be covering it more in the future" (quoted in ACT UP 1991).

Later in the evening, reporters asked ACT UP members why they chose to utilize such a tactic: "Don't you think this is an immature and silly way to get your point across to the country?" An ACT UP member responded: "No, we think spending hundreds of billions of dollars bombing people on another continent is an immoral way to get a point across" (quoted in ACT UP 1991). Throughout the evening, multiples news broadcasts included stories about the disruptions of Rather's and MacNeil's broadcasts.

The next day, the rest of ACT UP furthered the disruption with the Day of Desperation actions. The spectacle began with a banner drop over the train schedule board during rush hour in the terminal at Grand Central Station, accompanied by a sit-in that blocking commuters hurrying to catch their trains. "While this was intended as a

non-violent action, the violence and hatred of the commuters was of a level I have never seen," Moore recalled:

> Those of us sitting on the floor were kicked as commuters, like a stream of ants, began to literally climb over our bodies. ACT UP had created the perfect metaphor for AIDS in their country – normal Americans were willing to literally walk over our bodies while ignoring AIDS (2004, p. 142)

Looking back on that anger, some troubling issues about the demonstration emerged. Some questioned the utility of blocking access to public transportation even those who sympathized with the cause. For Moore, this was part of the debate of about any good work of art:

> ACT UP at that moment had crossed into the realm of art. Day of Desperation had ceased to be about tangible activist goals: it had become a huge performance, a theatrical event designed to express desperation and rage. It will remain emblazoned in the memories of all those who participated. It was the moment when my generation was able to live fully as artists and achieve something as transcendent as the Mineshaft or feminist performance… (2004, p. 142).

And this is precisely the point for Moore. "It was, in fact, the first moment in my life when I felt pride rather than shame," he recalled (p. 143). (For more on ACT UP as theater, see the following section).

The controversial zaps were part of the ACT UP game. For some, the challenge became how to push the message further and in more creative ways. For others, the media coverage occasionally became an end in itself. Mark Harrington explains:

> We were trying to speak to as many audiences as possible. And again, if there was any one demonstration, there were twenty media zaps and creativity and competition for coverage. A lot of people would rush home to TV after a demonstration and try to watch TV and see as validation how much coverage they got. And that became eventually not self-defeating, but distracting. How much media you get does not necessarily mean that you made any changes happen.

In other cases, the game became riskier. Some of the more hardcore ACT UP affinity groups have been described as "adrenaline junkies" because of their propensity to employ intense tactics. Some of the edgiest include the banner drops, where members literally risked their lives to move their counter-public message into the public arena. Meixell recalls one such banner drop at City Hall:

> Karen and Steve Melvin and Rex Wasserman took a banner up to the roof of City Hall. Jamie Leo designed the banner, and they were able to get in by being art critics or something. And dressing the part. That's what Action Tours does. We dress like we belong. They dropped this banner a day before a major ACT UP demonstration across the Brooklyn Bridge, an AIDS demonstration. It said, "AIDS HALL OF SHAME." So that picture was on page B3 of the *Times*.

Another risky banner drop was the "Pope Drop" action. Here, Meixell recalls, Quester and Cypress crawled out a building balcony just as Pope John Paul arrived in New York. Security guards pointed guns straight at the two as they dropped a banner that read, "Condoms Save Lives." "We always had adventures, it was so exciting," Meixell fondly recalls. I noted that it sounded like Action Tours was playing spy games. "Yeah, it is," she responded. "It's just trying to get away with something. We have done so many events where we have to case the joint first." Activism takes on a slapstick comic quality in the images Meixell describes of running into another activist casing the same place and startling each other.

A highlight many Action Tours members involved a banner drop at the Statue of Liberty in 1991. Here, child's play was literally a part of the action. "The people who went upstairs carried a balloon to go in front of the security camera, bobbing," Meixell recalls, smiling. When I asked Quester about his favorite action of all time, he shows me a postcard from 1990 bearing the words, "No Choice, No Liberty" over an image of the

State of Liberty, with a banner reading, “Abortion is Healthcare, Healthcare is a Right!”

He recalls:

> Action Tours decided it needed to make a statement against the global gag rule. And we went online and it’s not hard to find the measurements for the Statue of Liberty, ‘cause the Parks Service is proud of that. But we found out that you needed a banner hanging off the pedestal that would be thirty by thirty feet. It was a 900 square foot banner. So if you have 900 square feet, you can say a lot. So we decided to have it say, “Abortion is Health Care. Health Care is a Right!” We painted it in Elizabeth’s basement. That was when Elizabeth starting answering the phone “Church Ladies Sewing Circle and Terrorist Society” because she spent just days and days and days sewing the hem on the banner so we could sew a chain into the bottom of it so it would hang. What was so fun about that one for me was it was all this group work.

For Quester, the fun part of the day was how well the affinity group members worked together. He continues:

> The morning of action I went up and bought helium inflatable balloons so we could have someone standing up there with balloons blocking the surveillance cameras. Those of us who were hanging the banner from the pedestal needed cinder blocks to weigh them down. We wrapped them in Laura Ashley paper. So I walking around the Statue of Liberty with a cinder block and I looked gorgeous. And we were all in Republican drag. I walked around Liberty Plaza not acknowledging the 35 or so people I knew there. We had rented a helicopter. That’s how we had this picture [on the postcard]. And my friend from the Columbia blockade had a foam crown to signal to me to drop it. The banner was down long enough to take the picture and we took the ferry to get out of there, and the police went through these Italian tourists’ bags, not ours, ‘cause we were in Republican drag. And we got out and we had runners waiting to take the footage to the news stations. And yes, we did get in the paper [see Associated Press; 1991; Kaufman, 1991].

These action brought group members together. As Action Tours was arranging, planning, coordinating, and pulling off all these zaps aimed at moving their counter-public message into the public sphere, a significant byproduct emerged. Meixell notes:

> Well, we happened to build a community on the side. When we do a “Pope Drop” we have a whole backdrop ready to go into action. We have people taking the pictures and video and transforming it into the stuff you can use on the news. We have runners going to all of those places and we have a fax calling up the media

> and sending the press release again and again. And we have people ready to stand on the side and talk about it. So we all know what we're doing and we all trust each other. And we all have our own lawyers on the site ready to go and we have a lot of support and backup. We trust that each other will do this and we stick with each other through the court situation. It's solidarity.

Within this trusting, playful solidarity, the group was able to take on a vast array of issues. After abortion rights and homophobia, AIDS education was the third pillar of the holy trinity of issues for the Action Tours/Church Ladies affinity group. "The body is a battleground," Quester explains in linking the three seemingly disparate issues. Here, the play element moves from an instructive to an external goal. The aim was to advance the dramaturgical ambition combined with practical HIV prevention information, as outlined in the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence's 1982 work, *Play Fair!*, "the first safer sex pamphlet to use plain sex-positive language, practical advice, and humor" (Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence, undated). Meixell explains how she worked with the ACT UP Youth Education Life Line (YELL) to zap the New York Board of Education about AIDS prevention:

> One of the last demonstrations that we did there was a safety demonstration. It was a regulation that AIDS education must be provided every year to kids of all ages. But condom demonstration were not specifically required. And we would go and speak at the Board of Education, singing Christmas carols written especially for the occasion. You know, like on an airplane you get a safety demonstration, this time we all dressed as stewardesses and we each had a banana or a cucumber and did a safety demonstration.

The YELL zaps were intended to put an emphasis on healthy sex education and AIDS prevention. The aim was not only to educate people about how to prevent the spread of the disease, it was also about preventing the criminalization of HIV transmission, which would inevitably become part of the discussion of AIDS policy in the coming years (Shevory 2004; Siplon 2002). To convey their point, the group's actions resembled

invisible theater pieces. Action Tours was not the only ACT UP affinity group to take such an approach.

ACT UP as Theater

ACT UP's playful style offered many things to many different people. Rather than care-giving or being a GMHC "buddy" who would do the chores for a person with HIV/AIDS, ACT UP offered a way to respond to the AIDS crisis that fit Ron Goldberg's dramaturgical sensibilities. "[T]his was a bit theatrical in the streets. Okay, this I can do," he explains. "I think I went to my first demo – it was actually after Pride [the yearly Gay Pride Parade], but then I started pretty regularly for a lot of years." For Goldberg, like many others in ACT UP, the loss of playwright Charles Ludlam to AIDS in 1987 served as a catalyst to action, inspiring them to bring his defiantly queer absurdist theater into the streets and into their struggle to halt the epidemic (Kaufman 2002; Borwotiz 2003).

Ann Northrop outlines why and how theatrical activism works to create change:

> Well, because it gets people to think in different ways. The general public, when they see this stuff, it tends to illuminate issues in a different way by putting it in terms that make people pay attention, that aren't just predictable sloganeering. So, if it's theatrical, it's clever, it's ironic, if it's colorful, if it's playful, whatever, it catches people's attention. And if you can then express your thought in a way that is original, you can stand a chance of changing people's minds or illuminating their thinking on something. That's the real goal, because it's so easy for people to get caught up in the standard rhetoric, if you are trying in a nice way to shock them into thinking in a different way of thinking.

For many years, ACT UP turned most every demonstration it organized into a form of theater. This included civil disobedience actions where, as Alisa Solomon explains, the group "stretched the form with unbridled theatrical flair." Another of ACT UP's founders, Larry Kramer, elaborates: "Each action is like an enormous show. We're divided into committees doing banners, logistics, media, just like a producer would hire

people for scenery, costumes, publicity" (quoted in Solomon 1998, p. 45). In one example, activists dressed in drag as "Mario Antoinettes" with big wigs and dresses, throwing pieces of cake to protest New York Governor Cuomo, chanting: "Mario Cuomo's policy is let them eat cake." The point of the spectacle was to disarm the state of its power to withhold services. ACT UP built on the Wobblies' adage, "direct action gets the goods" (Ferrell 2001, p. 202). ACT UP's insight was the dramaturgical element of political action (Shepard 1997, p. 117-8).

. ACT UP also made use of the dramaturgy of the civil rights movement (McAdam 1996). The group's ACT UP strategy was to make themselves a news-attracting event, to "speak through, not to" the media. ACT UP's modus operandi was "to go to the furthest extreme in order to get the center to take notice" (Cohen-Cruz 1998). For example, one-time member Richard Elovich recalled: "When a public bus company refused to allow Gran Fury's panel of 'Kissing Doesn't Kill, Corporate Greed and Indifference Do' on the sides of buses, the ensuing controversy provided sustained media coverage and public debate about discrimination" (Elovich, undated).

Yet the question always remained, how to advance fresh tactics into organizing that could result in practical shifts in people's lives. ACT UP made use of media, theater, any tactic at their disposal to push ideas into public consciousness and conversation. For many members, it also had to be fun, or else they would not do it. "I don't understand the references to social change. I'm not going for anything besides a good time that day," Meixell explained. A good time and an impact, "perhaps getting a slogan across. That's in the fact sheet. And that's why we work on them so hard." So far, the ingredients of a successful action include a good time as well as an argument delivered with a well-

researched fact sheet. Yet this argument also needed to be advanced in a more immediate manner. This is where the theater fits its, Meixell explains:

> The demonstrations, let's just talk about me and how I feel. We did an anniversary action for ACT UP. This must have been maybe 1991. It was at the World Trade Center on that part of Church Street that is closed off. It might have been 1992 after the bombing[THAT WAS IN 1993] and the street was closed off. And we had our "Faceless Bureaucrat" faces on. We had on our business-looking outfits. And we had signs around our necks saying, "That's not my job" or "AIDS doesn't affect my family" – the disclaimers of a faceless bureaucrat. So there was a die-in. We hadn't planned what we would do. When the die-in occurred, we started stepping over them. And so the next day, there was a whole full two-page picture in the *Daily News*. So doing these activities make news.

And when done right, ACT UP's theatrical approach – which combined research, direct action zaps, and effective communications – produced tangible success. Harrington explains that sometimes just publicly using the language of scientists against them was the most effective approach they could take (Epstein 1996, 2000). Yet even then, the drama of grabbing the microphone, a little direct action, set the stage for the advance, as Harrington describes:

> One of the best zaps was a very organized CD zap on Allan Cooper and the FDA in February 1989. We brought a whole busload of ACT UP people down [to Washington, DC] for a hearing on FDA reform. We distributed fact sheets that attacked the NIH and the FDA for DHBG [an experimental treatment] and monumental regulatory hypocrisy. We grabbed the microphone and got the kind of dialogue we wanted. And then three of the activists who were there went out to [Anthony] Fauci's office at the NIH campus and he said yes. And then that same day he called up [FDA commissioner] Frank Young, the next day the FDA changed their policy, and later in the month, people with AIDS that had CMV retinitis were getting their drug acyclovir.

They were going through all of these burocratic hurdles to get specific drugs approved for a specific condition A central component of this organizing approach is the view that

when activism remains fresh, well researched, and creative, it can produce results in peoples' lives. Harrington explains:

> All of those different pieces that you do: you stage a festival; you hold a demonstration; you go meet policy makers; you get arrested. And eventually, down the road, there are some concrete changes that can happen very quickly, as with the FDA. We went to demonstrate at a federal hearing about acyclovir for CMV retinitis in February 1989. And a group went out to Fauci's office at NIH that same day and he called the FDA commissioner that same day. And then two weeks later the drug was on expanded access for people with CMV retinitis. So we would get letters from people that said, "Thank you for saving my eyesight." So that was incredibly powerful feelings of intervention, validation, accomplishment and something good happening right away. Originally at the FDA demo, we just thought the drugs are there, we just need to get them out. But I think we were wearing lab coats with the biohazard warning on them.

The lesson became that well-timed, creative guerilla theater could reshape power structures. And along the road, the dramaturgical lesson unfolded that good actions had to be good theater. ACT UP helped teach us that with good media work, sound research, and a coherent message, guerilla theater can play an effective role in promoting political change. Scenes are staged so as to be media-friendly, characters learn their sound bites around particular policies in question, and audiences gravitate to good performances. People want to write about and interview the cast members, regardless of whether they are stars or not. Everyone has his or her lines.

Quester recalls the use of street theater in an action against the American Medical Association (AMA), illustrating how the group used these elements to convey its support for national health care.

> I went to Chicago in 1990, the ACT UP conference. It was called Act Now. And we went there and we demonstrated at the AMA. And there was a woman there wearing with a leather jacket. And on the back of the jacket in sequins it said, "Dykes with Guns. That'll Scare 'Em." So I pretty much decided I was in love with her. And ACT UP did this big die-in front of the AMA 'cause they opposed national health insurance. And you know, it was earnest, 'cause die-ins are. But

> the folks who were getting busted – 'cause no one got arrested for dying on the streets – they were told to get up, and they got up. But the folks who were getting busted, we were lying in the doorway, we called ourselves "The Greed Doctors." We wore white coats. We xeroxed $20 bills. We enlarged them, because when you are a clown you need big props. We had giant $20 bills with blood all over them. And they were coming out of all our pockets and our sleeves. And we were marching around singing, I think Jamie Leo was behind this, "Oompa, loompa, dippidy dee. We are the doctors, where is our fee? Oompa, loompa, doopidy doo? There'll be no healthcare coverage for you." It's from *Willie Wonka and the Chocolate Factory*. And Jamie was walking along and he'd say, "Who are you?" And we'd go, "The greedy doctors." And he'd say, "What do you want?" And we'd go, "Blood money." And throw it around. And then we lay down. We did our die-in at the door of the AMA. And he went around and went into our pockets and took our money 'cause he was being the AMA. It was great.

The majority of ACT UP's playful theatric pranks were meant to convey a point, as with the AMA street theater pieces Quester describes. For Northrop, internal group play contributed to more of effective communications and street theater. "If you label it theater, and there could be both comedy and tragedy in that, then I think you are hitting the nail better on the head," she explains. The point of ACT UP's most dramatic actions was tactically speaking to multiple publics:

> I certainly think there has been a role for cleverness and play to some extent, although more for the entertainment of the activists than as an actual communication tool. Certainly, we take into account the primary goal, which is how to communicate. And a lot of that has to do with humor or irony or some twist that helps people understand things better. And it certainly can be seen in terms of play. But also one needs to be careful not to go too far with play and actually mess up your message because it's important to be serious. One thing that comes to mind are the pictures of the first gay rights demonstration right outside the White House. People very deliberately chose to dress seriously. The men in suits and ties; the women in dresses. But the groups I've worked with have always taken seriously the need to be conscious of the message we're sending. Sometimes that ends up in adopting a playful message. And sometimes the opposite. There are various ways these messages manifest themselves.

But while street theater had to be part of a conscious, deliberate approach and communications strategy, this is not to say it had to be bland.

In countless ways, the politics of playful creative protest offered a striking contrast to conventional protest strategies. "[It was]the politics is the politics of smashing the closet," Quester explains. "There's a bunch of queers here, so we're going to act really, really queer because we're queers and that's what we do." Thus, ACT UP, like the Gay Liberation Front before it, rejected assimilationist political messaging. "We're not going to do our "Mattachine Society Pickets the White House." We don't do that anymore," Quester says. Yet this is not to say that there was not a clear political strategy to the tactical use of dramaturgy in ACT UP: Quester continues:

> Whether we articulated it or not, there was a queer political strategy that went into that. What do you want to do? Do you want to frighten people? Then do the angry thing. Politically, if that's what you need to do, frighten people. Do you want to stymie people and leave them without a response? Then do the high camp thing. It was strategic.
>
> I remember when we were in New Orleans during the Republican Convention in 1988 and we had offended everyone because we zapped the bishop there. And they were saying, "I think we should all dress in white and have a candlelight march because the way that you guys go out there with your black t-shirts and your chanting, you scare people." And I remember Peter Staley, who is not someone I admire politically in 2005, who at that time was very articulate and patient with them. And he said, "Look, sometimes you want to scare people. We're trying to do that."

The play element of ACT UP's work, at least for Northrop, was more about "the entertainment of the activists." But this does not diminish its role. McAdam (1996) speaks of multiple publics, including fellow travelers. There are times when the play message goes straight to fellow activists. Here, play involves a more instrumental role, rather than an external role. Northrop and I talked about the propensity to find a space for playfulness in good times and bad, where it was part of a community-building project. Members of ACT UP continued to have fun and show up and keep on going when people

were literally dropping like flies. Northrop describes another effective example of the use of play by ACT UP members:

> Well, I think of it as a more internal tool than an external tool. A lot of people in ACT UP partied together. That was one element of it. There were inside jokes to what we did. For instance, at the FDA action we'd had a pre-action meeting in New York where we went over tactics and techniques. And one of the things we talked about were sound bites we would use with the media. So we discussed what the issues were and how we would talk about those. And a story I know because it involves me, because I was a media specialist, was that I was asked to condense information into a sound bite. We were talking about something that then-president George Bush, the first one, was trying to do, a proposal we suspected he was going to make and what was wrong with it. David Barr, a lawyer, went on at some length about what was wrong with it. And I said, "Ok I get it: it's a lie; it's a sham; and it won't work." And everyone said, "Ok, that's how we condense it." And then when we got to Washington the next day, someone ran up to me at a pre-action meeting and said, "What was that you said – it's a lie, it's a sham, what was it?" So I repeated it. We went to the action expecting to say that or something like that to the press when they said something about the Bush proposal. Well, Bush never made his proposal. And we weren't asked about it. But everyone was so taken with that little phrase, which doesn't even rhyme, that all through the action, people were chanting, "It's a lie; it's a sham; and it won't work." And when NBC news did an evening news piece on it, all through their piece in the background was this chant of, "It's a lie; it's a sham; and it won't work." And it was simply an in joke for us that we laughed about for years and became something that was amusing to us and had no real meaning to the outside world, except that it was adopted in other situations as described.

For ACT UP, play was a part of a spirit of absurd defiance. It began with the group's very name: ACT UP, which includes a "playful" set of double meanings (Reed 2005, p. 187). While the name indicates an imperative to ACT, to struggle for life, to be defiant, Douglas Crimp (2003) points out, the group was also clear that it wanted to advance something other than a simple macho, heroic image. Instead, the name implied a level of mischief, of childish misbehaving, acting up, or acting out, to borrow from Freudian parlance. In name and spirit, the group advanced a way of being which conveyed a paradoxical sense of performance and pretending, play and even ridicule, and

sometimes appealed to be the anti-thesis of more serious political organizing (Reed 2005).

Radical Ridicule

In his 2005 book, *Electoral Guerilla Theatre: Radical Ridicule and Social Movements*, Lawrence Bogad lists examples of marginalized groups that have advanced their counter-public message through the use of subversive humor, performance, fun, agit prop, and political theater. What unifies these groups is the use of subversive humor, intelligence, audacity, and "ridicule" to highlight the limitations of the electoral process, which bars many counter-public voices from formal political participation. One of the case studies in Bogad's work extends his ridicule by calling for radically reformist proposals that seem to function well outside of conventional, albeit obfuscated, "unacknowledged (pro-capitalistic law-and-order) limits of debate" (p. ??). The point is to shift the terms of what is and is not permissible in political debate and democratic engagement. At one point, one of Bogad's prank political candidates is so successful at shifting the terms of the debate that, to their dismay, they were actually elected. This individual's great success was advancing a counter-public message that was so compelling that it successfully supplemented conventional political thinking.

ACT UP borrowed from a similar ethos. Much of this sensibility involved playful, "better to laugh than cry" defiant jeers. Goldberg was known as the group's "chant queen" because of his quick and pithy capacity for witty chants, which put a funny face on difficult, often panic-ridden situation. He describes this approach in his first demonstration with the group:

> I remember particularly the first demonstration, and the time when the cops were arresting them in Washington with the gloves – and the "Your gloves don't match your shoes, we'll see you in the news!" And I was like, "Oh, that's interesting." And actually, I went to the center to participate, to sign up to hand out leaflets about the March on Washington that was going to happen.

Thus, the silly chants were also a way to offer a counterbalance to the hysteria that accompanied the health crisis. They were a part of the radical ridicule that was the group's strength. Long-term member John Riley explains where this ridicule overlaps with a spirit of adventure, play, and movement success within the group:

> One of the things that I think is great about ACT UP is the sense of humor and the sense of really exposing the enemy in humorous ways as well as exposing their viciousness. From kiss-ins to protest AIDSphobia and homophobia to very serious actions where you take over government officials' offices. It's very fulfilling and you can see the effects. You have to look, but if you analyze the news you see that the activism has made an impact....If you are going to be in a struggle that may take a lifetime, you have to be able to play to keep going.

And members of ACT UP played a lot together. One of the primary ways the group made their messages public was through smart, often serious chants: "People with AIDS Under Attack, What Do We Do – ACT UP, Fight Back!" In other cases, playful, festive chants conveyed the group's messages. Harrington explains: "I remember there was like, 'Pump Up the Budget' [in reference to the 1980's house anthem, 'Pump up the Volume']. And then, "I've got a drug right here, it's called acyclovir." A lot of little dittyies." Goldberg recalls one of the chants that fit better in the radical ridicule category. "I mean, it was a bad chant, but it was a lot of fun, which was "City AIDS care is ineffectual, thanks to Koch the heterosexual."

The chants fit into the carnival-like atmosphere of many of ACT UP's early demonstrations, including one called Target City Hall. Harrington recalls an extremely silly, camp element, which combined with more radical ridicule of then-mayor Ed Koch:

> Most affinity groups would do their own mini action within the larger action. You know, Graphic United brought signs at the Target City Hall rally. One group decided to call itself "CHER." I don't really know why. It wasn't like community health education reaction or anything. They were just CHER. They were part of the Swim Team, which was the hunky boys with Doc Martin shoes. They all wore t-shirts that had "CHER" on them. And then there was another group that had signs that mocked the *Newsday* cover which said, "ED KOCH – I'M NOT GAY." And so all the people in that other affinity group made signs that said, "And I'm Marie of Romania," "And I'm..." to mock the cover. It was very funny.

Part of the ACT UP approach toward radical ridicule was to punch holes in the pretense of those who ignored AIDS, such as Ronald Reagan, who was often pictured on political flyers with his chimp in his 1951 movie *Bedtime for Bonzo*. The point was to illustrate the buffoonery of those who saw AIDS as anything else other than a public health issue. For activists, the *Bedtime for Bonzo* picture – from a movie in which Reagan tried to teach morals to a chimp – seemed to mirror the push to moralize about an epidemic.

The point, of course, was that ACT UP members, through their personal experience with the epidemic, had come to a different understanding, a different way of conceptualizing AIDS as a health crisis, not a moral issue. Goldberg explains:

> [T]here was sort of the realization of, they don't know any more than I do. It was really amazing, because we invest these people with such knowledge...I mean, they were saying things – well, that's just garbage. And there were a number of times we did that. The Civil Rights Commission [CRC] – the Send in the Clowns demo, was sort of a classic [example] of that.

As Goldberg notes, the Send in the Clowns demo was a classic case of ACT UP's use of radical ridicule. Meixell recalls:

> Steve Quester and some early ACT UP people went to Washington and the National AIDS Commission. They all sat there and at a certain moment all put on fuzzy clown heads. And then they put on the noses and just sat there, just sat there until they had an appropriate moment to say, "that's bullshit" or "you're just clowning around" to the speaker.

Yet within all this clowning around, an important point was being made about the nature of knowledge. What many people with HIV/AIDS lacked in professional, scientific understanding of the epidemic, they made up for in their personal understanding and experience of the epidemic. This personal wisdom translated into profound counter-public expertise and knowledge (Epstein 1996). And it changed the way policy around the epidemic was conducted (Epstein 2000).

But before the group could sit at the table, they had to shift the conventional understanding of how the epidemic was conceptualized in the public debate. Quester, who attended the Send in the Clowns action as his first demonstration with ACT UP recalls:

> So my first experience with ACT UP, Andrew Miller invited me to come to Washington. He said, "We're doing this action at the Civil Rights Commission." It was spring of 1988. I had never been to an ACT UP meeting. I took the day off of work. I was a K1 teacher at a private Jewish school. And we took the bus to Washington and we went to the Civil Rights Commission. They were having hearings on like "public health vs. civil rights," like, shouldn't we really quarantine people with AIDS? Reagan hadn't gotten the answer he wanted from the National Science Foundation and somebody else, so he asked the Civil Rights Commission. So we're like, "I can't believe these clowns are doing this."

Goldberg continues:

> The Civil Rights Commission…They were going to finally look into AIDS discrimination...Anyway, they were having a hearing, and having all these incredible people speaking who were like, "The AIDS crisis is over, there is no

> crisis." *The Myth of Heterosexual AIDS* – he was the guy who wrote that [Michael Fumento]. "There is no AIDS among heterosexuals. Clearly, everyone who has it who is a heterosexual, is really homosexual – if AIDS exists at all."

ACT UP's skill was in advancing this counter-public knowledge into public discourse (Brouwer 2001). Playfulness, humor, and performance were vital tools in advancing this knowledge: these people are clowns. Yet the question was, how could group members best advance their understanding in a way that could shift public debate? Goldberg elaborates:

> So, for that commission, the question was, okay, if we go into a regular demonstration, aren't we just legitimizing what they're saying? How do you combat that? The whole thing really is just a circus. And initially, I think Maria [Maggenti] came up with, oh, we should let bugs out, or marbles. And then someone said, "Its just a circus, isn't it? Why don't we get clown masks?" So we called it the Send in the Clowns demo – or I called it the Send in the Send in the Clowns demo, because I'm a Theater Queen.

The clowns were part of the strategy of radical ridicule. He recalls:

> We showed up at this meeting. We came after lunch, and we heard that in the morning there was this horrible testimony going on, and then we just sat there. We went to our seats in the audience, and we all had these half clown masks on. And we just sat there. The commission came in, and they were facing us, and you just saw their faces light drop. The Civil Rights Commission is facing us. All the Reagan appointees are trying to pretend we're not there. Mary Barry is cracking up. But these right-wing maniacs that they have invited to testify have their backs to us. And they are facing the CRC. And the press was like, "Oh, clown faces! Here's an image." We were trying to think of ways to interrupt the proceedings. They are testifying and testifying and we get bored. So we stand and hold up our watches. This was the first one where we took off our watches to show time's running out. At one point, we chanted, "Tick, tock, tick, tock."

Goldberg continues:

> And then there was another point, I think we all turned our backs, when somebody said something about there not really being an AIDS crisis or something. The guy, the witness, says, "And you will see here that the graph bends over." And spontaneously, like sixty of us go, "Whooo" and bent over and sort of mooned the commission without taking off our pants or anything. (Laughing). So now the witness turns around and loses his cookies because

> there's like sixty people in clown masks mooning him. Mary Berry was hysterical laughing. The liberal people on the committee were having a great time. We were there for like 20 minutes, because it started to get tense and the police started to go in, and it wasn't worth taking a bust on. We'd made our point. It's not about getting arrested, why get arrested? But it was incredibly empowering, because we completely wrecked it. The committee had no legitimacy. They just sort of fizzled off into nothingness, and we were really able to undercut them so severely by doing this – by being funny, be being smart, and not playing into this situation they'd set up.

And after the commission meeting was over, Quester recalls, "We came back to New York and we walked directly into an ACT UP meeting." As Huizinga points out, such forms of play can be all-consuming.

The Ascent of Operation Ridiculous

The Send in the Clowns demonstration was by no means the only ACT UP action that featured playful radical ridicule or defiant clowning. This ludic energy accompanied one of ACT UP's most controversial episodes: the 1989 Stop the Church action, in which ACT UP members disrupted church services at St. Patrick's Cathedral in a protest over the homophobic positions of the Catholic Church, which ACT UP felt helped spread HIV/AIDS. Northrop was put to the test in facilitating the debate about the action:

> Take for example, the discussion of St. Patrick's, which went on for weeks, the debate over should we do it, with people very, very emotional on all sides of the issue. People very scared of doing it; very enthusiastic about doing it; people wanting to stop it. And it looked like it just might be too contentious and too difficult to make it happen. In the end, by allowing open discussion over a long period of time, meaning several weeks, maybe even months in a row, it worked. And I think produced a brilliant action, which of course is still controversial.

The spirit of radical ridicule was part of much of the preparation

and messaging for the action, including the flyers. "'Choose your Scumbag,' with a picture of Cardinal O'Connor with an open unrolled condom, was a prime example of humor that was very confrontational," Northrop explains. "It was also meant to be humorous. It was certainly meant to be humorous." This dark humor was also part of the street actions planned for Stop the Church. But behind the humor lay a significant critique. With Stop the Church, ACT UP brought its absurdist approach into the struggle against homophobia. So an affinity group formed Operation Ridiculous, a troupe of ludicrous clowns meant to point out their concern about Cardinal John O'Connor's endorsement of Operation Rescue and its advocacy of direct attacks on abortions clinics. Quester explains:

> Operation Rescue was just off of their victory in Wichita. And I really have to remind us here, if you've read *What's the Matter with Kansas*, Operation Rescue's victory in Wichita is the reason that W is bombing the world. That's where they learned to drive a wedge between poor people and the party that would ….well tend to stand up for them [the Democrats]. Wichita was their first big splash. That was when they announced to the country,"We are going to descend on Wichita and we are going to save all the babies in Wichita." And Cardinal O'Connor said, "I would join Operation Rescue if I could," which is one of the reasons we went after him. So they really did cause havoc in Wichita. Kansas was a Democratic state, and it was the way that the culture war was defined and leveraged by the Republican Party in the wake of the Wichita strikes by Operation Rescue that turned Kansas Republican and then just created that whole sea of red states. It all goes back to Wichita.

As stated earlier, many in ACT UP were moved by the death of playwright Charles Ludlam to AIDS in 1987 (see Kaufman 2002). With his Theater of the Ridiculous in mind, many sought to bring his defiantly queer absurdist form of theater into the streets and the ACT UP struggle (Bordowotiz 2004). The Theater of the Ridiculous was right down the street from Bob Kohler's home in New York City's West Villag (as he recalls in the previous chapter).

With word of O'Connor's endorsement of Operation Rescue, members of ACT UP formed another group of clowns to offer radical ridicule as a response. "We wanted to make it fun," Meixell recalls. "We wanted to embarrass them. Costumes, flaming fags, brought out that stuff. Operation Ridiculous to make fun of Operation Rescue." Operation Ridiculous would take radical ridicule another step further.

These members donned makeup, dressed as clowns, blew up balloons, performed clown skits, and ran around with little baby dolls to highlight the church's support for babies over women's lives. "We are Operation Ridiculous. We are comprised of members of ACT UP and WHAM. Our mission is to diffuse the energy of the flag-waving, fetus-loving, bible-thumping bigots, we go where no clown has gone before" (quoted in Diva TV, 1990). The antics included their own version of the old clown taxi routine, in which Operation Ridiculous membersdrove a taxi up to St. Patrick's before moving their routine inside the church. "The humor humanizes that person so they are less frightening. It somehow changes the messages," Kohler observed. It puts them "off guard"; it's "disarming."

The rationale for the clown action included a series of church policies that the group found distasteful:

> It's ridiculous that inert tissue masses are considered more vital than the rights of living women.
> It's ridiculous that Operation Rescue – a predominantly white group – preaches carrying all pregnancies to term, while a majority of them are of color.
> It's ridiculous that pregnant women are blocked from AIDS clinical treatment groups (quoted in Diva TV, 1990)

The manifesto concluded with the words: “Calling all clowns! Calling all clowns. It’s time for Operation Rescue to rescue this demonstration from the hands of the cops” (quoted in Diva TV, 1990).

Of course, this humor did not prevent the police from chasing down and arresting numerous clowns rushing through the streets amid the carnival-like atmosphere that accompanied the action. “[T]here were all sorts of things going on outside,” recalled Northrop, who was eventually arrested inside, “including Ray Navarro dressed as Jesus doing color commentary as a nice onsite correspondent during the demo.” With microphone in hand, Navarro interviewed members of Operation Ridiculous. “We’re doing this for you Jesus,” one female clown explained before running through the streets to the roars of the crowd and being taken down by a group of five policemen.

Spaces where spontaneous play occur, such as the carnival created outside St. Patrick’s with Operation Ridiculous, are frequently accompanied by efforts to regain control, rather than allow the play to continue unencumbered. After all, such play tends to involve “an erosion or inversion of social status” (Bial 2004, p. 115). For this reason, authorities often seek to close spaces where improvised play takes place. Such play has been known to invert social hierarchies. This was certainly the case as debate about the Catholic Church and HIV prevention moved from ACT UP’s counter-public into the larger public sphere.

At the time, Northrop “wasn’t too thrilled” with Navarro’s theatrical commentary. “But as I think of it now,” she says, “I think it’s one of the most brilliant things I ever saw.” Debate about the day’s events would go on for weeks after the action. While many members, such as Harrington, thought the action alienated moresupporters of ACT UP,

than to won. others such as Northrop and Charles King consider the action the best thing ACT UP ever did. King points out that after weeks of debate about why ACT UP would do such as thing, debate shifted to why the Catholic Church would influence AIDS programming and policies as they did. Thus, Stop the Church resulted in a shift in discourse about separation of church and state, the influence the Catholic Church should have on AIDS policies, and what truly constituted effective HIV prevention: abstinence or comprehensive sexual education.

Diffusing Power – The Church Ladies for Choice

The spirit of rambunctious play, of radical ridicule, certainly did not end with Stop the Church. In the years after that action, the adage, "When in doubt, make fun of the Religious Right," would become an abiding principle for the Church Ladies for Choice, a spin-off of Action Tours. Like Operation Ridiculous, which sought to "diffuse the energy of the flag-waving, fetus-loving, bible-thumping bigots," the Church Ladies would spend the next fifteen years diffusing the shaming power of anti-choice activists who targeted abortion clinics. Quester recalls the group's early foundations:

> I remember a lot of ACT UP people used to do clinic defense before WHAM was even founded. And before the Church Ladies for Choice were founded. So I'm outside of this clinic in the Bronx. I think that the Psycho Christians have put kryptonite locks around their heads and attached them to the doors of this clinic. And there is a crowd of them across the street and we're bellowing at the Psycho Christians. And we're bellowing at the cops to please take them away so the women can get their services, and me and this other queer guy started making out. We just had a brainstorm. The Psycho Christians feed off of Satanic queers yelling at them. That works for them. So we started making out. And it was good. It was really good. It rattled them.

Thus, early on in the ACT UP experience, members recognized that defiant pleasure was a useful counter-response to the politics of shame and control. The Church Ladies were born of this lesson. Quester continues:

> Well, Elizabeth passed out flyers to all her friends in ACT UP telling them to show up at the Cross of Light in Manhattan. The Christians made a human cross up and down Fifth Avenue and across 34th street in Manhattan with signs that said, "Abortion Kills Children." So the Church Ladies show up. First we decided that we were going to dress up as French maids. Don't ask me why we were going to dress up as French maids, I don't remember. And then we changed our minds. We were just going to wear dresses. But poor Jamie showed up with body stockings ready for his French maid dress. And Rex Waxerman[WASSERMAN?], may he rest in peace, showed up with his grandmother's turban on and that's when I named him Phyllis Stein. And we had signs that said, "Militarism Kills Children" and "Homophobia Kills Children." And we just stood there and stared down the antis. And I think we went by St. Patrick's Cathedral. So that was our first real action.

As the Church Ladies continued to struggle against the forces of homophobia, bits and pieces of practical wisdom began to develop. Quester recalls another action:

> It was a Saturday morning and we knew there was going to be an Operation Rescue hit. We were on their mailing list unbeknownst to them. But we didn't know where. We knew there was going to be a hit, so we jumped into a car and he[WHO?] says, "Come on. We're on a mission against God." We drove from clinic to clinic and we heard they were in Long Island, in Nassau somewhere. We drive up there and there's police barricades making a corridor to the door. And the antis are up there waiting to be arrested. And they have a huge group of supporters that don't want to get busted on either side of the barricade. They're praying. I wade right into the middle of their crowd. And I start blowing a whistle. And I keep blowing a whistle and blowing a whistle and blowing a whistle. And this anti (as in anti-choice), this Christian, comes up to me and he looks at me right in the eye. I was chanting lewd things. And he says, "I'm not afraid of you. I think you are funny." And I realized afterwards, he was talking to Satan, 'cause I was obviously possessed.

The lesson became that a simple disruptive approach was easily dismissed and misrepresented. What was needed was to shift power, to change hearts and minds.

Instead of continuing to scream, the Church Ladies would turn to their own form of freedom songs. Quester recalls, "At another clinic defense, we end up near Dobbs Ferry. We zapped and absolutely killed Operation Goliath." At the time in 1990, Operation Goliath was engaged in an ongoing and unpopular attack on a Hudon Valley abortion clinic; they held signs proclaiming it "Auschwitz on the Hudson," (Foderaro, 1990). In responce to the aggression of their opponents, the Church Ladies started to sing during their events. Quester explains.

> So we get up there. The clinic is closed. There are locks on the door. The cops are not doing anything about it. And there's, like, Christians running around. I have been up all night on ecstasy and I'm wearing a red feather boa. And I had also been drinking margaritas. And we'd taken the train up there. And you know, on ecstasy, it was fine. And so we spend the day just trying to swat away the Christians who were in the parking lot because there were clients in their cars waiting for appointments. And the Christians would go up and stick their signs on the windshield, "Don't Kill Your Baby," blah, blah, blah. So I was hanging around with Ed Ball and we're singing, "I'm Meryl Streep, I had a kid, and Dingo whipped my baby, D-I-N-G-O" (to the tune of Bingo), which is the reason why the Church Ladies sing. It goes back to that day. There were no Church Ladies yet, but Ed and I realized that singing to Psycho Christians was politically effective and good for the soul. We would sing "Amazing Grace"' to them.

Yet instead of dismissing the Church Ladies, Quester recalls a different kind of reaction. "They were stymied. They can't rebuke you. If you are angry, they rebuke you. They love rebuking. Rebuking's good." Here, Quester realized, if he screamed, the "antis" thought the Church Ladies were the devil. But when the Church Ladies sang, "They just get kind of deflated." The "antis" were comfortable disregarding screams, but when the Church Ladies sang and performed, the "antis" had a had a harder time handling his energy. Soon after the Dobbs Ferry action, Quester introduced a song he'd learned in high school called "God Is a Lesbian," sung to the tune of "God Save the Queen." The song would become an anthem for the group and the movement. "Maybe I

knew that one from ACT UP," Quester pondered with a second thought. "And then we started writing songs and we got nuts. We got really nuts about it. We were very focused on the songs." In the years to follow, a strategy would continue to emerge from the practical wisdom of the Church Ladies versions of freedom songs.

Another component of the satire is the buffoonery of the scene, with mostly gay men from ACT UP dressed in drag, the women dressed as choir boys, and even a couple of nuns. Thus, gender play adds another component to the Church Ladies performance. Here, the combination of pro-choice anthems and gender play is advanced as a response to social control, an antidote to panic. The spectacle becomes a kind of fun-house mirror, where people see a distorted image of themselves reflected back at them.

"Its great play," Wayne Hoffman, a former Church Lady recalls. "Drag is such a lightning rod for some people. Before we opened our mouths, they were yelling at us." Hoffman describes the way drag altered power dynamics at a Church Ladies action against Operation Rescue in Washington, DC, in 1993:

> After college, I did a little bit of work with OUT and another March on Washington. And I got involved with abortion activism. I was a Church Lady for Choice. We would get dressed up in drag and defend abortion clinics. I was living in DC and Operation Rescue was coming to target Washington. But they don't tell you which clinic, so we didn't know. And as Church Ladies, our job wasn't to defend clinics; our job was to entertain the troops who were defending the clinic. So we got up at 5 a.m. in drag and drove from clinic to clinic. And we had about a fifteen-minute schtick. We go to one, we do our schtick; move on to the next and do our schtick…at the forth, they're there. We found them. We found Operation Rescue and they're in the middle of a very tense screaming match. CNN is there and the local media's there and the pro-choice activists are defending the clinic, arms around the building. And Operation Rescue's Randall Terry, who was still leading the group, was there. Everyone's watching and we show up. At first we go, "We should leave." And we go, "No, no, this is the point."
>
> As soon as we show up, Operation Rescue folks – no matter what they say, they hate gay people more than they hate abortions – they freaked out that men in dresses were there. And they turned away from the clinics and clenched

> their fists and screamed that we were faggots and were going to get AIDS and were going to hell. And we did our whole schtick. And CNN is filming the whole thing. And the clinic director comes up to us and says, “Keep going.” And we said, “We can’t. We only have a few minutes of material.” And she says, “You’ve gotta keep going. They are so distracted by you that we are getting our clients in the front door.” They totally stopped paying attention to the clinic. So we did it again, and talked through some of our songs, joked around and improvised for another twenty minutes until shecame over and said, We’re done. All of our morning appointments are finished. You can go.” Operation Rescue came to town to shut down an abortion clinic, and they were standing right in front of the clinic watching clients go in. They were so angry that men were wearing dresses that they forgot their whole politics. That’s the power of drag.

Again and again, unapologetic displays of pleasure and radical ridicule were an effective response to the “antis.” Shortly after this action, the Clinton Administration passed a law to defend access to such clinics (however tenuous this accord feels as this study is being completed in 2006). Sarcasm and play were vital components in this struggle.

The New York chapter of the Church Ladies for Choice was formed in 1992 by two members of WHAM (Women's Health Action and Mobilization) who joined with two male ACT UPpers, impressed by the Church Ladies’ability to entertain and defusetension. Over the following years, the group continued clinic defense while making a point about the implicit links between women's health, reproductive rights, choice, gay rights, and HIV prevention. And they did it with a sophisticated politics that linked the lessons of queer activism and feminism in sex-positive ways (Cohen-Cruz 1998).

In the years to come, the Church Ladies would become a virtual USO of clinic defense. A typical day would involve the Church Ladies arriving at 7:30 a.m. in front on an abortion clinic, in say, Brooklyn. On one side, a group of pro-life activists would stand holding rosaries and a replica of a dead bloody fetus on a cross dressed like Jesus, offering diapers to women willing to be turned away from clinic services. On the other, the Church Ladies would be dressed for a morning of street performance and diversion

from the guilt mongering. While the Religious Right frames its clinic appearances as religious revivals, generating a feeling of terror and the needs to be saved, the Church Ladies juxtaposed that energy with a display of irreverence and good humor, thus undermining the atmosphere.

Most of the Church Ladies' songs were riffs – some would say culture jams – of classic melodies rewritten as pro-choice anthems. "This Womb is My Womb," sung to the tune of "This Land is My Land" was a crowd-pleaser: "This womb is my womb, it is not your womb, and there is no womb, for Wandell Tewwy." The Church Ladies shook their tambourines, and a smile emanated from the crowd. As a pro-choice counterpart to right-to-lifers who blockade women's health facilities, the Church Ladies' aim was to deflect the very real tension and harassment of women using clinic services. Between the drag and the pro-choice freedom songs, the Church Ladies usually succeeded in creating a spectacle (Cohen-Cruz 1998).

Another favorite was ""Christian-fascio-Nazi-nutso-psycho-right-wing bullshit," written to the tune of Supercalifragilisticexpealidocious from *Mary Poppins*. The first verse opens:

> Its Christo-fascio-Nazi-nutso-psycho-right-wing bullshit
> If you try to talk to them you'll find they are full of shit!
> We will guard our clinics just in case they try to pull shit.
> Christo-fascio-Nazi-nutso-psycho-right-wing bullshit!

The second verse situates the right-wing attack within a witty reading of US history:

> This country's values are Judeo/Christian, yessiree!
> And that requires a very special view of history:
> Importing slaves and killing Indians is not a sin,
> But give a boy a condom, oy, the trouble you're in.

The third verse continues the narrative:

> Young women in America, their fate must not decide.
> An aging pop[Pope?] in Italy is much more qualified.
> If you want an abortion, then you really must be sick:
> You can't think for yourself because you haven't got a dick
> (*Church Ladies Song Book*, undated).

As the crowd screams, attention is drawn away from the women attempting to use the clinic.

At its core, the queer/feminist politics of the Church Ladies is translated through a simple series of jokes and jangles, as witnessed in their pro-choice anthems. An anti-temperance impulse propels the group's creative output (see Wagner 1997). Quester explains.

> The songbook is really about the tequila. I think that a 12-stepper would feel very out of place in the Church Ladies for Choice. We like get together in someone's apartment with a lot of tequila and we write lyrics. The music is already written.

A typical example of this creative output is the group's take on "Kumbaya," written during another trip to DC.

> There are bigots, girls, *Kumbaya*
> At this rally, sisters, *Kumbaya*
> We will mobilize, *Kumbaya*
> Get your dresses, *Kumbaya*
>
> Tease your wigs, women, *Kumbaya*
> Paint your nails, ladies *Kumbaya*
> We'll demand our rights, *Kumbaya*
> Time to re-dress, *Kumbaya*
> (*Church Ladies Song Book*, Undated).

The same biting humor was also useful in challenging left-wing orthodoxy. When ACT UP was gaining many new members and political power in the late 1980s, it drew members of the Worker's World Party (WWP), the International Socialist Organization (ISO), and the Revolutionary Communist Party (RCP) to its meetings. At one point, the

sectarians attempted to stack floor votes and called for ACT UP to endorse their agenda and political analysis. The sectarians succeeded in causing a rift that would lead to the breakup of the San Francisco ACT UP chapter (Braverman 2003). The same problem did not happen in New York City. There are many reasons why the sectarians failed to shift ACT UP's agenda, yet one of them might have been because of the biting humor and satirical approach of the ACT UP/New York group. The Church Ladies song, "I'm a Homophobic Leftist," sung to the tune of "I'm a Yankee Doodle Dandee" was inspired by those battles, with words that mock the world of the ideological left:

> Oh I'm a homophobic leftist
> Homophobic through and through.
> A real live leftist like my uncle Karl.
> He was a homophobe too.
> We want to crash your meeting,
> and claim your issues as our own.
> Acronym acronym acronym
> I am a homophobic drone
> (*Church Ladies Song Book*, undated, p. 12).

"I'm a Homophobic Leftist" was also a response to the behavior of the Pro-Choice Coalition, which was an RCP front group. The Coalition confronted the "Psycho Christians" at Eastern Women's Clinic on E. 33rd Street during the July 1992 Operation Rescue campaign, with little regard for clinic clients. Coalition members angrily ignored pleas from clinic staff to to leave. The Church Ladies had seen the same behavior at other clinics at other times.

"Music is the food of love" became a core Church Ladies. Over the years, the pleasure of singing, rather than fighting helped keep the affinity group moving forward. "Well, it's certainly pleasurable to put on a dress and a wig. It's certainly pleasurable to sing and to make music. It's certainly pleasurable to laugh," Quester explained and this

pleasure helped keep the group from falling into the dourness which is often said to have over taken other leftist groups such as the ISO. Howard Zinn (2002) used to play music for his students in class to keep them from letting politics make them sour. Over the years, ACT UP members played with countless ways of engaging in the range of feelings that accompanied the AIDS struggle.

Play as a Transitory Fantasy Space

An intermediate dimension of the battle between Eros and Thanatos involved the arena of fantasy. In many ways, riots and other highly confrontational direct actions represent a form of lived struggle – some real, some symbolic. It is widely known that one of the sparks that turned the 1969 police raid on the Stonewall Inn into a riot was a confrontation between a lesbian and her arresting officer. Once she was taken into the police van, she fought her way back out, screaming for help from the onlookers. This was repeated two or three times before she escaped for good. As she did, onlookers saw that the raid and the expected inevitable police detention to follow were anything but inevitable. With Stonewall, the rules of the game changed when the queers fought back (Carter 2004). A similar struggle between a right a to space, the shifting rules of that space, and a fantastical struggle where rules of engagement changed unfolded during ACT UP's October 1988 Seize the FDA demonstrations.

Shortly after Vito Russo spoke outside the Health and Human Resources building in Washington, ACT UP members held an impromptu Monday meeting.. Rumor had it that the FDA would be closed when ACT UP planned to demonstrate there. Members debated the efficacy of such an action. They decided the action was on. The meeting

came to an end "with a kiss-in that devolves into a virtual feeding frenzy of lips," unofficial ACT UP scribe David Feinberg recalled (1994, p. 41).

By this point, members were struggling with how to make sense of what was going on in front of them. Reactions varied, from Vito's impassioned speech, to the kiss-in, to ACT UP members actually assaulting a couple of police officers – reminiscent of the lesbian fighting the police at Stonewall. David Barr, the Director of the Forum for HIV Research, for example, recalls watching Stephen Gendin "running with a banner at the FDA in his leather jacket (and knocking a policeman off his motorcycle in the process – a felony arrest charge, later dropped)" (quoted in *POZ* 2000). "If you could document some of those fantasies [during the FDA action] that would be great," explained Walter Armstrong, one of the participants, who worked with Gendin at POZ magazine. "The AIDS quilt was first displayed that day, so much of our emotional response vacillated from grief to anger," he recalled.

Throughout the day, the rules of the game twisted from laissez faire into far darker manifestations. Members of the group hung a sign proclaiming "Federal Death Administration," as well as ACT UP's slogan, "Silence = Death," on the walls of the building. Staley lit colored smoke bombs, creating an even more ominous air. And the police refused to play. No one could get arrested. "People were arrest queens and they were media queers," Harrington says. "They wanted to be arrested and they wanted to be in the media." Feinberg recalled asking his friend, ACT UP videographer Jim Hubbard, "Who do you have to fuck in this town to get arrested?" (2004, p. 47). Despite the lack of a key ingredient of political theater – the bust – ACT UP did make the nightly news that evening. "That night, Peter Staley was on *Nightline* or *Crossfire* or something with Pat

Buchanan, Harrington says. “He was talking about condoms. And you know, we were all in our twenties.” What’s more, the group ultimately largely succeeded in achieving its goal of changing the FDA’s drug approval rules (Epstein 1996).

Yet for many the day was rather messy. Interviewees recall vacillating between the grief of witnessing the AIDS quilt display for the first time and anger at the FDA bureaucracy they were targeting. These conflicting emotions found expression through both tears and acts of anger. While the aim of dark play is to subvert the regular order of things, there remains a double-edged quality to this type of game. As dark play subverts and inverts, sometimes breaking its own rules, the line between what is permissible and impermissible shift; here, the creativity of play overlaps with a darker, more destructive force (Schechner 2002, p. 107). In recalling the Seize the FDA action, Armstrong says, “There were things that were just so extraordinary.” He continues:

> At Seize the FDA, me and my affinity group, we were passing ourselves as… because we had been through the boot camp of the Republican Convention (in 1988), we were passing ourselves as the fiercest. And it was a little competition among a few groups of who could do the most outrageous thing. So we were going to start attacking the front doors of the FDA. And we had this whole elaborate choreography of like kneeling, squatting, standing; kneeling, squatting, standing in different cycles of things. We moved forward. And we were sure we were going to get the shit beaten out of us and it was going to be fantastic. So we were very quickly subdued and just pushed aside while other groups did other things with smoke and tombstones and all this other stuff. And we spent the rest of the day, to our great shame, trying to get arrested. And not being able to get arrested.

Another affinity group set up a billboard listing the number ofAIDS deaths in the US every thirty minutes. They would blow air horns on the half hour (Feinberg 1994).

As the day continued, the Delta Queens escalated their tactics. Armstrong continues:

> So meanwhile, PWA's [people with AIDS] who were on their last breaths were climbing on top of the police buses and lying down and getting arrested. We weren't doing anything. A day that, like, started at 5 a.m. And it was now like 4 p.m. There were very few people left. I remember seeing someone set fire to a Reagan or Bush effigy. And even that didn't get her arrested. Towards the end, my two friends Randy and Heidi grabbed this banner and they just started marching. [There were] a few cops who were just walking around patrolling in front of the FDA, these cops and just a few people left. And this one cop on a motorbike comes, not speeding, but just riding at them. And they looked at each other and they looked at each other and they started laughing and they moved apart and they pulled the banner really, really tight. And he sped up and it was this pointless confrontation. All I could think of was his head is going to be sliced off. This is going to be it. I mean, I was convinced of it. Of course, the only thing that really happened was he ran into the banner. He fell over. And Heidi and Randy ran away laughing. And there I was looking at him..

For Armstrong, who had been brought up as a Quaker, the scene was hard to watch. "I thought, I never could have done that because I was so afraid of what the consequences would be. And yet they knew, and they felt very secure. In a certain way, they were playing around." If they were playing around, certainly it was a form of dark play.

Yet the specter of violence brings up a messy point about power and oppression in political action. For many on the left who work with notions of prefigurative politics, part of the goal is to make sure their work embodies the change one wants to see in the world. Many are conscious about preventing themselves from becoming another left-wing movement that takes over and becomes more repressive than the last. I asked Armstrong what was going on in people's minds that day. Why did so many people want to get arrested that day? What was that relationship with the cops at that moment? It sounds like S/M in some ways, role play, game playing. He replied:

> I think that in one way, I mean certainly for people in ACT UP and going through CD training and all that, is you want to minimize the violence as much as possible. And we always claimed to be a non-violent organization, whatever that means. And yet, underneath it, really there's incredible fantasies going on. And I think you feel like, as someone who is HIV negative, the most I can ever do is be

> a martyr. And there is some desire to elicit from the cops as much violence as you can. In part because you are very, very angry and you need to be able to express that, even though that's not the point of the demonstration. And I think, where does all that anger go? As part of a movement, you are getting closer and closer to your anger at the same time that you are also finding community and all this other stuff. But what are the right moments to express that? And if they are not in confrontational rituals, then where are they? The problem is in those situations, you are going to get carried away. And no one is going to really look out for you. And partly with the lesbians, there may have been a dynamic of "We need to prove ourselves as courageous as possible and we need to risk physical assault." I felt that myself. There was a time when we talked about assassinating Jesse Helms. I mean, how can we stop here? How can we stop with non-violence when our friends are dying? It's not enough.

Thus, the Seize the FDA actions involved a complex range of emotions – love of comrades and lovers dying, anger. "And also a lot of guilt," Armstrong confesses. "As sophisticated as ACT UP was, we didn't have the tools or the time to unpack all of that at all...There is a lot there that is worth examining. Its all very layered." These layers are part of the historic trajectory in which Gay Liberation was born. The image of the Stonewall Girls kick-line and the lesbian escaping from the police wagon. Two images of defiance: one play and one anger. The demo started with a pre action kiss-in and ended with police being assaulted.

Much of the play that took place within ACT UP served as a means of expression. The politics of play took many forms, not the least of which was the paradoxical struggle between dark play, subversive humor, violence, pleasure, tension, and release. Play thus represented the liberatory counter-response, the flip-side of repression. "To be running down the street and laughing 'cause you got away with something stupid," as Meixell describes it, laughing. That is the politics of play. Part of the rules– the risk – is the realization that actors do not always get away. She continues:

> But then there are the times when people don't get away with it. You know that drug company at 17th Street and 8th Avenue that they plastered the slogans on,

> someone called the cops and they were in jail for two days. And when they were in court, the lawyer brought the full-page ad from the drug company [announcing] lowering the price of the drug. It's immediate. They wheat-pasted the whole store with big posters. It must have been 1993. They were just held until they got to court. They weren't sentenced. But the judge said, "OK, you're free to go as soon as he saw the big full page add from the drug company lowering their price."

Thus, even getting caught could be part of the strategy.

Within ACT UP, play functioned as an effective response to social controls. "Certainly we've seen it during the mass arrests," Quester recalls, eluding to one occasion when ACT UP members conducted a sort of gay "water ballet" when they were in jail in South Carolina. He continues:

> We were arrested in Columbia, South Carolina. They put us in a pen after we blocked the street in front of the state house. They knew we were coming and they set up pens in, like, a high school gymnasium. So they put the girls in a pen and they put the boys in a pen. And we did "water ballet." We lay down on our backs in a circle and we did water ballet, feet facing in, in our boys' enclosure in the school gymnasium. We all lifted our right leg, then our left leg, then kicked in unison, then moved our arms to make flower shapes...very Esther Williams/Busby Berkeley. How did that effect police procedure? I don't really know, but it presented them with a novel situation.

I remember being told sternly, "Being in jail is not supposed to be fun." Meixell continued:

> After working hard on demonstrations for weeks out in the streets, and its over its like the post mortem after a party. You talk about who came. The post mortems are really mortems, cause people are still gonna die. There's no cure. Its pretty depressing. You go to a lot of trouble and theres a video of it. But nobody's life has been saved. Nothing has really been done that you can see.

When ACT UP members get out of jail, part of the affinity group is typically there to meet them. No one gets out of jail without a greeting from a crowd. Meixell explains:

> After working hard on demonstrations for weeks, out in the streets, and it's over, it's like the post-mortem after a party. You talk about who came. The post-mortems are really mortems, 'cause people are still gonna die. There's no cure. It's pretty depressing. You go to a lot of trouble and there's a video of it. But nobody's life has been saved. Nothing has really been done that you can see.

It was only in 1996 that things really changed and after ACT UP's successful work at pushing new drugs through the approval pipeline. Yet, before then things could feel very desperate. G'dali Braverman and I used to talk about "the crash" (Shepard 1997). There's a moment in the demo when you believe you are going to end this thing, to put an end to it all. And then you come home and the epidemic is still going. But I was able to become an activist in ACT UP when I could never be one before, because people stuck with you through all that.

An All-Encompassing Festival of Activism

As the years went on, ACT UP members continued to work hard and play hard. "So, like I said before, it became this all encompassing festival of activism, a lifestyle. It was really all-engrossing," Harrington explained. Others such as Charles King and Kendall Thomas, report similar sentiments. Keith Cylar, another early member, also recalls a similar feeling. As his voice as an activist was awakened, this overlapped with aspects of his life as African American man who was into leather and an active part of the underground leather scene. Cylar recalls:

> Slowly, one day at the large meeting, I raised my hand and all of a sudden people realized that I had something to say. And then the next thing I know, we were doing the next Wall Street action. So I go, and I'd never been to a demonstration in my life. And the television cameras picked up on me being there. They walked up to me. They stuck the microphone in front of my face and said, "What is this all about?" So I responded and the next thing I know, I'm it. And I'm going to this committee and that committee. I'm goin' here, I'm goin' there. And that was

> a period in my life when I wore nothing but black. And all of a sudden I knew all this stuff about AIDS and HIV. And I was very much into the leather scene. And I was a drug dealer and people in the gay bar scene, the leather scene, began to realize that I knew something about AIDS and HIV. And they began to ask me questions. So I was at after-hours [bars] dealing with safer sex issues and helping people deal with losing this one and that one…And AIDS became a focal point in my life. And I had dropped out of social work school [at Columbia] at that point. I was swept away(2002)

Armstrong concurs: "For two or three years [ACT UP] was the air I breathed, and in that sense it was life. And it was play, even if it was drama and heartbreak and a lot of ugly feelings." Yet there were limitations of such a way of being. There were aspects of play that were not explored. "I definitely feel like there was an aspect of reliving high school in that room with all of the unfortunate and absurd things about high school," Armstrong explains.

Despite all this, for a number of years, ACT UP's approach worked very well and still continues to a lesser degree (although as social conditions change so does the need for different repertoirs). Part of that success, of course, was due to the talent of so many people, the capacity to deal with tough policy minutia and political differences in an open way. Another part was the quality of prefigurative community building, of building the world in which one wants to live within the organizing process, and having the community activists are seeking to create embodied in their protest tactics. That was part of the ACT UP process. For ACT UP, the intelligence, the meetings as theater, and play prevented that ugly side from taking over. Northrop explains:

> Well, certainly one of the reasons I felt myself comfortable in ACT UP and at home was that I felt that it was a room that in spite of being so predominantly male was very feminist oriented and was one of the few rooms of men that I could imagine, let alone be in, where I could speak in feminist terms and principles.

> And that was a very important factor for me and I think for a number of other women in the room. Now there are also people who would say ultimately that didn't work. And there were wars between some of the men and the women in the room. For a long time, I think it did work and there was a hunger among a lot of the men to learn that stuff.

In this respect ACT UP's work seemed to offer a contrast to so many other left-wing movements. Armstrong ruminated about this. "What's going through my mind is the history of revolutions. People take themselves so seriously. And they replicate or even outdo the terrible authority relationships which existed and exist." While Armstrong acknowledges that play was offered as a way to switch that around, he also saw an ambivalence to the commitment within ACT UP's work. But for many, the commitment was total. They fought until they died. For others, it was useful just to come to a meeting and share of themselves in that experience. Bill Dobbs explains, "ACT UP collectively has lots of accomplishments. To its members – even those who only went to one meeting – seeing a group like that in action is a great gift" (Dobbs, undated).

For many, including Armstrong, Quester, and Northrop, one of the important things about ACT UP was that it offered members an outlet, a means for self expression. Virtually all the interviewees responded that the community they were seeking to create was embodied in their protest tactics. When asked, "Are you fighting to build community or create external changes? And are these aims mutually exclusive?" virtually all the members suggested that the means and the ends were linked. Here, expression and affect, and play were recognized as vital parts of the group's work. Quester explains:

> Jan Cohen-Cruz, you've read her essay on the Church Ladies [Cohen-Cruz 1998]. She's Simone de Boudoir, by the way. She talked about how the individual members used the Church Ladies to create an alter ego who is part of us, like an expression. Felicity Buncake and Belle Bottom are expressions of who I am and not parts of me that get expressed in my day-to-day life. Belle especially, I love being Belle. Then it's like, why should I get up at 5 a.m. to go defend a clinic, because then I can become the real me, the me that nobody ever sees. That's really, really, really important.

When asked how she defined success and found meaning in this work, Northrop elaborated on the theme of expression:

> To me, I find it satisfying to be able to express myself by being part of a group that goes out and does direct action. No matter whether it accomplishes anything or not, just being able to express myself is a great thrill and extremely satisfying. The fact that we then accomplish things on a case-by-case basis – whether it's changing the FDA drug approval regulations or creating an international AIDS movement or promoting the creation of drugs that might actually save lives – is gravy, wonderful gravy and certainly what I'm out there to do. I'd love to change the world. And the older I get, the more cynical I get about that. But I think it's well worth trying every single day, any way anyone cares to. People ask me what they should do to get involved. Should they do this and should they do that and people apologize for not doing direct action. I say to people, "I don't care what you do. Do whatever you want. Just do something."

As the years went on, ACT UP's leaderless style churned forward, years past the typical two- or three-lifecycle for a direct action group. The ever-present Bob Kohler turned down marching with the Stonewall Veterans or any of the establishment groups to march with ACT UP at the 2005 Gay Pride march. Kohler describes how ACT UP engaged the crowd with a bit of their play on Eros and its struggle with Thanatos:

> [That was] the best thing that the new ACT UP did. We had a van that said, "Fuck Bush!" The crowd went crazy. They loved it. They laughed and screamed. I remember there were a bunch of black women. And I was screaming, "Fuck Bush! Fuck Bush!" The whole crowd was lost. They went crazy. It was like this Gospel thing. "Fuck Bush!!!"

The chant was part of a simple paradox: anti plus pleasure. "With the old ACT UP, it wouldn't have worked," Kohler explained. "Because then they needed the die-ins. It had to be heavy."

The ACT UP Model – A Holistic Approach

In summing up a very long chapter on play in ACT UP, it is useful to consider and articulate what made the group's approach work and where did play fit into this. Many have acknowledged that ACT UP had an impact on city, state, and federal AIDS policy. As the stories herein have illustrated, play served an instructive as well as an

external function for the group. Yet few suggested that ACT UP's play, the clowning, the chants, could achieve policy ends by themsleves. "It's only to bring attention to the issue. And to keep us going. To keep us cohesive. And to allow us to relate to each other and know we can trust each other," Meixell explains. While there were some occasions — such as Operation Ridiculous, the Bring in the Clowns demonstration, or the Church Ladies for Choice – when play was an explicit part of the external messaging for an issue, more often it seems the play element was part of the work of creating solidarity, developing community, and making the very difficult task of fighting a large system of neglect bearable for more than a short period of time.

Play in ACT UP also served a seductive dimension, an invitation to a pleasing and joyous rather than dour approach to the aesthetics of social change. For Quester, it's all about the party:

> The playful style will hold people in the movement. There is a core of earnest boring leftists who will go to every single demo. And they will wear a lot of buttons and they will sing, "Free, Free Palestine" (chants in monotone). But they are not going to recruit anyone new because why would anyone want to do that? But if you've got the WAC [Women's Action Coalition] drum corps and the Mary Magdelene Liberation Front, it's a reason to join in because it's a fucking party.

And that's both intoxicating and seductive, participating in world-changing possibilities. ACT UP's playful style created a new style of protest which merged the joyous, ecstatic spirit of exhilarating entertainment with a political agenda aimed at progressive political change. Within this festive revolutionary theater, progressive elements of political change would be linked with notions of social renewal, moving spectators to join the fun, to become part of the concrete action of social change. Spectacle is linked to practical shifts

in people's lives (Ornstein 1998, p. xiv-xv, 6-9). Party as protest thus becomes an invitation to a possibility. "Not to mention that we're just gorgeous and irresistible," Quester adds.

Along the road, the work – and the play that supported it – translated this into policy changes. The playful piece works well when it's part of a coherent, holistic organizing strategy that includes a clear goal, direct action, and legal counsel, as well as a media and communications strategy, as Harrington explained with regard to fast-track drug approval from the FDA. The strategy included a number of components, starting with the kind of "party" Quester refers to, the politics of seduction. Harrington explains. "All of those different pieces that you do: you stage a festival; you demonstrate; you go meet policy-makers; you get arrested. And eventually, down the road, there are some concrete changes that can happen very quickly, as with the FDA." Adds Meixell: "Yeah, I think the Food and Drug Administration now allows people with terminal illnesses to test drugs. That never happened before."

Meixell goes on to explain how the street actions and pranks were part of the escalation, part of putting the issue on the table:

> Well, if you've got an issue, you gotta ask. You write a letter, you write another letter. You get your friends to write letters. You show up, you show up with your friends. You go and you do something. Charles (King) and Keith (Cylar) go and sit down. And then everybody else shows up. And then you make it happen as legally as possible. And this is just part of escalation. If they won't let you in, everybody's there leaning on the door. And the door opens. But there is the problem of you can make them too mad. But the issues somehow come out.

As far as strengths versus the limitations of the playful, creative protest model described above, Meixell suggests it worked best with a recognition that everyone has a set of skills and can contribute something:

> The thing is, we had our specialties and we just trusted each other and we believed in each other. But that's the way we had to work. There was nobody who knew it all. Just like at demonstrations. You know. Nobody is in charge. And [when] the cops come over to me, I'm just about as stupid as a blond can be.

There is no leader organizing this model. Instead, there was a collective will. It was more about a collective process of skills development. The social change drama requires many forms of performance, which include elements of improvisation built on practical wisdom.

Play is affective and emotive as well as cerebral and instrumental. Yet for ACT UP members, it was quite often about storytelling and community building. The play was the storytelling. As James Wagner explains, "It was always a part of ACT UP. Celebrating, laughing, storytelling was also part of it and getting together." If anything, he confesses, "We were guilty we were having so much fun." "It's all about stories," Meixell explained after our interview was completed. In qualitative research, you always get the best rap after you turn off the tape machine. "I ain't got no answers. I just got good stories," Meixell said before I asked if we could go back on tape. "But we all get together and we talk about 'the time that...' We've been together long enough that that's what we do. We talk about the time that..."

There's worse things to do than remember some stories. John McNight's (1987) point follows, "In communities, people know by stories. These community stories allow people to reach back into their common history and their individual experience for knowledge about truth and direction for the future." Ken Plummer (1995) argues that community and storytelling overlap. "Stories need communities to be heard, but communities themselves are also built through story tellings. Stories gather people

around them: they have to attract audiences, and these audiences may then start to build a common perception, a common language, a commonality."

As such, the stories presented here, the narratives, offer a glimpse of the changing nature and conditions of the communities that supported the work of the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power. As with all interviews, I asked Northrop, "Are you fighting to build community or create external changes? And are these aims mutually exclusive?" Her answer provided a striking insight about current activism. "Not at all," she replied. "In fact, I would say they are pretty interdependent. In fact, one of the reasons that one could say there isn't so much of an ACT UP anymore is that the community dispersed." Certainly, this phenomenon is not isolated to ACT UP. "That is true of many social movements," Northrop explained.

When the play receded, many felt less comfortable staying involved with the group. For Harrington, as the chants became less creative, the group lost its vitality. "As the chants diminished, the bloom was off the rose as far as creativity was concerned," he says.

Instead, many members of the group became more specialized – in various areas such as public health, housing, syringe exchange, HIV prevention, and medical treatment – as the enormity of the task ahead sunk in. Harrington explains:

> So once people started getting more strategic about working around certain policy areas, like needle exchange, housing, condoms, education, prevention, and treatment and stuff, I think each group's work had to evolve and adapt. And ultimately, most of those split off and became autonomous organizations, like Housing Works, and Lower East Side Needle Exchange, and TAG.

ACT UP's assumption "Silence = Death" and "Action = Life" propelled a generation of actors (Crimp and Rolston 1990). As Russo's 1988 speech at DHHS conveyed, a system of silences allowed business as usual (racism, sexism, homophobia, classism, and countless other regimes of the normal) to create conditions for a deadly epidemic to progress unchecked.

But the evolution of ACT UP into specialized successor groups was not without its difficulties. "In the case of treatment in ACT UP, there was a lot of tension around strategy and tactics that got to be really destructive," Harrington recalls. Many in the group assumed that participation within the system was tantamount to complicity (Aronowitz 1996). To work with the drug companies was to change the rules of the game. For others, this adherence to what Marcuse called "pure refusal" smacked of social purity, a luxury the group could not afford (Kauffman 2002). While members of the Treatment and Data Committee (which later evolved into TAG) advocated "drugs into bodies" regardless of the means, others suggested that negotiating access to experimental drugs for some but not all created another form of social and cultural apartheid.

Long before the global justice movement called for respect for "a diversity of tactics," ACT UP members went their separate ways over compromises with drug companies (Epstein 2000; Medley 1996). The decision marked a Rubicon for the group (Schulman 2002). After that, much of the old camaraderie of ACT UP was lost. "And so the old playfulness and joyfulness of yore [was lost], in the old days people would not have criticized each others' strategies. They would have just tried the other strategy and seen which one was more effective," Harrington explaind.

Over the years, different cohorts of friends and leadership passed through the groups, each seeking to reinvent what was vital about the group's work. This was work. And for years, members of ACT UP did just that. The group and its movement continued, with some staying in the streets and others finding places at the negotiating table.

Members of the Treatment and Data Committee rejected the notion that the scientific establishment should be viewed simply as enemies. Harrington reflected on his first meetings with drug company representatives he had zapped in previous years: "At the time, I would just say that it was clear from the very beginning, as Maggie Thatcher said when she met Gorbachev, 'We can do business'" (quoted in Epstein 2000, p. 614). Rather than cower or scream, Harrington's Treatment Action Group (TAG) split off from the Treatment and Data Committee in 1992, and sought common ground with representatives of big science. The result was more rapprochement and dialogue. Given the urgent need for results, many favored a pragmatic compromise rather than ideological purity. "But then I guess you could say some people got closer to power," Harrington reflects. "And that itself is like getting closer to money. That itself raises issues for groups."

Yet the work continued. Radical historian L.A. Kauffman (2002) suggests that ACT UP played an essential role in the radical renewal that propelled the global justice movement in the late 1990s. Simultaneously, countless ACT UP spinoff groups and former members dominated the AIDS policy landscape for the next decade. The following chapter will consider where play fit into the organizing which propelled the work of some of these groups.

Chapter IV
Playing by Different Rules:
DIY Experiments in Cultural
Production and Harm Reduction

> The idea of just going out and doing it, or as it is popularly expressed in the underground, the do-it-yourself ethic... Doing it yourself is at once a critique of the dominant mode of passive consumer culture and something far more important: the active creation of an alternative culture. DiY is not just complaining about what is, but actually doing something different.
>
> Stephen Duncombe (1997, p. 117).

> Unlike other more straightforwardly cultural movements of resistance, such as, say, 1970's punk and 1980's anarchopunk, there is a tremendous emphasis in DiY culture laid on actually doing something in the social and political realm and rarely is that something as banal as traditional forms mobilization like marching on a demo and shouting...
>
> George McKay (1998, p. 4).

> Sociability "is a precarious and artificial creation that can be shattered at any moment by someone who refuses to play the game" (Berger 1963:145). Sociability is "playing society" and a return to the moments of childhood role playing in an artificial social world. In other words, a society, its institutions, roles, and mores are the elements of a game being played out daily by people in on-going social interactions...
>
> Peter Nardi, Forthcoming.

In a recent ethnographic study, Susan Bernstein (1991) used the metaphor of "playing the game" to describe the task of managing service contracts in nonprofit agencies. By the early 1990s, ACT UP affinity groups, including the Treatment and Data, Housing, and Syringe Exchange committees recognized that in order to achieve their stated aims, they needed to work more closely with government and industry. For some, the next step in direct action involved service delivery. Some evolved intononprofit

organizations. In the years that followed, they were faced with the question of how to play within the system. For those involved in harm reduction – the housing and syringe exchange groups – this meant playing the game in a way that included socially vulnerable populations: homeless people suffering from chemical dependence, injection drug users, and others who had traditionally been excluded. Including these populations would require the new organizations to radically alter traditional paradigms of service delivery.

In *Man, Play and Games*, anthropologist Roger Caillois (1958/1979) suggests that games in a culture can be conceptualized within a continuum from *paidia* – active, wild, exuberant, highly engaged, spontaneous play – to *ludus*, where the play takes on a subversive dimension, including calculated subversion of standard rules and protocols. As AIDS activists became involved in service provision for people with HIV/AIDS, they borrowed from the do-it-yourself (DiY) – "not just complaining about what is, but actually doing something different" – approach to playing the game.

Not only did this highly creative ethos involve a spirited, aesthetic approach to organizational development, but it also involved rejecting rules that created barriers for people with HIV/AIDS. "AIDS service organizations kept telling us that they couldn't take our clients, and all of the agencies had these stupid rules that said you had to be clean and sober. You had to be this, you had to be that," explained Keith Cylar (2002), the co-president of Housing Works, which grew out of ACT UP/New York's Housing Committee. "At the end of the day, the truth of the matter is that AIDS housing providers did not want drug users," Cylar's ACT UP buddy and Housing Works co-president Charles King concurred. So Housing Works took a DiY approach, building their own housing for people with HIV/AIDS. And they were not alone. This chapter considers how

the ACT UP Housing Committee, Housing Works, the Lower East Side Harm Reduction Center, the Harm Reduction Coalition, Stand Up Harlem, and the Flemming Center borrowed from the DiY ethos and learned to play by a different set of rules to advance their activist aims.

The ACT UP Housing Committee

Few cultural spaces better embodied the DiY ethos than the committees that provided the life pulse of ACT UP. Through this creativity, radical historian and organizer LA Kauffman suggests, ACT UP spurned a process of post-1960s social movement renewal. "From its inception in 1987, the AIDS activist movement pioneered a punk-inflected style of outrageous and mediagenic direct action, employing protest in highly targeted ways that led to consistent concrete victories," she explains (2002). Kauffman is not the only one to recognize the "punk-inflected style" of ACT UP. Allan Clear, who moved to New York from Britain in the early 1980s explains:

> I really liked the stuff that they did because it was just like punk was in Britain in the 1970s, where people were really upset about language; they were people who were upset about images; and people would smash their TVs in England because they were upset about something someone said on television [Marcus, 1989, p. 3-4]. And people were being beaten up because they had safety pins in their clothes.

An urgency propelled this anger and activism. "The group's ferocious creativity had everything to do with the immediacy and immensity of the stakes," Kauffman explains. "Illness and death were a constant presence...a powerful radicalizing force that made its experience unlike that of any previous social movement" (2002). The provocative style and histrionics that accompanied this work – Walter Armstrong's "Legalize Butt-Fucking" sign, sequins on a jacket spelling out "Dykes with Guns. That'll

Scare 'Em," a t-shirt that said "Desperate dying hopeless people with nothing to lose are dangerous and unpredictable," a roomful of guys in black leather jackets attending a meeting with facilitators in drag – were incredibly exciting for those observing and participating. "The way ACT UP used theatre to make change and also to create media interest was really, really creative. So I was in admiration of ACT UP at that point," Clear explains.

Theatricality was certainly part of the ACT UP DiY ethos. ACT UP co-founder and former Housing Committee member Eric Sawyer explains:

> We realized early in our ACT UP experience the importance of street theater, witty chants, slick graphics, and sound bites. Often the coverage we received was limited to fifteen seconds on the TV news. Reporters seldom covered our issues accurately. We learned that witty chants and slick graphics were a better way to make sure that the media reported the facts correctly (2002).

This theatrical flair translated directly into the work of the rambunctious Housing Committee, which formed after the demonstrations accompanying the Republican National Convention in New Orleans in 1988. King explains:

> You know, there were several of us in ACT UP, somewhat separately, who had been passing homeless people in the streets. And the late '80s was when you started seeing the cardboard signs that said, "Homeless with AIDS – Please Help." I was a poor student, so when I passed someone who was homeless on the street, I would given them a quarter. When I passed someone and they had a sign that said they had AIDS, I gave them a buck. But really hadn't figured what to do with that. And it sort of crystallized when we attended the Republican Convention in New Orleans. Those of us that went spent the week hell-raising there and organized a New Orleans ACT UP while we were there. And some of the [local] folks who were there became very, very involved in what we were doing, who were demonstrating with us all day every day, as it turns out were two homeless men. When we got ready to leave, they asked if they could come back with us. And we were very cavalier about, yeah, things were better in New York. When we got back here and tried to help these guys get things together, we realized that things were much better for people with AIDS who were housed, but if you were undomiciled, you might as well still be in Louisiana. And so we organized the Housing Committee of ACT UP. We spent the next year and a half very

> aggressively challenging the city around homelessness and AIDS and its responsibility. (Personal Interview with author 2005).

Shortly after the committee was formed, King worked with Ginny Shubert, a lawyer with the Coalition for the Homeless, to file a lawsuit – *Mixon v. Grinker* – to establish the right to housing for people with HIV/AIDS. King and Shubert worked on the suit for years, pushing it up to the state court of appeals. "We lost it there, but basically it forced the production of almost all of the AIDS housing that now exists in New York City," King explains.

Part of the early success of the ACT UP Housing Committee involved a savvy awareness that policy advances were made possible by having an effective communications strategy, a great deal of research about an issue, and a clear policy alternative to accompany any direct action – no matter how silly it might get. Sawyer explains:

> ACT UP also quickly learned that doing our homework was crucial to the success of an action. We taught ourselves to become experts, both to enable us to answer reporters' questions and to successfully debate government and scientific officials. We learned that it helped to advance our cause when we were able to suggest workable solutions to the problems we were protesting about. Some problems were not the result of ill will, but rather occurred because no one had yet found workable solutions. We found that when we suggested solutions, they were often adopted. This was especially true if an elected official or prominent public figure was sufficiently embarrassed in the media. Thus, ACT UP always prepares fact sheets that include a list of demands that summarize workable solutions (2002).

The result of this approach was a series of innovative calls for the city to house homeless people with HIV/AIDS. G'Dali Braverman, another Housing Committee member, recalls how direct action moved issues, services, and funding which had otherwise been off the radar screen into play.

> So, what we began doing was targeting the [Mayor David] Dinkins Administration and targeting Housing Preservation and Development. The director [commissioner] of the city's Housing Authority then was a Hasidic Jewish man – [Abraham] Biderman. He was very unapproachable. So, we of course stormed his offices, demanded meetings and came up with a series of proposals for scattered-site housing. And within the first six months, we were able to get the Housing Authority to earmark – I think it was five or six hundred units and we had demonstrations that were very creative. We set up house outside HPD offices building, where we had beds, sofas, desks. You know, we just brought in furniture and set ourselves up in front of the building, until we embarrassed Biderman sufficiently that we were able to get meetings (2003).

King, too, laughingly recalls the 1989 action:

> Our HPD action was another amazing one. On Gold Street they have revolving doors. We went around on a Sunday night and picked up a bunch of abandoned furniture on the Lower East Side and Monday morning took it down to Gold Street and stuffed the revolving doors with furniture trying to deliver it to furnish housing for people living with AIDS.

For, Eric Sawyer, those actions against the HPD were some of the most creative moments he had with Housing Works. He explains:

> [W]e were pushing for the development of housing for homeless people living with AIDS. We collected old furniture, loaded it into my pickup truck, and placed the furniture in the middle of the street in front of the New York City housing commissioner's office. We hung a big banner between two streetlights that read "Squatters Camp for Homeless People with AIDS." Then we sat on the furniture while rush-hour traffic tried to drive around us, until we were arrested. The police had to cart our old furniture away in garbage trucks and tow my old pickup truck to the police vehicle pound; the demonstration kept city employees busy for more than an hour. This gave reporters time to ask sufficient questions to understand the dangers of homelessness for people with AIDS and to communicate these dangers to the public. The next month the housing commissioner announced that the city was budgeting $25 million dollars for new AIDS housing programs. It seems the demonstration was a success (2002).

And ACT UP was not alone. Squatters, anarchists, and artists from Harlem to the Lower East Side found themselves involved with this housing struggle. Some, such as artist Seth Tobocman (1999), specifically got involved with the Housing Committee to

push for concessions from the city Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD). King continues:

> What was actually cool about it was we had been pestering Abe Biderman, who was the commissioner who had sworn that no HPD units were going to go to people with AIDS. He was very conservative. So we had been pestering him and we did that action. That very afternoon he issued a press release announcing that he'd established a commission to study whether or not they could identify housing for people with AIDS. That was in June [1989]. We waited until late August, early September, until right before the Dinkins/Koch [mayoral] primary. We sent Biderman a fax saying we had another load of furniture to furnish housing for people with AIDS. "Where would you like it delivered?" That afternoon he issued a press release announcing that they had identified 60 units of housing for people with AIDS. Of course, they were going to turn the units over, 20 units per year, over the course of three years. They were going to do the pilot project to see if people with AIDS could live in their housing.

While there were certainly countless obstacles and impediments, the Housing Committee successfully pushed through them. With each success, the committee garnered more momentum and attention.

The tasks of the Housing Committee dovetailed with the close eye on research, advocacy, and effective communication that characterized ACT UP in general. Here, the unsexy task of finding housing for poor people found a frame for expression, narrative, and messaging. "What would have, otherwise, seemed to be peripheral issues at the time were media worthy. So that gave us a lot of confidence," G'dali Braverman recalled (2003). The ACT UP trademark of substantive research buttressed the Housing Committee's work. "I think the other thing was that some of the people were beginning to do cost analyses around HIV and AIDS, and it was clear that the cost of hospitalization was so high," Braverman explained. "[W]e were also beginning to see tuberculosis cases – predominantly, among homeless people. [Housing] would help keep people healthier

longer, you could keep them out of hospitals and more expensive facilities like skilled nursing facilities, for a longer period" (2003).

Sawyer elaborates, "All these tactics – part civil disobedience, part street theater – succeeded in getting ACT UP's message into the public eye and played an important role in the group's many accomplishments," including housing for people with HIV/AIDS (2002). Here the counter-public narrative of the population the Housing Committee spoke for – homeless people with HIV – propelled itself into the larger public sphere with ACT UP's help. These victories overlapped with ACT UP's larger long-term successes including expedited drug approval from the FDA, establishing a seat at the policy table for people with HIV/AIDS, increased protections for the civil liberties of people living with HIV/AIDS, and increased monies for AIDS services and research around education, prevention, treatment, and housing (Sawyer 2002).

Yet to achieve these successes, the group had to confront a series of social inequalities that accompany health-care delivery in the United States, particularly for communities of color (Kaiser 2002; Smedley, et al. 2003). In the face of obstacles typical of the task of poverty alleviation in the US, the group occasionally flirted with despair. I asked King if the group ever felt discouraged, and what they did about those feelings. We talked about some of the housing actions, such as sitting on couches in the street, following from the Martin Luther King's dramaturgical tradition. Based on this discussion, I asked to what extent a rambunctious creativity was part of the spirit in which this group was born and part of its strategy. He replied:

> Well to start off with, the Housing Committee of ACT UP was amazing fun. I remember when we were trying to get HASA [HIV/AIDS Services Administration] working, back then it was called the Division of AIDS Services. And they had a bunch of new hires, like sixty new employees but hadn't given

> them any desks or workspace. So they were just spending their days sitting in a classroom. And so we organized this action. The union was picketing. Eric [Sawyer] actually drove the truck where we brought a bunch of desks and chairs and phones into the middle of Church Street in front of HRA [Human Resources Administration] and handcuffed ourselves to them. I loved the chant. The chant was probably one of the best that we ever created. It was: "The check is in the desk and the desk is in the mail." (Laughs).

As the work of the Housing Committee churned forward, members became increasingly aware of the structural barriers to housing homeless people with HIV/AIDS who had chemical dependence issues. Dealing with AIDS involved addressing endemic social problems of racism, income inequality, and discrimination faced by the truly disadvantaged in America (Alder, et al. 1993; Moore, et al. 1994; Wilson, 1987). Sawyer recalled seeing a different picture of AIDS in Harlem, where he worked:

> I knew a couple of people in the neighborhood who were homeless, who didn't have housing....I just started reading a lot about it and, because of the connection with drug use, started learning that there's this whole other AIDS plague, tied to drug use, that is very prevalent in homeless communities, and it's a whole area where there are no services (2002).

The activists recognized that the demographics of the AIDS pandemic would continue to shift toward underserved high-risk groups such as low-income women and people of color (Levenson 2004). And they pushed for the government to do its job. King continues:

> So, the actions were fun. The actions were creative. We saw success at the margins. But at the end of the day, the truth of the matter is that AIDS housing providers did not want drug users. Homeless providers didn't want people with AIDS. And so even if government had been willing to take on its part of the responsibility, their probably wouldn't have been providers who were willing to do it with people who we were trying to get housed.

In the face of such obstacles, it began to dawn on Housing Committee members that they would probably have to start housing these people themselves.

Housing Works: A DiY Approach to Harm Reduction Housing

Housing Works was born of this frustration and ambition. Its founders, Cylar, King, and Sawyer, had all been active members of ACT UP from its inception. Throughout the 1990s, ACT UP evolved with the ever-elusive nature of the virus, staying together longer than anyone could have expected. Leadership changed, activists died, and Monday night meetings continued. With each new level of carnage, the task of halting the epidemic's progress became more daunting. AIDS was fully entwined within the mosaic of poverty. Within this context, the group struggled to maintain its focus (see Epstein 1996, p. 290, 294; Hardy 1991; Minkowitz 1990; Nealon 1991; Pepper 1990; Levy 1991).

Sawyer described the floor debate over creating a different organization, outside of ACT UP, to address these needs:

> ACT UP didn't want to do housing. They didn't want paid staff. They wanted to do activism. They didn't want to do housing or provide services. We would come to the floor and tell people about our search for buildings or whatever, and there was a huge outcry of, "You can't have paid staff, you can't get governmental contracts. That's going to limit what we can say. It's going to compromise our voice." And we were like, "Hell – that's bullshit. We'll not only bite the hand that feeds us, we'll chew it off, if it's trying to slap us." And we kind of took that motto to Housing Works (Sawyer 2004).

"The strategy was to push, push, push," Cylar said in describing the approach of the early Housing Works years. "It wasn't different than the general ACT UP strategy about inclusion. But it was always to get those [other] populations also included. It was easy for the world to deal with gay white men. People of color were so far off the Richter scale, and it was also to hold people-of-color organizations accountable." This meant creating an organization in which aggressive advocacy for unpopular causes coincided

with the group's unique institutional needs. "Housing Works started when, after demonstrating, fighting, and working in the AIDS community, the people that I cared the most about were the people least likely to get served," Cylar continued (2002).

> So we decided we had to do it ourselves. All of a sudden, we got this arrogant streak. Fuck it—nobody else can do this. We're gonna do it. So we started writing about it and talking about it. We talked our way our of depression and into action

From there Cylar explains:

> And we started a process that involved actually twenty to thirty people. And we talked about what kind of bylaws and organization it would be that was a shared responsibility and would empower clients. Then we recruited a whole lot of people who were in this group, AIDA – AIDS into Direct Action. It was made up of homeless and formerly homeless people, many people of color who did direct action around these issues. We included them in all of the discussions because it was important to design something that they had insight into. It was important for their voices to be heard throughout. We got a lot of them on the board so that if push came to shove, they could stop it [the growth of Housing Works, if necessary]. We wanted to be different than AIDS, Inc.

The creation of Housing Works was not a comfortable situation for some advocates who had come of age with ACT UP – or even with Student for a Democratic Society years earlier. Many in ACT UP were familiar with social theorist Herbert Marcuse's idea of "pure refusal," a position that held that participation in a problematic system is tantamount to complicity (Aronowitz 1996). While few social movements are able to remain entirely outside of the framework of service provision, ACT UP maintained this position and the group persevered, although not without difficulties. Fissures reflective of the larger society pressed the group, as demands around specific populations become more and more urgent. And the group split into different organizations. Braverman feels something was lost during this period:

> There were certainly periods where, I think, there were some factional elements of the organization that felt that maybe we were missing issues around women, or issues around minority communities, or around drug use, and that we, as predominantly gay white men, are not addressing these concerns. I don't really think that we failed in those respects, because I think all those issues[had a] role and that very capable people created service organizations that took many of those issues where they needed to go. I think where we missed was the implosion that happened. I think that there came a time when we really needed to have, maybe some sort of hierarchical kind of administration to hold the organization together as it grew and started spreading and people began feeling maybe a sense of competition around their issues....I think it would have been in our best interest to have formulated some sort of a structure that would have allowed ACT UP to continue existing in ways that would have made it more functional through the mid-1990s. I think that's where we missed (2003).

Despite its rocky start, in the years to follow Housing Works would take a lead in addressing much of the U.S. AIDS activist agenda. Although its orientation toward service provision was novel, much of the DiY approach that had proven so successful for ACT UP found its way into Housing Works. King describes how Housing Works played with the rules of the game of contracted services (Bernstein 1991):

> I think the way we brought that spirit of creative action into Housing Works was in how we designed the programs. Take our first scattered site program. Our housing contract had some preclusion about drug use, requirements around being clean and sober. And we demanded and demonstrated for a contract that would require us to take people who were still using drugs. What everybody else in the country was precluding, we decided we would fight for.

Housing Works always displayed this audacious quality of doing all the things one was told they were not supposed to do. While other service providers and social workers were talking about collecting data and making arguments, Housing Works was protesting its funders and challenging them to do the right thing. There seemed to be a real liberatory quality to the group's work. This rambunctious approach also found expression in the group's programming, as King explains:

> I want to emphasize that it also played completely into program development. So, for example, our Independent Living Program started out as a total scam on the system. The way the system operated, the state rental assistance program was in place. The way New York City interpreted the regs, you had to have an apartment and be at risk of an eviction to be entitled to the rental assistance. So there was no way somebody who was homeless could get access to it. So we started looking at ways to get around that. We started renting apartments on the open market. We would do a legal sublet with the client. We would move them in with a written promise from them to pay their broker's fee, security deposit, and first month's rent within thirty days of moving into the apartment. We would wait until 30 days passed; we'd serve them with an eviction notice; and they were now rent stabilized so they could go down to HASA and apply for rental enhancement. And we did this like 15 or 20 times. And that's when the city caught on to what we were doing and confronted us. There was nothing illegal about what we were doing. Our response was, "We're not the ones who are acting illegally, you're the ones who are acting illegally. Set up a system so homeless people can prequalify and we'll stop doing this."

And the city did exactly what Housing Works had asked for.

In other cases, the group would set up "justice squads" of case managers who would lock themselves to chairs in the offices of the Human Resources Administration (HRA) until benefits and housing were provided for their clients. Here, Housing Works borrowed directly from the tactics of the ACT UP Housing Committee, which had been so successful using the technique that the city would house people as soon as their lawyers got an injunction. The strategy of pushing the rules until the bureaucrats broke down and served clients was a cornerstone of the group's approach.

King describes how Housing Works drew the attention of the Department of Investigation (DOI) after the city started funding its scattered-site program: "Even then, in the scattered site, the city-funded apartments, people would get up to a certain amount of rent and utilities were folded into the apartment's rent. So we started renting our ILP[??] apartments with utilities included…That got us our first DOI investigation."

Part of what made Housing Works so successful was actually listening and building programs designed around clients' stated needs. Here again, the group was not afraid to bend the rules if that would get their clients what they needed. King tells the story of the Housing Works job training program:

> The job training program started off as a scam. We wanted our clients, and most of them were active users, to have some safe space, and so providing them with stipend work around the office was a way to do that. But most of them, because it was so hard to get an AIDS diagnosis, were still on public assistance. Under the public assistance regs, there was a dollar for dollar offset against your benefits. And Ginny Shubert was actually the one who researched the regs and came up with the fact that expenses related to a job training program were exempt from this offset. So we called it a job training program. And our clients did not understand. We explained to them what we were doing and why we were doing it, but they were the ones who then turned around and said, "But we want a real job training program." And again, there we went to every possible job training program, public or private, and what we heard pretty universally; some were polite in how they phrased it; some said it just this way: "Why would you spend money for people with AIDS to work when they are just going to die anyway?" And so, going back to despair into the arrogance that allows you to take action, that solidified it for us. We were going to create a job training program that worked for homeless people with AIDS, even if we didn't get a dime from anybody to put it in place. We were going to make it into place because the whole fucking world had said "You can't do this."

With Housing Works, everything was on the table. And that was the interesting, rambunctious thing about the way the group played. King remembers the basement desk where those playful meetings first took place:

> Actually, when we started out we opened an office with one desk, one phone and five chairs. It was kind of an interesting thing. Now that desk, the reason we had that desk was it was too big for the tenant that preceded us to get it out of the space. So, it was this huge monster desk. It became our conference table. And I remember we used to sit around that table every morning for problem solving. Then we'd have these weekly staff meetings. We were small enough to sit around this desk and do these weekly brainstorming things. And it did sort of help us break out of the box and we'd think of wild and crazy ideas. And sure enough, one of these wild and crazy ideas would work. So, yeah, being creative in the

> actions is important, but it was also really important that we brought that same spirit of can-do playfulness, creativity to thinking about what programs would look like.

Over the next fifteen years, Housing Works would remain true to its founding ethos, even as the organization grew and straddled the divide between direct action and direct services. The organization would both create spaces for socially vulnerable populations to call home while fighting the industry that would grow and profit from the epidemic. Walking through the Lincoln Tunnel during the first day of Housing Work's 2005 Campaign to End AIDS, Sawyer reflected on Housing Work's first fifteen years:

> When we founded Housing Works, our whole mission was to speak truth to power and to help those people who were getting no help from anyone else. And I think as long as Housing Works continues to fight the good fight and to do god's work, its going to survive. And that's what it does. Housing Works speaks truth to power. It bites the hand that feeds it. And it tries to bring a reality to the world while it cares for the most disenfranchised people in our community.

Squatting, Building, and Succeeding

Seth Tobocman was one of the many artists who brought their aesthetic sensibilities to the squatter movement in New York City in the late 1980s and early 1990s. He worked with the December 12th Movement and with Braverman on the ACT UP Housing Committee to target HPD. He also worked with squatters to help bring art into the DiY approach used to push for housing. "That made the building more imaginative," Tobocman said, describing one project. "The meaning of the phrase 'direct action' was right there."

In the *The New Urban Frontier*, Neil Smith (1996) points out that cities as diverse as Hamburg, Amsterdam, and New York City have all had contemporary squatting movements. Squatters maintain a distinct image in the popular imagination, both in New York and internationally. The East Village squatters have been the subject of several academic treatments and even a large-scale graphic comic book by Tobocman (Mele

2000, p. 261-87; Sites 2003, p. 101-35, 169; Smith 1996; Van Kleunen 1994; Tobocman 2000?). It is generally accepted that squats date back to the 1960s in New York. Andrew Van Kleunen quotes from a 1990-1 statement from the Lower East Side squatter community, of which the East Village is a significant enclave. “We are young and old, black and white, Latino and Asian…We are people of the Lower East Side. The majority of us are low-income people. We can no longer afford the skyrocketing rents in our own neighborhood” (quoted in Van Kleunen, 1994, p. 285).

There is a deep philosophical point to the East Village squatter movement: that housing is an essential human right. Additionally, squatters are associated with counterculture, youth subculture, punk rock, deep ecoology, anarchism, and DiY practice and culture. Thus, the Lower East Side squatter statement continues: “We have taken charge of this important area of our lives: housing.” To this end, squatters moved into vacant, unused buildings: “Through our resources and creativity we are rebuilding structures left abandoned by the city for years” (quoted in Van Kleunen 1994, p. 285). By 1994, some 500 people lived in 20 abandoned buildings on the Lower East Side of Manhattan (p. 286).

Art and play were constants within the squatters’ struggle. Tobocman recalls the “Speakout with Milk and Cheese” in the weeks after the Tompkins Square Park uprising of 1988. The two puppet-like characters carried signs for “ A Slice of Spite and a Carton of Hate,” as part of the response to the social control imposed by the police. Yet not all squatters consider the play element an effective part of the struggle. Former squatter Michael Shenker explains:

> Well, there wasn't a lot of it [play]. Our survival was not dependent upon it. I think it's a very brief phenomenon. I don't think it's going to make much of a difference. As a matter of fact, I think it tends to be counterproductive.

Shenker's answer speaks to the complex nature of play within social movements. He goes on to note that music and cultural production, however, were part of the movement:

> I mean, we did a lot of art. And visual artists were particularly effective. We did a particular amount of propaganda, which was influential for people. It created sympathy or empathy. It opened up people's minds. So visual arts were particularly effective, [with] concerts [also] sometimes being done.

Still, the playful spirit was not often part of this work, according to Shenker. "[T]he spirit of levity, which often accompanies play, was diminished by the seriousness of the endeavor," he recalls. One Housing Works slogan is "Housing Works, Shelter Kills." Shenker concurs: "Some people died. Homelessness kills." . The stakes were often extremely high, as he explains:

> [O]ur struggles in the buildings sometimes came down to physical confrontations, beatings; cops got beat; it wasn't something to rejoice about. The result of a failed action had a direct impact, which was that people were in the streets. Sometimes they go to jail and when they get out all their belongings have been taken out of their home. So, it wasn't too joyful or playful.

Yet paradoxically, a joyous spirit of play did often accompany this life-and-death struggle. When asked about his best experiences with the use of creativity in his work, Shenker smiled and acknowledged:

> We had a blast the whole time. It was like fun. Yeah, it was a pain, but the other side of that was great joy and pleasure. Incredible culture too, smoking parties and stuff like that. So there was a great deal to this. It was a great time. The stakes were incredibly high. You could lose your apartment if you had a bad demo.

After years of highly publicized battles with the City of New York – dramatized in the work of Smith (1996) and Tobocman (1999) – the remaining squatters in the East Village were finally granted the right to live permanently in the remaining squats in the

neighborhood (Sites 2003, p. 169). In one battle with the police, the city actually brought in a tank to evict the determined squatters, who were willing to be arrested to defend their homes and the idea of a human right to housing. For the squatters, the gentrification of the East Village is about more than real estate, it's about a state-sponsored strategy to establish forms of social control over poor people and people of color (Van Kleunen, 1994, p. 299). The few that remain represent a significant victory, as Shenker explains:

> The apex is right now because we are codifying the entire process, which means we are going to be signing some contracts with the city and the state government. And these contracts kind of summarize the struggle, 'cause they are going to be binding for 32 years or whatever. And so we'll see what's in writing, you know?

Culture Jamming at Stand UP Harlem

Housing Works was certainly not the only harm reduction AIDS housing provider. A different organization that built on the lessons of both ACT UP and the squatter movement was Stand Up Harlem. Louis Jones, the founder of this group, now works to organize a drug users union with the Positive Health Project, a harm reduction and syringe exchange program in Manhattan. Jones has been living with HIV since 1986, and was diagnosed with hepatitis C in 1999. He started our interview by noting that in his life, he'd quickly learned there was nothing to lose in terms of his precarious hold on life with HIV/AIDS. Fear of death was no longer part of the picture. "But then you find yourself still alive…" he reflected before the formal interview began.

Jones got his start organizing in the early 1970s, after a short affiliation with the Black Panthers. His influences included Martin Luther King and Louis Farrakhan. Jones recalls that he brought revolutionary books to school. His favorite movies included *The Battle of Algiers* and *The Spook who Stood by the Door*, a movie about African

Americans being trained to work for COINTELPRO who instead "used this training to train revolutionaries," he says.

As a housing activist, Jones got his start squatting a building on 6th Street between Avenues A and B in New York's East Village. After working with groups including Milagros Loisaida and Abelante, Jones says he was "hooked." Yet "it all came together in East Harlem." There, he saw the praxis of "ideas into action" as he helped build and open a homeless shelter for mothers at 144th and Lexington. From there, Jones says, he "started feeling empowerment": "That to me felt so incredible. You talk about emotions. I just felt such pleasure. Everyone thinks about pleasure in terms of decadence, but there was more to it than that. I was moved. After a lifetime of searching for something, Jones found a direction for his life. He explains: "It brought fulfillment. I felt animated. We were living together, sleeping together, and working for change. We were part of something very global, a global movement. Yet our take was from the local view, as the cliché goes." The DiY ethos of the housing movement proved thrilling, he says: "Give us the resources and we can do this."

By far the greatest challenge Jones faced Jones was the looming HIV/AIDS catastrophe. He explains:

> In the beginning, it was primarily a homeless movement. We marched from New York to DC. Mitch Snyder with the Center for Non-Violence organized that in 1989. My colleagues, compatriots were dying. It was very scary. Yet I could not break my denial or speak out about having HIV myself.

That was until yet another funeral.

"I was at a memorial and I was angry," Jones recalls. "That was one feeling I was in touch with." He'd recently come into contact with ACT UP. There were so many people living and dying with HIV, and no one was saying anything. But at that memorial,

he says, “I was moved to stand up and break the isolation. So, that’s what we were when we started our organization, Stand Up Harlem.”

For Stand Up Harlem, “putting ideas into action” meant “living together, working together.” And it included a sense of play, if only to break down the tension between work and home, as Jones explains:

> Somewhere along the way, we did find ways to deal with the tension ‘cause we were living together at 160 West 120th Street. We’d just get out of the house. One of us would say, “Lets get out of here.” So we got out of the house and walked. One day we just started out, not knowing where, and ended up in a school yard, where we played on the swings and seesaws. And there were some tough guys, just out of the joint, acting like children…feeling good.

A minute after telling this story, Jones broke from the narrative and looked right at me. “Thanks for letting me remember that, cause most of those guys are dead now,” he said.

Thus, play was a part of an effort to find shelter, work, meaning, and solidarity. “In the struggle, we had a philosophy of common living: ‘Not for everyone, but something for everyone.’ We would never refuse anyone.” This low-threshold approach to serving everyone who walked in the door anticipated elements of the harm reduction movement that would emerge as a best-practice approach to providing services and care for people with HIV/AIDS. Jones explains:

> We had an “active reception” policy at Stand Up Harlem. It was an open-door policy to drug users, a high tolerance for a low threshold to care. When someone walked in the door, the first question wasn’t “When's the last time you used?” which was part of every other program; our question was “When's the last time you ate or had a shower and are you hungry?” We acknowledged that there is drug use, and tried to integrate it. Our view was there is a time and place for everything. So let’s reduce the risks.”

In many ways, this caring initial question represented a paradigmatic shift in the way the housing game was played in New York City. I asked Jones about the notion of harm reduction as pleasure activism. Jones replied:

> That's an interesting way of explaining it. To be honest, play and pleasure activism, that's the first time I have heard that. We were not all work. We were play, pleasure people too. But we were not all that balanced...We worked hard but we also played hard. Sometimes it was just to go out in the country and breath. That experience of pleasure was so essential. Because you have to understand, we were dealing with our mortality here. There is the old expression, "drink and be merry for tomorrow we die." I don't remember who said it.

The rest of the expression is, of course, "We should enjoy life as much as possible, because it will be over soon," from the books of Ecclesiastes and Isaiah (Hirsch, et al, 2002). The point was never lost on Jones or others in the harm reduction movement. "I don't think we do acknowledge the pleasure though, not as much as we should do," says Allan Clear.

Thus, drug use was viewed as part of a continuum of options, which ranged from seeking pleasure to stopping pain or sometimes just "getting normal," as Jones explains:

> Using was dying with dignity – with dignity because it was my choice. No one was making it for me. I took a stand set for me, for those I knew who chose drugs when they were facing death. When they were facing death, they would want to cop in the midst of all that pain. For some it was just to get that old familiar, this old feeling, relationship, lover, what have you. This pain relief that the doctor might not give or it might not be enough. And this was not from a pharmacy. It was on your own terms. The liberty was what I was elated about – the choice without shame. The idea was I had choice. That was what I was doing....And culturally, that was another thing. It was always part of saying goodbye at the funerals. As they say, doors close and open. The New Orleans thing. Drugs and pleasure were part of it even with recovery folks.

"Social rec" was another notion I really liked, the idea of social recreational drug use. It was about connecting with someone else, taking a bag, listening to music or watching a DVD, to get the full range of experience with no regret.

I asked Jones about the notion of risk, a theme which had come up in many of the other interviews. “Risk was always a part of it. I loved the risk, the hustle of getting my way into housing when I had nothing else,” he said. For Jones, a willingness to take risks was part of changing the rules of the housing game in New York. Like the Situationists and the culture jammers before him (Vaneigem 1967/1994; Boyd 2002; Lasn 2002). Jones recognized that he could borrow from established rules, yet turn them on their head.

For culture jammers, the point is to turn the language of one’s opponents against them, as with Japanese Aikido. The method involves taking the power of a method, word, or message into one’s own hands, and redeploying it to one’s benefit. One example is the Situationists, who resisted the highly controlling contours of Haussmann’s Paris (Benjamin 1999) through radical walking tours and a process of detournement, which called for radical shifts in the patterns of everyday life and routine (Lasn 2002) Some culture jammers are urbanites who attack billboards or jam hate-mongering websites. Others are activists, such as the Church Ladies for Choice (Cohen-Cruz 1998), who turn the words of church hymns into pro-choice anthems.

Culture Jamming can be defined and expressed in countless ways, from Dada to borrowing the methods of one’s FBI trainers and using them for liberatory ends for a Black revolutionary insurgency, as Dan Freeman attempts in *The Spook who Sat by the Door*. The movie, part of the late 1960s “Blaxploitation” genre, explores the fictional life of the first African American FBI agent . After training and a distinguished tenure as a photocopier with the agency, Freeman sets out on his own as a social worker assigned to work with a gang in Chicago, the King Cobras. Yet instead of merely working with them

as delinquents, Freeman uses his FBI training in urban guerilla warfare to train the gang members as an insurgent underground movement. "You really wanna mess with whitey," Freeman tells them, "I can show you how." In so doing, Freeman trains the Cobras to look remarkably like the Black Panthers. The group includes a propaganda leader ("Minister of Information") assigned to "talk to the people in a language that they understand," (quoted in Fuchs 2004). Throughout their training, we hear Freeman repeating the lessons he was given by the FBI.

Louis Jones' work with Stand Up Harlem of "getting my way into housing when I had nothing else" displayed from a similar ethos. Having witnessed the workings of the housing market in New York, Jones felt comfortable making use of these tools to procure housing for those most in need: "I would talk my way into places, bluffing, get the keys, and then the money would show up at the eleventh hour." A spirit of play helped the members of Stand Up Harlem, just like it helped members of Freeman's Cobras, who make use of both theatrical playacting as well as playful levity to continue the difficult task they set out for themselves.

Play is part of incorporating Freeman's lessons from his years in the FBI and applying them to the "revolutionary" task of shifting the oppressive dynamics of life on the streets. During one of these playful moments, the Cobras assess and deconstruct the functions of racism in their everyday lives (de Certeau 1988; Lefebvre 1991; Vaneigem, 1967/1994). The group shares stories and recalls memories, laughing off the absurdities of the rules of the Jim Crow system. "You dig those plantation movies on television? No chains, no whips. Bunch a happy darkies just waitin' on Massa Charlie and his family and diggin' it," one says (quoted in Fuchs 2004). While the memories are both ridiculous and

atrocious, the guerillas acknowledge that the task at hand is to change the rules. To do this, the group declares their autonomy from the previous rulebook: "What we got now is a colony, what we wanna create is a new nation. In order to do that, we gotta pay a different kind of dues. Freedom dues" (quoted in Fuchs 2004).

The “freedom dues” for Stand Up Harlem were that virtually all of the original members are dead, with the exception of Jones. For Stand Up Harlem, the point was to use direct action to get housing one day, and “the next day we’d lie in the grass in the park,” Jones recalls:.

> There is this photo of us all laying in the grass with the light shining on our faces. I don’t know who took it, maybe me. If ever there was a group of people who needed to live it was us, a group of people who were dying.

Syringe Exchange and Harm Reduction: From the Lower East Side to South San Francisco

In the days shortly after the death of seminal New York punk rocker Joey Ramone in April 2001 (Kaye 2001), Allan Clear gave a speech in which he compared the punk DiY approach to that of the harm reduction movement, which had built a fresh new approach to service delivery which was reaching the hardest to reach of socially vulnerable populations. It was not an unusual statement from the former punk musician, drug user, and ACT UP member, who now has the ear of the New York City Department of Health as well as the city’s drug users and syringe exchange advocates (Richardson 2004).

Clear has been Executive Director of the Harm Reduction Coalition (HRC) since October 1995. HRC is a national organization committed to reducing drug-related harm among individuals and communities by initiating and promoting local, regional, and

national harm reduction education and training, community organizing, and advocacy. Before joining HRC, Clear was co-founder and Executive Director of the Lower East Side Harm Reduction Center, an innovative community-based organization serving drug users that developed out of the Lower East Side Needle Exchange, which began as a project of ACT UP and became one of the five original state-authorized programs. He is a leading national spokesperson on issues related to harm reduction, needle exchange, and the rights of drug users.

Like many involved in New York's harm reduction movement, Clear got his start organizing with ACT UP. He recounts:

> Living in New York City in the mid-'80s, it was the epicenter of the HIV and AIDS epidemic. And I guess the first time I heard about AIDS, it was 1985. And I was using a whole bunch of drugs at that point, from the end of the 1970s through the end of the 1980s. And I started going to twelve-step meetings...And every other person, literally, had HIV. So at that point, friends of mine started going to ACT UP. And then as now, people thought of it as a gay organization. And I wondered what my role was.

That role would become more obvious as Clear became more familiar with the omnipresent ACT UP committees:

> Actually I first heard Richard [Elovich] speak at a meeting and he was talking about needle exchange. And I thought, I ought to go and do that because that's where I fit in. No one does anything for drug users and I'll go and do stuff around needle exchange.

Once involved with the syringe exchange committee, Clear would encounter the tools that would become the cornerstone of the evidence-based approach propelling the harm reduction movement. Empirical testing, observation, assessment, and reassessment became central elements when ACT UP recognized that injection drug users were dying

from AIDS because they did not have clean needles in the late 1980's. So, members of the group got arrested for distributing clean needles on New York's Lower East Side, brought data to court showing that clean needles save lives without increasing drug use, argued for the medical necessity of syringe exchange, got their charges thrown out, and changed public policy It is one of countless examples of the use of experimentation, testing, and a new approach toward praxis that helped make ACT UP and its successors.

Elovich, a long-time ACT UP member, recalls some of the disruptions that put the medical bureaucracy on notice:

> My engagement began when as a representative of ACT UP's Treatment and Data Committee in 1989, I heard a researcher dismiss addicts as a "non-compliant population" while explaining why they were not represented in clinical drug trials. I remember standing up in an auditorium at the New York Academy of Medicine, not three blocks from the methadone clinic where I had been a client seven years before, identifying myself with other addicts and challenging this notion. I'd stood often in front of audiences as a performer, but never before as a heroin addict in recovery (undated).

The point was that effective activism could be thought of as a series of public performances with audiences including policy-makers, movement publics, and allies (Brouwer 2001; McAdam 1996).

ACT UP brought the sort of urgent theatrical sensibility Elovich describes to its most successful actions, and in so doing transformed the way activism was conducted. Effective disruptions involved breaking down social and cultural barriers in order to create the context for policy-makers to move. In order to be successful, activists realized that they would need to battle against a medical model that sought to control people, forcing them to wait for the bureaucracy to work. While some died waiting, others, such as Elovich and other members of ACT UP, worked to create a new approach to

HIV/AIDS prevention which sought to meet gay men, drug users, prostitutes, and anyone else where they shot up, had sex, and made a living. The result was a series of radical approaches toward community-based prevention activism that came to be understood as harm reduction. Syringe exchange was born within this milieu, as Elovich recalls:

> When the city's pilot needle exchange program became so politicized that it was shut down in 1990, ACT UP founded an illegal program, jokingly referred to as its longest running civil disobedience. Operated entirely by volunteers, we performed weekly going out to distribute clean needles, condoms, and bilingual information about health services to thousands of injection drug users at risk for AIDS in the Bronx, East Harlem, the Lower East Side and Brooklyn. Our services were informed by the theory of "harm reduction," the belief that change is not all or nothing, and that even incremental changes could be valuable in helping people save their own lives (undated).

Throughout the late 1980s and 1990s, ACT UP successfully redeployed the Gandhian/civil rights era repertoire of non-violent civil disobedience techniques to fight for effective treatment for people with HIV/AIDS. Under the mantra “drugs into bodies,” the group successfully fought to expedited approval for HIV/AIDS drugs, treatment, and services. Much of this work was marked by a dramaturgical flair. Elovich explains how this approach was used to achievee policy gains in the area of harm reduction:

> The next phase of the performance was in front of a judge. I along with eight other AIDS activists…were arrested when we openly challenged the law that criminalized needle possession. We based our defense on the legal principle which held that the minor legal harm of needle distribution was justified by preventing the much greater harm of drug users and their families dying of AIDS. We couldn't take the judge out to see needle exchange, so we needed to bring experiences of the drug users, the reality of the sharing of needles and drug users' lack of access to effective treatment, and the concreteness of our intervention into her courtroom. Listening to our testimony, the judge agreed, finding needle exchange to be a justifiable medical necessity (undated).

Despite a federal ban on funding syringe exchange and other frank approaches to HIV prevention, over the following decade needle exchange became an established

approach to HIV prevention work (Crimp 2002; Siplon 2002), embraced by health professionals and even a many politicians including New York's Mayor Michael Bloomberg).

On the West Coast, syringe exchange supporters did not even need to get arrested to see this radical DiY public health approach find support. Global justice activist Starhawk considers her involvement with San Francisco's Prevention Point one of the high points of her long career as an activist:

> One of the actions I've been involved in where I can clearly say every time we did it, "Ok, this is saving someone's life," was the needle exchange program that was done in the 1990s in San Francisco by Prevention Point. There were a number of my close friends who were more involved in setting it up, who also worked in the field of urban health and planning and sociology and they'd been doing studies, surveys on drug use and AIDS. And they felt like a needle exchange would be one way of addressing the spread to the drug-using population. And of course, that was entirely illegal in California. So we decided to do it as a direct action. It worked beautifully. The first week when we went out and did it we thought we were going to get arrested. And we exchanged about eighteen needles and we didn't get arrested. And then we started going out every week. And it just grew and grew. We kept not getting arrested. And within a few months we were exchanging hundreds and then thousands of needles every day. And finally, after about three months, the *San Francisco Chronicle* ran a story on us. And they interviewed the police chief who said, "Yeah, we know they are out there, but they are doing something that needs to be done." And so it sort of halfway turned into a social service program. And eventually we were able to get the mayor to declare a state of public health emergency and do an end-run around the state laws. And actually fund and legalize the programs. (Personal interview.)

Clear's first ACT UP action was Stop the Church in 1989. "I went to the first meeting for syringe exchange," he explained. And he found his niche. Clear had already encountered the DiY approach to cultural production and community building when he was growing up in England. Clear even had his own band. "And it really was about DiY. The possibilities were endless. We put our own record. We met John Peel outside the BBC. And he played our record on the radio. It was called Zeitgeist," he recalled. Once

involved with punk, Clear was connected with a culture-building trajectory of ever-expanding tribes connected through the music and the DiY ethos.

"Every Thursday, my friends and I would listen to the DJ John Peel at two o' clock in the morning on our transistor radios," former East German punk Michael Böhlke – otherwise known as "Pankow" – reflected in 2005. "Punk was a cross-cultural phenomenon in the east," he explained. "The 'tristesse' of the GDR unleashed a huge creative potential, and the minute you were on the margins of society you tapped into a network of other artistic activity" (quoted in Paulick 2005). That network would support Clear's life and work.

Once Clear got involved with public health activism, he brought much of the same creative ethos, the prefigurative politics of building a world you wanted to live in, to his work with ACT UP and harm reduction. He recalls:

> I left England with that approach. Someone like Henry Miller was a big influence on how you live your whole life. If you look at harm reduction, it's a whole bunch of old punks. I think it was not only the anarchist thing to add input to the conversation. It's not that you should disobey authority, but that authority really does not count. It has no legitimacy. And be there to challenge things.

In her oral history interview with G'Dali Braverman (2003) Sarah Schulman noted that most people are taught that "no means no" when they are brought up. Yet for Clear, Braverman, and many others involved, their experience with ACT UP helped change their view of such understandings. ACT UP pushed to change the rules of the game with their zaps and cultural activism. This thinking was part of a larger activist approach to questioning the basic tenants of scientific knowledge and notions of medical expertise (Epstein 2000; Moore 2006; Murray and Paine 1988).

For Clear, the call to question authority was based on an assumption that it had no legitimacy anyway. This thinking was part of his upbringing, he says:

> The place I come from is a real working-class place. I talk about that in *6.57*. I've been in a book about soccer fans in Portsmouth [Pennant and Sylvester 2004]. And there is something ingrained in me that comes from that. I mean, where I come from is real working-class, never having anything. And I think that that produces a kind of tenacity and determination. And Portsmouth fans are very proud of their sixteen titles, which isn't exactly do-it-yourself, but it is a kind of anarchy.

Part of this anarchy, of course, was building something yourself when nothing else was available. For the Portsmouth soccer fans, Clear was also aware that there was a need for a harm reduction approach to playing around:

> Interesting thing on that in this book I just read, *6.57*, which was the train that fans used to take to get out of Portsmouth to go to away games. By the end of the 1980s, they'd all gotten into drugs. What you had in those days were firms. And you'd go and fight the other firms. It wasn't really random violence, it was part of the game. And that's what you look forward to.

The play for the Portsmouth fans included the carnivalesque passion to push the limits of the line between spectator and participant. "Yeah, but no one would actually watch the game. You went there for the violence. But what they ended up doing was ecstasy and stuff with the other firms in the clubs and stuff." Clear was too young growing up to have been a part of it. "I was, like, ten when I was going to football games. But I knew what the experience was. You were aware of the violence. It'd be going off all around you, which is sort of exciting," he recalls.

In many ways, the contact high Clear speaks of with his peripheral connection to soccer violence was like what punk was about: a highly embodied approach to risk and play. For Eric Rofes, risk always accompanies play. He explains:

> You talk about embodying stuff, I talk with my students about putting your body in those icky places that are going to challenge you and be meaningful to you in

> the long run. Last night I went to "Big Love," which is a bar night once a week for really, really fat guys, of kind of masculine fat guys in New York. I was there and I was uncomfortable...I feel like lot of the growth is putting yourself in those uncomfortable places where growth can occur.

As I was interviewing Clear, I started thinking about my first punk shows, the Dead Kennedys in 1983 and the Circle Jerks later in the year. Clear explains, "It wasn't so much violence as much as an edge. There was a buzz. I don't remember that night fighting. But there was lots of spitting. It was sporadic. All that kind of thing happened but it wasn't widespread." I remember my brother jumping off the stage onto the crowd. And then I jumped, waiting for the crowd to hold me up. It was a risky, amazing form of edgy, high adrenaline play. One part high-octane experience, another part trust, a third lack of self. For many, including myself, civil disobedience is the closest thing to that feeling. It is the closest thing to that highly embodied experience of rough play that Rofes talks about.

In many ways, ACT UP surpassed the passion I had for punk. When I moved to California in 1988, I was hoping to find the punk-inspired street ethos I'd read about (Belsito and Davis 1983). But by the time I got there, much of that passion had waned. Where it still manifested itself was in ACT UP/Golden Gate. I still remember G'dali Braverman's ripped jeans, leather boots, and the "clean needles save lives" stickers on his pants as he walked me through how to handle myself at a demo during my first action with the group in 1993.

Those DiY aesthetics, the punk ethos, was an abiding part of Clear's work, art, and memories:

> The Do-It-Yourself stuff... It wasn't until about 1978 that people started putting out their own stuff on their own record label. And that was what was exciting too.

> You would know people like Jeff Travis from Rough Trade. Everyone was available and accessible. But you could just see all these weird impresarios. They were just there in clubs.

The Ramones were playing at CBGBs. And when they came home after playing to sell-out crowds in England, no one really cared about them. But in their own way, they changed the world a little bit. "Oh, they totally did. That was that ethos," Clear continued. And this DiY ethos of cultural production spread from New York to London to Berlin and around the world.

In many ways, the impulse behind syringe exchange – people are dying and this is something I know I can do – builds on this DiY ethos. The idea is, I'm not going to wait until somebody tells me whether I should do this. You talk about do-it-yourself: here is your clean needle. Clear describes his early days doing syringe exchange:

> It's really simple. There is not even any counseling with it. For me, I got into it because I thought, why do you have to go into recovery? People could walk up to me and get a needle and go in.[to the 12-stop meeting where Clear was standing] That clearly wasn't what people wanted. Actually, I ran the needle exchange. We did it two days a week. I did the Wednesday exchange when it was underground in the Lower East Side back in the end of 1990. I did very little needle exchange. I did a lot of talking to people. It was like being a bartender, which I always think is a creative job. You are talking about all sorts of things and developing relationships 'cause you want people to come back. I remember people would talk about public health and I didn't know what public health was. There was no history of harm reduction. There was no road map for this. And I think that's what made it very liberating. You could actually do whatever you wanted because there were no rules. We really did do whatever we thought was entertaining for people.

Playfulness was part of this spirit. Clear talked about how those elements informed his work with syringe exchange. "I've often thought that if there was a show made about syringe exchange, it should be a comedy because it's very entertaining," He says. Certainly, a great deal of this anything but playful. There are community struggles; there is ongoing illness. But there is also an engaging quality to the work. "When you

work with drug users, it was really entertaining," Clear explains. For him, much of the play of syringe exchange takes on a paradoxical quality:

> Just endless stories. Just tragicomic kind of stuff. A friend of mine was going to go rob a gas station 'cause he was so desperate. But he was on crutches. And he had a gun that didn't work. And he was going to go rob a gas station. That doesn't really work. I was in the office with someone from the Office of AIDS Policy from the White House. And someone comes running in and says "I've just been stripping cars all day." That indicates a level of trust, that someone who's been ripping off cars all day is going to come in and tell you about it. But they would come in, in front of complete strangers, and tell you what they'd been doing. You get a level of trust and then you continue building that level of trust. It's also the network-building stuff. I mean, committed drug users are extremely creative. That's how they get by on a day to day basis. They have to.

As much as anything, resourcefulness propelled the early syringe exchange programs, Clear explains: "[A]round the early 1990s, there were some great programs like the Santa Cruz Needle Exchange… Clean Needles Now in Los Angeles. Both of them were youth programs doing all this amazing stuff. Basically the drug users were doing it themselves." The Santa Cruz Syringe Exchange produced colorful cartoons to illustrate their point. And they created something very exciting. "And so we would feed off that and they would feed off our stuff," Clear recalls.

At its best, harm reduction feeds off the work of a range of public health and activist movements, including feminist health clinics, Women's Health Action and Mobilization (WHAM!), ACT UP, and even the Young Lords, with their takeover of a public hospital to better services for their community. Yet harm reduction is primarily built on the insights of drug users, as Clear explains:

> The way we started acupuncture – now everyone does acupuncture and needle exchange, it was Ryan White Funding. No one had actually done acupuncture before. But one of the volunteers said, "Lets do acupuncture." She actually suggested we putting a gym together. I thought, well we could probably do acupuncture, but probably couldn't do the gym. So we started the acupuncture

> program, which is kind of mainstream now. But at that point, no one was doing it except Lincoln…

Lincoln, of course, was the hospital the Young Lords took over in 1970. Vicente "Panama" Alba explains:

> We recognized there was a massive heroin epidemic in the South Bronx...We recognized there was a need not just for detox, but to fight the society that created this epidemic. We used consciousness-raising to help people become aware of the racism, sexism, and chauvinism in their lives. We borrowed from the successful program of treatment of the National of Islam, which borrowed from the idea of love of self. We tried to integrate that love into a new consciousness. We read Franz Fanon, held film sessions, discussions, and created spaces where people could open up. The consciousness-raising involved ways of thinking about how people had been hurt and how that formed who they were. It also helped people understand their personal path toward heroin. (Personal interview.)

A DiY approach to program development was part of the Young Lords' work as well.

Alba continues:

> We borrowed from Chinese ideas about acupuncture when we realized it helped with withdrawal. We were doing it ourselves. We actually taught people to use methadone to reduce their dosages, we developed our own long term detox – several months, as well as one or two day detoxes. We did this with education about the relationship between heroin and its relationship to the war in Southeastern Asia.

Adds Richie Perez, another Young Lords veteran:

> After hundreds of angry police surrounded the hospital, the Lords slipped out; and only two people were arrested. The publicity about the terrible conditions in the old Lincoln Hospital accelerated the building of the new hospital that exists today....Lincoln Detox. During the occupation of the old Lincoln Hospital, a preventive medicine community clinic was set up in the auditorium. Afterwards, another demand was met; and the historic acupuncture-detoxification program was established, with licensed doctors, acupuncturists, and staff members hired from the community (including from the YLP and BPP). Ahead of its time, for years the Lincoln Hospital Detox Program served as an international model of treating heroin and alcohol addiction with acupuncture instead of substituting methadone, another addicting chemical – before it was closed down by Mayor Koch in the '70s (Perez 2000)

At its most vital, the early harm reduction movement in New York City was about community building. Clear describes the early programming at the Lower East Side Harm Reduction Center on Avenue A:

> [O]nce we had that money to create this space, it became this holistic thing. So, as well as being fun, it was this sense of exploration. We had Reiki in there; we had chi gung; we had massage; we had herbal stuff going on; we created this alternative, holistic thing for drug users, which had never been done before.

Part of the community building was done with stories, the listening, the sharing, the culture tales. "And stuff like the Love Exchange," Clear elaborates: "We had to completely reorganize our office once a month. We'd rearrange it so we had a stage. People would just get up. They would do poetry. They would perform. They would sing." The syringe exchange office was located in the Lower East Side just down the street from the Nuyorican Poets' Cafe. A favorite poem at the Love Exchange was by Miguel Pinero, one of the founders of the Nuyorican Poetry Movement. His poem, "The Book of Genesis According to St. Miguelito," offers a small glimpse of the tragicomic, yet still playful ethos of those evenings and the harm reduction movement in general:

> Before the beginning
> God Created God
> In the beginning
> God created the ghettos and slums
> and God saw this was good.
> so god said,
> "let there be more ghettos and slums"
> and there were more ghettos and slums.
> but god saw this was plain
> so
> to decorate it
> god created lead-based paint
> and then
> god commanded the rivers of garbage and filth
> to flow gracefully through the ghettos.
> On the third day

.... god's nose was running
and his jones was coming down and god
in his all knowing wisdom
knew he was sick
he needed a fix
so god
created the backyards of the ghettos
and the alleys of the slums
in heroin and cocaine
and
with his divine wisdom and grace
god created hepatitis
who begat lockjaw
who begat malaria
who begat degradation
who begat
GENOCIDE
and god knew this was good
in fact god knew things couldn't get better
but he decided to try anyway
on the fourth day
god was riding around Harlem in a gypsy cab
when he created the people
and he created these beings in ethnic proportion
but he saw the people lonely and hungry
and from his eminent rectum
he created a companion for these people
and he called this companion
capitalism
who begat racism
who begat exploitation
who begat male chauvinism
who begat machismo
who begat imperialism
who begat colonialism
who begat wall street
who begat foreign wars
and god knew
and god saw
and god felt this was extra good
and god said
VAYAAAAAAA

...

> god called a news conference
> on a state of the heavens address
> on a coast to coast national t.v. hookup
> and god told the people to be
> cool
> and the people were cool
> and the people kept cool
> and the people are cool
> and the people stay cool
> and god said
> Vaya...
> (Algarin and Pinero, 1975).

For Clear, the poetry and the community took on a healing dimension:

> We were basically a community center and an arts space. We took glow sticks. For some of the poetry, there was one womaen who was reading about domestic violence. And I realized this was very therapeutic. It was a way of letting people express secrets they hadn't expressed before.

The poetry thus took on a tragicomic dimensionthat people responded to in creative, fantastic ways. The dark humor, the play can be seen as a resiliency. Users created a distinct culture with this gallows humor. Yet, Clear acknowledges, it's often a space with a great deal of pain:

> We might talk about the tragicomic elements of drug use. But I don't think that either one of us wants to be switching places with the people we are working with. And so if you don't look at it in a way in which you can appreciate what's going on, then it's really tough to do. I don't think that anyone is going to minimize the negative effects of drug use. People are just nodding in and dealing with pain and causing more pain at the same time.

Within such a context of working with populations dealing with such a level of pain, many have started using the term "vicarious traumatization" to describe staff who work with clients dealing with trauma. Here, the play element becomes a primary source of creative inspiration and resilience for staff and clients alike. Kirk Read, a writer and staff member at the St. James Infirmary in San Francisco, explains:

> The group that I work with the most right now is the St. James Infirmary, which is a free clinic out here for sex workers, a free medical clinic. And I run a men's group, a discussion group. Last year I did volunteer coordination. And now I do HIV counseling and testing. I always start our clinic with a circle of all the staff and volunteers. And we always do some sort of dance or song or sometimes the hokey-pokey to start off the clinic. There's always the sense of bringing the child into the space. And welcoming that sense of creative energy. People who are doing degrading non-profit work on a shoestring have to be creative. We rely on volunteers, a doctor who knows three people who are going to clean out a closet, so we can have a free clothing closet. We rely on people to think really creatively to continue what we're doing.

The play not only helps the free clinic continue its work, which is rooted in a profound historic trajectory (Danto 2005), but it helps build a sense of community.

Building a Healing Community

The notion of building a healing community is not exclusive to the Lower East Side Harm Reduction Center or the St. James Infirmary. It has become a part of innovative programming from coast to coast. Cylar, King, and the rest of the Housing Works staff spent a great deal of time addressing this issue. "I think that the community-building work is kind of at the core," King explains. "And I think sometimes we lose our focus on how central that is to what we do." Thus, the movement aims to build a space for people who were not supposed to have a space, literally build them a home. A home is more than bricks and mortar. "Our theory on that here at Housing Works has always been building a healing community – and it took me a while to persuade Keith [Cylar] that this was the right theory, he thought it was a little bit too religious, but he finally got there," King explains, laughing. In an unpublished interview with the author, Cylar concurred:

> It is a community and it's a healing community that allows people to heal from a lot of really negative stuff. And did I necessarily set out to build a community? I don't think so. I think what I set out to do was just in response to the reality of what I just knew was good therapeutic intervention. I'm a clinician. I grew up in a milieu of hospitals and psychiatric hospitals and models. I understand what it takes. It was no accident that I said that it would have a positive, cathartic experience that would allow them to move forward. I'm a humanist. I'm a whole lot of different stuff. So Housing Works represents a whole new way you do that therapy with this kind of population. 'Cause it isn't about how you treat people, its about how you develop this thing that works for a large class of people. But the individual nuance of it is based on what each individual's life and history and their individual personhood is. And so it isn't like you can have these common code words. It wasn't really about that. It was about listening to the individual. And moving them, and helping them explore what works for them. And what worked for them was not whether they stopped doing drugs or not, what worked for them was whether or not they were going to live and whether or not they were going to die well. And for me and the work were doing, it was about helping people die well. That was really, really, really what it was about. Being about when they took that last breath that they had made peace with themselves, with their families, with god because they were going to die. And if they didn't do that kind of work or have that kind of energy about them, then they died really horrible deaths and they were painful and they were really ugly. And that was something that I didn't want to see anybody go through.

As Charles King and I talked, I mentioned that Keith's participation in leather communities included a number of spiritual and religious leanings as well as community building rituals (see Perry, 1991). "Yea, I know, I know."

For King, [who was first (and only) white man to be ordained within the Connecticut Missionary Baptist Convention] the notion of a healing community meant including those who had been excluded from other communities.

> It was a notion that I brought with me out of the church because whether it was my own experience with the church or people who I worked with in the church, I always found myself working with the folk who the church tended to shut out. And it was so ironic because those were the people who the church should be reaching out to. I remember when I was working with homeless people in San Antonio, I did an outline for a book that will probably never be written, but I had titled it *Members of the Community*. And ACT UP as church within all of this. The idea of a church [is] herding people to coming together to minister to one another, and so the non-religious terminology that we've used for that is a "healing community." A healing community is a place where everyone

> acknowledges that they have reasons why they need to be a part of this community. So it's not just us helping them.

Thus, the community-builing model advanced by Housing Works involves healing broken parts of the provider as well. "Exactly," King concurred. Yet, for King and Housing Works the aim is also to create a framework where people can contribute instead of feel further on the outside of a culture and system of services which margalizes rather than embraces people.

> ... [W]hether they are marginalized because of their homelessness, because they are victims of domestic violence or sexual abuse or they're addicted, whatever has shoved them off on the margins. Part of creating a community is not just offering them help, but offering them a place where they can give help. That's really what its about. If it's just about an us-helping-them kind of relationship, nobody get healed. All you do is create dysfunctional dependencies that are mutual. We then need to keep the Medicaid money flowing, so we keep them needing us so we can feel good about helping them and all those….

I mentioned to King that Cylar used to talk about Martin Buber's work, *I and Thou*. "It was actually through that avenue that I got him to buy into the healing community," King explained. As King and I talked, I noted that part of what Barbara Epstein (1991) thinks about with prefigurative politics is that we're building our community now. The notion of community building is a vital source for the work and play of Housing Works.

When asked whether the harm reduction movement is about community building or or external policy changes or both at the same time, Clear elaborated on this notion of community building:

> I think it's a mess of all kinds of things at the same time. To me it's about community building. We also did picnics. We also did baseball games. (Laughs). Its like when you have someone who has emphysema playing in the outfield, (laughs again) people running with their shoes falling apart cause they can't really run properly, but everyone was out there playing baseball. We lost ten-nothing to Housing Works. But when do people with no shoes get to play baseball or have

> parties on Christmas and Thanksgiving or birthdays for people? When you are a street drug user and everyone sings happy birthday to you in a needle exchange program, it means something. Or even the peer education programs where people turn around and they say, "I have never graduated from anything before in my life. I'm really proud of this." There is really nothing else you need to say. We've built that community. Here is a community graduate.

As Ken Plummer (1995) writes, a central part of this community building takes place through storytelling. For Clear, it happens through combinations of peer education and storytelling. There is something very powerful about somebody hearing you tell your story. And that is very intimate. He explains:

> Some of the most immediate secret stuff are gone when you are in an exchange. Some of the burdens are gone immediately. People are very guarded when they are injecting drugs. Some of the disease stuff. HIV and hepatitis C. They are kind of gone when you are in an exchange. So you are a little free-er. That's what harm reduction is about when you say, how do you change community norms? You change it through stories. You might call it popular education, but we might call it outreach and stuff. But really it's about changing community norms. And drug users do that themselves.

Yet for Clear, so much of the play now involves actually seeing his work translate into the policy goals he dreamed of advancing when he started working with the ACT UP syringe exchange in 1989. "But the policy element to me, that's probably the most fun part now," he says. "It goes back to the stuff we wanted to do in a different way through ACT UP and punk and stuff." That's where it all comes together.

Punk, DiY, and the Flemming Center

One of my favorite albums growing up was a record featuring a montage of photos of musicians, historical, and cultural figures on its cover called "Burning Ambitions: A History of Punk." Allan Clear was far from alone in his "burning ambition" to take the energy created when people play punk music, when they create communities around dancing, art, and agit-prop, and translate it into a force for social change. Mark Andersen, the organizer of the Washington, DC Flemming Center, explains:

> It was really punk rock that brought me to activism. My involvement with community organizing would never have come about if it was not for that initial channel for my anger and my confusion that I felt in beginning to express it in a way that a) affirmed myself and b) also connected me with other kindred spirits. And it was through that place of finding my own initial power that I became aware of the importance of activism and through that of community organizing.

For Andersen, this abiding faith in community organizing first found its expression in creating spaces for punks to play in Washington DC (Andersen and Jenkins 2001). "How do you get people together?' Andersen pondered. "The answer was music, punk music." In connecting with other punks, he started becoming aware that "I wasn't alone. In the mid 1970s, there were other possibilities." Music was a way for Andersen to break through layers of fatalism. He explains:

> I grew up in a pretty rural working-class context.…I was just in a way buried under the weight of all of this, of the economic opportunity, or lack of opportunity… So, how do you even glimpse at another way to place yourself within this struggle? Well, for me, the answer was music. That's what reached me. And particularly we are talking about punk music. And I think that that's one of the great things that the arts can do. It can cut through the layers of fatalism… It strikes so close to our core that it awakens some things that we might not be aware of. That is our own personal power to do something that alters that. And the chance to live a life that makes sense to us.

Yet "to live a life that makes sense," and to create change, organizers have to break through a number inherent systemic obstacles. For Andersen this included an awareness of power. He explains:

> In general terms, people who want to fundamentally alter that system will not tend to have the majority of the money or the majority of the guns...So, what might we have? Well, I think if the analysis is correct and this system does not benefit the majority of Washington DC, of the US, or the world…Then in principle you have a profound, I would say the most profound, source of power, and that is people. And that's really, really important. But how do you get these people reasonably coordinated and together? Well, you've got to be creative. You've got to figure out the way to draw people together. The divisive power of money and buying people off is immense. And of course, the fear factor of the repressive force of the

> apparatus that defends that system is also immense. We need people, and to get the people we need to be really creative. That's my set of assumptions.

That's where the play comes in. With these two assumptions, Andersen started organizing spaces where people played music, where people converged, where they could be creative and create alternatives (Andersen and Jenkins 2001). After years of creating space for disenchanted youth, he expanded this project in 2003. He says:

> If we stay in our sheltered underground, it can become an odd mix of would-be "utopia" and prison; a place where we live still in relative privilege, proud of our marginality, able to ignore the life or death or struggle of the mass of humanity, while claiming somehow to share them (quoted in Chenoweth 2005).

Putting his words into action, in the winter of 2003, Andersen worked with a group of cultural activists, musicians and punks to collaborate with a senior citizens group to develop a 13,000-square-foot complex of rehabbed row houses in Washington, DC. The driving approach to the project was the cultural ethos to create music and build community with whatever resources are available. "The do-it-yourself punk philosophy, which basically says, 'Do what you can with what you've got' – that's exactly what has happened historically in Shawand with the seniors in the neighborhood," Andersen explains (quoted in Reel 2003). The "can-do" approach used to both create music and squat a run-down building with virtually no resources created spirit of solution. Within this problem-solving spirit, coalition partners developed a "common ground" to conceive of and complete the building project. Andersen describes how the space will be used:

> Positive Force will be there, we'll have a gallery and an archive and a creative space, we'll have direct service stuff, the Peace Center will be there, Catholic Worker bookstore will be there. Also the Brian Mackenzie Infoshop. You'll have the Catholic anarchists on one side of the wall and the secular on another side of the wall (laughs). And an office space, at night, will be a performance space where you can show movies, have concerts, have political meetings, have poetry readings, all sorts of stuff. A building with a lot of powerful possibilities. I think

> there is a common spirit between all of these groups and we need all of these elements, we need the arts, the creative element, we need the direct service stuff, because as much as we want the revolution, the revolution is not going to be here tomorrow. To ensure a long-term vision of transformation, you need to make sure people are being fed, clothed, and housed in the short term. Hopefully the Flemming Center will bring a lot of people together across cultural and racial and faith lines and will create in a small way precisely what we need on a larger level (quoted in Munson 2003).

DiY resourcefulness helped create the Flemming Center. Its not everything, but its a start For Andersen, "revolution means we need each other."

The do-it-yourself spirit of cooperation and direct action speaks to a resourcefulness that propels the new social movement work. More than anything, when cultural work becomes a part of political resistance, it expands ways to consider organizing for social change (Duncombe,2002; McKay 1998; O'Hara 1999).

Clowning with the Rules

If the previous stories suggest anything, it is that creativity cultivates a generative spirit that helped create programs and keep them rolling. With the stories of Housing Works, the Lower East Side Harm Reduction Center, Stand Up Harlem, and the Flemming Center, alternative narratives of community renewal emerge. The stories of the people who created and used these spaces is characterized by combinations of pain born of abject poverty and oppression, combined with alienation-crushing networks of mutual aid in which users with little else supported each other, shared a meal, a subway token, watched a movie, told a story, shared a hit, or clowned around.

The spirit of the clown offers another way of being in the world. As clowns are not afraid of being seen as foolish, clowning offers a route toward openly questioning

conventional ways of seeing the world. Long-time ACT UP member Ann Northrup has suggested that while ACT UP members may not have had the money or access that other advocates had, their success was often determined by a willingness to endure public humiliation, if that was what was necessary to get a point across. The result was a series of very public performances that transformed the way AIDS policy was conceptualized. Beyond simply appearing foolish, explicit clowning was also a part of ACT UP's work. As highlighted in the previous chapter, a squadron of clowns dubbed Operation Ridiculous ran to and fro diverting the crowd and contributing to the spectacle during one of ACT UP's most famous protests, the Stop the Church action of 1989. For many, this spirit of carnival and clowning is compelling because of its expressive, emancipatory qualities.

In the spring of 2004, I attended a funeral for Keith Cylar, who had lived with HIV for some twenty years. Like many in ACT UP, Cylar was a man who was willing to advance an agenda for homeless people living with HIV/AIDS in countless brash and innovative ways. He used to talk a great deal about the need for a joyous defiance of conventional wisdom. While the status quo suggested things should remain the same, that nothing can be done, Cylar helped create programs, housing, and funding streams for homeless communities of drug users with HIV/AIDS. At his funeral, friends read from one of his favorite passages of *The Color of Light,* a work of meditations for people living with HIV/AIDS. This passage highlights a daring and caring spirituality of clowning, capable of challenging social controls and panic:

> There is an old native North American Indian tradition called Heyoehkah. The Heyoehkahs, or sacred clowns, were people within the tribe who "did things differently," challenged people's thinking, shook them up. Their function was to keep their people from getting stuck in rigid ways of thinking and living. They were

> also known as “contraries” because they lived backwards. They walked backward, danced backward, everything they did was contrary to the norm. By their living, they symbolized the shadow of the Creator God, reminding people of their spiritual center.
>
> For gay people, the role of sacred clown is especially important: not only are sacred clowns often gay, the role of contrary is a sacred symbol of the role we play among society as a whole.
>
> There has been a sacred clown response to AIDS. When the normal response was to react with fear and panic, there were people dancing backward, responding with love and confidence.
>
> When, every day, the world began repeating a death mantra, our sacred clowns danced the dance of life. They talked about living with AIDS, surviving, healing, recovering. When normal reaction to a diagnosis was isolation, our sacred clowns dragged us into a community. When the world wanted us to be victims, they drew circles of light around themselves and stood in their power.
>
> Whenever it got dark, they turned toward the light. Whenever people said there is no hope, they said there is always hope. Whenever people said this isn't about us, they stood up and said, “This is about you. This is about us all. Our planet is sick. Earth has acquired an immune dysfunction. We are all living with AIDS” (Tilleras, 1988).

Dario Fo once wrote, “Clowns always speak of the same thing, they speak of hunger; hunger for food, hunger for sex, but also hunger for dignity, hunger for identity, hunger for power. In fact, they introduce questions about who commands, who protests” (quoted in CIRCA, undated).

In Memorium: Keith Cylar

The last time I spend any time with Cylar, we met for dinner and went out to the Rawhide bar in Chelsea. Keith was exhausted, but excited about the resilience that Housing Works has shown through the years. That day, he’d gone to Yale University to give a talk. Yet he’d forgotten his carefully prepared PowerPoint presentation. Cylar lived and functioned for years as co-president of a multimillion dollar organization while simultaneously managing the difficulties of living with dyslexia, HIV, and the onset of

AIDS-related dementia. Still. he knew what to talk about; he reminded everyone there that if they were going to engage in social change practice within a clinical setting, they needed to stop asking their clients to fit into little boxes. They needed to stop asking clients to comply and fit into a screwed up system. Instead the job for social workers, for activists, was to take the system apart, to change those structures that sought to control and marginalize the poor (Gill 1998).

With or without notes, Cylar's message was the same. A long as he was alive, he was motivated by the same thing – the compelling fixation on shifting the terms of the game. As an African American man who loved men – strong men – and who created services for the most marginalized of populations – homeless, active drug users with HIV/AIDS – Cylar's whole life had been about shifting the contours of power relationships. Love of men in leather, with whom play had involved power, was a fixation for him. Here, he became intricately familiar with the transformative possibilities of personal and political seduction. Yet, much of it started with an attraction to authentic experiences of comradery and masculinity he found in high school sports.

At Cylar's funeral, one speaker after another – including Sandy Thurman, the head of Bill Clinton's office of AIDS policy – talked about his ability to disrupt a meeting or lock himself down to a desk to angrily make a case for AIDS services one minute, only to change course midstream. Thurman recalled Cylar inviting her out for drinks even as he was being carried off by the police after taking over her office. As King explained at the funeral:

> …he delighted, he absolutely delighted in taking over your office, handcuffing himself to your desk, shouting you down at a meeting, and then after he had gotten out of jail, inviting you out, insisting that you come with him for dinner or a drink so he could explain to you why he was right. I see people in this

congregation who were the victim of that kind of attack. (King, 2004)

Cylar's charm was irresistible. Thurman accepted his invitation. They had dinner and drinks and AIDS policy under Clinton churned forward in a reasonable rational, and progressive, albeit flawed, manner. Play was a cornerstone of Cylar's personal style. For him, things were just too serious not to ACT UP or poke a hole in the pretensions and hypocrisy of those who muddled the progress of programs that could keep people with HIV/AIDS out of harm's way. "When the normal response was to react with fear and panic, there were people dancing backward, responding with love and confidence." Cylar was one of those people.

As King began the eulogy at Cylar's funeral, he turned to tha gospel choir that had been performing between speakers. Addressing the Choir he gushed:

> I have to tell you why I wanted so much for you to be here today. You see, Keith and I were different in a lot of ways, he loved dance music and I loved gospel and still do. A year or so ago, I bribed him with brunch at Sugar Hill Bistro to go with me on a Sunday afternoon to hear you all sing. He fell in love with you all.

King talked about how much Cylar would have loved seeing all the dignitaries, his friends, the Housing Works staff, who were present, but more than that, he would been glad to see the clients of Housing Works, who had helped create the body politic that made the AIDS/harm reduction struggle happen. As King explained:

> If you were at all involved in the struggle against AIDS, he considered you a blood relative. And, boy, did he love a family squabble. He loved both the fight and the making up after. If you were homeless, if you had been incarcerated, if you were an addict, if you were living with AIDS, and especially if you were gay or lesbian, any of these things – and particularly transgender – Keith considered you to be his people, and he would lay down his life to protect you.

In many respects, King was left on his own after the death of Cylar – his life partner and co-president, fellow activist and former ACT UP jail buddy. Here, the play

aspect of activism comes closest to its limitations. In the face of the death of a friend, it's hard to smile. Yet for King, who loves the work of Victor Frankl (1963), there is also the space for agency, connection, and meaning creation:

> I was in a counseling session with somebody whose daughter just died of AIDS. She had come to me because she knew Keith and I. And my counseling was around choosing joy. Yeah, there's grief. But even in grief, you can choose joy. And you have the option of either spending your time lamenting your loss or spending your time being grateful for what you have. Those are the two options. And we have the power to make that choice.

As King was concluding his eulogy for Cylar, he alluded to a struggle that had dominated much of the eight years from 1993 to 2001. Mayor Rudolph Giuliani had fought Housing Works, just as he had many of the groups that organized against his image of urban life. King said:

> [Y]ou need to know that in Housing Works' darkest hours, when the Giuliani administration was doing everything it possibly could to drive us out of existence, and when colleagues were suggesting that we tone it down and not be so aggressive, Keith insisted that we continue to boldly speak truth to power.

While Housing Works survived, other organizations and meeting spaces did not. During the Giuliani years, the struggle for a place to play became a primary point of activist engagement.

Chapter V
Play and Panic in the Neoliberal City:
The AIDS Prevention Action League and SexPanic!

> Puritanical thinking reduces joy ... [It] seeks to inhibit it.
>
> Rebecca Solnit, 2004

> Puritan ecology could as logically argue that fags and sex don't mix at all. The human impulse to sexual activity is not less ingrained than its impulse to play, and both will survive the Puritans.
>
> Jim Eigo, 1997

"Desire and sex are just an expression of an almost willful insistence on constant play," Daniel Mendelsohn (1999) writes. This playfulness is what is said to differentiate distinctly queer aesthetics from all things "straight" (Rauch 1999). Unlike gay men, pornographer and sometime-political philosopher Boyd McDonald (1980) suggests, "'Straight males' can be used for fun in the bed but they are worth talking to...their attempts at leadership... are not to be followed." After all, McDonald continues, "In their craving to express their virility – in war, greed, violence – they have ruined the most promising nation and made America a nation you can't trust. Inadequate use of their pricks had turned American into a nation of pricks" (p. 5).

As the previous chapters suggest, play is an intrinsic part of queer aesthetics and organizing. Faced with a panic over the AIDS crisis, ACT UP advanced a holistic approach to queer activism in which play offered a useful counter-response to the politics of social control. Queer theorist Douglas Crimp suggests play was a distinct part of this politics:

> ACT UP made engagement possible for many who were not comfortable with the typical protest aesthetics. *They did this by queering activist heroism and machismo, with a jigger of play.* ACT UP made it possible for people to engage in a kind of antiheroic activism by queering it, by making it campy, funny, and ironic. The humor and queerness of ACT UP came from such things as the fact that the men facilitating the meetings wore skirts and necklaces. So even though there were still some traditional heroics going on, there were also ways of debunking them. On one level, ACT UP was very good at puncturing activists' tendencies to take themselves too seriously (quoted in Takemoto 2003 emphasis mine).

Yet every time the panic started to wane and the public health response to the AIDS crisis gained ground, panic structures seemed to re-emerge.

By 1997, countless panics raged as yet another ACT UP spin-off group, ironically calling itself SexPanic! dropped off flyers at the Gay Pride parade. They announced:

WE'RE IN DANGER!

Queer New York Is Being Shut Down!

PADLOCKED!
Mayor Giuliani has harassed and padlocked...
Gay and Lesbian bars including Cake, Crowbar, Edelweiss, Rome, Rounds,
Limelight, Sound Factory, Tunnel and Vinyl,
Sex Clubs including He's Gotta Have It, the Vault, and Zone DK,
Theaters including the Adonis, the Capri, the Hollywood Twin, King, Naked City,
the New David and the Prince.

SHUT UP!
Public discussion is curtailed. Tune in to the media
and all you hear are conservative gay male voices
calling for assimilation. They say gay liberation is
undignified, and marriage is all we need. Other
opinions, including lesbian opinions, are shut out.

FENCED OFF!
The piers where we have played for years are
being torn down, fenced off and patrolled to
keep us from
each other.

ZONED OUT!
Mayor Giuliani has zoned 85 percent of adult

businesses into oblivion, taking Times Square
away from us and giving it to Mickey Mouse.
Adult book stores, video booths, strip clubs and
even bars with go-go dancers will have to close
all over the city.

ARRESTED!
In the past six months entrapments and arrests of gay men on charges of public lewdness have increased...
Men have been arrested by the NYPD, Port Authority cops, parks police, Metro North and LIRR cops,
Over 60 men have been arrested in the World Trade Center men's room alone,
Men of color are routinely treated more harshly than white men.

By many accounts, New York City was in the midst of a sex panic (Crimp, et al. 1997). Radical historian Allan Bérubé suggested the panic over public sexual space targeted gay men because of where they choose to play; it:

> demonizes gay men...for stealing moments of sexual semi-privacy with other men in places such as public parks; public toilets in subways, bus and train stations, libraries and department stores; movie theater balconies; military bases; public baths, gyms, YMCAs and hotel rooms; backstreets and alleys; trucks, docks, ships and piers; booths in porn shops; gay bars, sex clubs and bathhouses; SM dungeons and *other sex play spaces*, and, recently, cyberspace (quoted in Wockner 1997; emphasis mine).

The logical culmination of such panic is a less tolerant approach to play. For the purposes of this study, panic serves as a description of a frenzied drive to support conservative politics favoring a better business climate for pro-growth economic policies poised to privatize, control, and profit from everything from water to public space to social welfare services. (The terms will be discussed further later in this chapter).

Factors contributing to the panic of the late 1990s included right-wing use of sex as a wedge issue to divide liberals and leftists, income inequality and concentration of wealth, an increasing awareness that HIV infections continue among gay men, and a push by mainstream gay groups to sacrifice the civil liberties of those on the margins for increased social acceptance (Rofes 1997). In New York, battles lines were drawn over a

XXX zoning law, the cornerstone of a Comstock-like "quality of life" campaign imposed by a new mayor, Rudolph Giuliani. Similar battles raged in the areas of HIV policy, welfare reform, public health, and public sexual culture. Members of SexPanic! felt that the debate involved core issues of self-determination and principles of democratic citizenship. In response to a politics of control and regulation, the group called for maintaining places for queers to converge and play.

While the previous chapter considered the stories of a number of ACT UP spin-off groups that sought to translate ACT UP's aims into social service programs, the groups considered here – SexPanic! and the AIDS Prevention Action League (APAL) – sought to build on ACT UP's roots in the Gay Liberation Movement to put sexuality back at the center of gay politics. Throughout the 1990s, the gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender (GLBT) movement had been dominated by debates about gays in the military, same-sex marriage, and adoption – heteronormative institutions that had nothing to do with gay liberation notions of queer sexuality as a radical critique of "straight" identity, as described by McDonald. After years of debates about sexuality within the context of culture wars and HIV politics, SexPanic! suggested that the politics of pleasure and play had a rightful place at the top of an organizing agenda. While play may have taken a more instructive dimension with AIDS activism, SexPanic! suggested it had a place as an expressive form and aim unto itself. Thischapter considers the use of play as a response to the politics of urban renewal, social control, and sexual panic.

Narrative Perspectives

At the second sex panic summit – a forum held in conjunction with the 1998 Creating Change conference in Pittsburgh – Reverend Jim Mitulski of San Francisco's Metropolitan Community Church noted:

> In my career, I've performed 800 marriages and 500 funerals. I've heard many men's stories. Moral stories are being rewritten by gay men. People are forced to

> make moral and ethical choices. Healthy movements do not tell us what to do and [how to] make our moral choices. They encourage us to make our own choices. We are taught polygamy is appropriate in Hebrew scriptures; monogamy is taught in the New Testament. The Bible can't offer us a route to make these choices. The richness of our own experiences is our source. Moral decisions are made in community. The sources for moral choices are in the texts of the lives of gay men (1998).

Mitulski makes an important point about the subjective, narrative construction of morality and ethics. Philosopher Richard Rorty (1979, 1982) has demonstrated how questions of knowing in the second half of the 20th century have shifted from notions of truth to notions of significance and meaning. Neither science (Kuhn 1962) nor theology are outside the influence of cultural bias or interpretation. No one has a monopoly on the truth. Instead, all we have stories to help us interpret and create meaning within a rapidly changing world (Howard 1991; Bruner1990; McAdams 1985).

As explained in the methods section of this study, an observing participant perspective (Butters 1975; Lichterman 2002; Tedlock 1991) informs this discussion of the ways members of SexPanic! played, told stories, and created meaning. As such, the reader may observe the sex panic story emerge as a reflexive process and coherent whole (Myerhoff and Ruby 1982/1992, p. 312). Given Clifford Geertz's (1973) contention that all ethnography is part confession, my voice plays more of a role in this story than in the previous stories. I worked closely with SexPanic! for two years, disseminating materials for the group, planning rallies, doing outreach, conducting research, and observing the group at work. As an observing participant, I have engaged in activities ranging from outreach to sex workers to being arrested and put through the system. In so doing, I have experienced the revelries and anxieties that sexual civil liberties activists live on a daily basis. This perspective informs the ethnographic and historical narrative comprising this case study. While notes were taken at group meetings, none of the names of meeting participants are used.

Competing Narratives of a Panic

I use a narrative perspective to consider SexPanic! as a social movement (Cohler 1982; Fine 1995). Here, the assumption is that we live through our stories (Mair 1988), and that these stories inform social movement action. Whole communities exist within such stories (Plummer 1995; Bennet 1981). Social movements can be understood as cultural movements underscored by discursive practices (Fair 1995, p. 127-44). Paula Treichler (1988, p. 63) observed that AIDS – as a disease and as a discourse where so much of this panic begins and ends – exists within a series of intersecting and competing narratives. SexPanic! can be viewed as a bundle of narratives rhetorically constructing a liberatory queer culture. Slogans such as “Remember: Condoms Work,” “We’re all in this Panic Together,” “Free your ass and your mind will follow,” and "More Booty, Less Rudy!” (referring to Giuliani) typify the group's approach to activism. SexPanic!'s emancipating narratives compete with an assimilationist rhetorical construction of gay life disengaged from its radical roots (Shepard 2001). I conceptualize these two approaches as competing narratives, symbolizing different worldviews. If we inhabit the great stories of our time, the SexPanic! debate frames the plotlines for urban gay culture some fifteen years into the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

Assimilationistgay writers Michelangelo Signorile (1997), Larry Kramer (1978, 1997a,b), Andrew Sullivan (1996a,b), and Gabriel Rotello (1997) came to be known as the "Gang of Four" of the late 1990s panic within the GLBT community. In a series of books and articles, they narrated gay life from an apologist perspective, describing AIDS as a punishment for queer sexuality and asking good gays to divorce themselves from their alter ego, "the promiscuous queer" (Warner 1997). Their storylines favored gay marriage, the pro-life movement; Sillivan favored military service, tax cuts, and law-and-order policies. By contrast, SexPanic! rejected the notion that queers must give up diverse sexual culture in order to gain acceptance. In response, Sullivan labeled queer

activism as "a strange confluence of political abdication and psychological violence" (1996a, p. 193). The new sex wars were upon us.

Today, sex has been left at the back of the progressive bus. Theologian Carter Heywood (1989) suggests that without justice, there can be no pleasure. The SexPanic! point was that without pleasure, there can be no justice. While the gay groups such as the Human Rights Commission choose to disavow GLBT linkages to human rights and civil rights movements. SexPanic! sought to relink the queer and social justice movements (*Newhouse News* 1999) with the transformative sexual potentials of the gay liberation and women's movements. The point was that hierarchies dividing deviant and privileged sexuality and play propagate cultural oppression. Sexual stigma scars people from a vast cross-section of our culture. As one observer pointed out, "Not all of us wish to become an 'insider' if the inside is the same repressive, sex negative culture we grew up with and have attempted to change with our lives" (Griffith 1998). The goal of sexual civil liberties activism is to free everyone from such restrictions. When justice re enters the fray, pleasure is usually not far behind. Here, the struggle for play overlaps with the fundamental human need for freedom, contact, and social connection.

The sex panic debate plays directly into the assimilationist/liberationist queer split nationwide. Carmen Vasquez addressed this rift when the Human Rights Campaign endorsed Al D'Amato for re-election to the Senate in 1998. She suggested that those who question whether the progressive social justice agenda serves queers should go ask the thousands of gays and lesbians on general assistance for whom budget cuts mean the difference between low-income housing and the street. She defined the queer/gay assimilationist split as, "a rift between those who want to be normal at any cost and those of use who believe that sexual liberation (and therefore reproductive rights) is a central and inviolate tenant of our struggle for liberation" (1998, p. 14).

The idea of "normal" sexuality implies a culture of privilege that guarantees social injustice. A GLBT movement positioned to attain civil rights in some distant future

and acting as power brokers for those who accept the prevailing social and economic system has no time for sex radicals or gender-deviant people of any kind – much less activists who hope to challenge the current social system. Questions of social and economic justice sharply divide an assimilating gay movement whose leaders suggest they are "virtually normal" (Sullivan 1996) from queers who connect gay liberation with battles for human rights and "resistance to regimes of the normal" (Warner 1993). Many gays reject notions that queers and cultural outsiders should be linked as fellow travelers. The split between "good gays" and "bad gays" begins here. The “bad gays” are typically those who engage in S/M and public play (Rubin 1991, 1997), as well as promiscuity and gender-deviant displays such as drag. Before HIV/AIDS spread across the world, leathermen – a group on the periphery of the GLBT world – were thought somehow to be the cause of the new disease. As Rubin notes: "Stereotypes that leather sexualities (particularly S/M) were inherently dangerous, unsafe, undesirable, or unhealthy have been easily assimilated into concerns over AIDS-related hazards. Thus leather sexualities have been prominent among the ideological scapegoats for AIDS fear, panic, and loathing" (1997, p. 109).

Panics as Distractions

For many members of SexPanic! the politics of panic were best recognized as distractions (Hall 1978). A number of researchers (e.g., Chambliss 1995) have suggested that moral panic over race helped legitimize the shift in public expenditures from health and supportive services toward policies aimed at social control. Moralism justifies “get-tough” policing and other regressive policies which favor increased social controls of public space and those who occupy it. Economic historian John Kenneth Galbraith speculated in 1998 that in the years to come, historians would recall official Washington as "supremely indifferent. Both politicians and Washington commentators were overwhelmingly, some will say exclusively, concerned with sex" (1998).

In the final years of Bill Clinton's presidency, talk of the Monica Lewinsky scandal, with its innuendo about extramarital and cross-generational sex and the very real threat to our system of government, dominated the scene – even leading to Clinton's impeachment by the House of Representatives. It seemed that the whole country was in the midst of a sex panic. Surveillance and intrusions into private sexual spaces had spread from those on the margins to the center of our national life. The president was experiencing the type of scrutiny sexual outsiders have endured for ages. As the panic spread, it overwhelmed media coverage of key domestic and foreign issues. The sex panic debate dramatized some of our culture's deepest moral and political disagreements. At the center was a question about the nature of pluralistic democracy: Is there a sexual commonwealth in America?

Sex Panics and Democracy

Central principles of democracy in America lay at the core of the sex panic debate. For example, can you lose your job for deviating from conventional sexual norms? For many, the answer is affirmative. Like so much else within our democracy, what one person enjoys, another will inevitably find offensive (Rofes 1998b). Variation is a core component of social life. Notions of sexual democracy – what Rubin (1984, p. 106) describes as benign sexual variance – are selective. Talk about diversity is easy until you meet someone truly different. Currently, sex acts are divided within a hierarchical system of social values. In her 1984 essay "Thinking Sex," Rubin outlines the contours of this sexual caste system. On the benign side lies a group of activities that maintains social privilege; this is "the Charmed Circle" of "Good, Normal, Natural, Blessed Sexuality." Normative sex in "the Charmed Circle" is generally of the vanilla, heterosexual, monogamous type. Commercial exchanges – to say nothing of sex outside the home or use of pornography or dildos – are on the deviant side, "the Outer Limits" of "Bad,

Unnatural, Damned Sexuality." This category include any number of sadomasochistic, queer, promiscuous, casual, or commercial sex practices. Lines dividing the circles are arbitrary, yet powerful. By engaging in acts outside the confines of "the Charmed Circle," Clinton challenged a cultural taboo.

A wide range of value judgments are at play within the cultural formation of these two circles. Acts within the damned circle are generally viewed with which contempt (Rubin 1984, p. 110). In the late 1940s, Herbert Hoover helped formalize the practice of criminalizing sexual difference by screening homosexuals and "sex perverts" from jobs in the federal government. Independent prosecutor Kenneth Starr's investigation into Clinton's private life continued this process of private acts becoming public information (Bumiller 1998, p. B7).

The Pro-Sex Argument

For many, the need for a group to fight the panic – to fight for sexual self - determination – became imperative by the mid-1990s. For SexPanic!, the goal was bring people together under a rubric of sex-positive organizing efforts. The idea was that if joy returns to the fray, progressive politics just might have a chance. The underlying problem Sex Panic! attempted to address is that, on the whole, the American left has no pro-sex argument or organizational model. While many of America's deepest social ills, from teenage pregnancy to the AIDS epidemic, are related to sexuality, progressives have failed to develop an overarching theory to integrate sexuality into their politics.

"No freedom is more basic to gay men and women than the freedom to make our own sexual choices," SexPanic!'s Jim Eigo argued. "When queers are denied venue for sexual expression, others freedoms are also suspect" (2002). For many involved with SexPanic! a space for play involved both Eros and personal freedom.

Susan Wright, the media director for National Coalition for Sexual Expression (NCSF), who worked with SexPanic! to defend public sexual spaces, explains, "It just

seemed like there was a lot of organized resistance from religious groups. They managed to push through laws, like the 60/40 [XXX zoning]law here in New York City." And these laws were affecting the ability of people to get together and play. She continues:

> We had always been getting all these anecdotal stories of this person getting fired, of this party was supposed to happen but this hotel backed out. We had always had this anecdotal evidence, but there was nobody ever correlating it, organizing it, making it public so people could fight back through media. These one-sided articles would appear and no one would refute them.
>
> From 1992 to 1997, I was organizing around the S/M issue, and then in the gay community around the SexPanic! issue. And kind of linked the two. It was definitely a need to fight against the religious communities. We can fight back by using the Internet, by writing letters, by educating local officials, by just standing up, by doing some of the research that hadn't been done. How much persecution really is there? How much of this are we really fighting? And gathering the information. It was a really young movement....We had to create tools to defend play. We had to have the tools to get across what we were doing in our own language.

More than anything, Wright was organizing to defend " the rights of people to get together and play and educate each other about S/M." In order to develop those tools, the left would need to develop a new vocabulary that linked pleasure and democratic participation.

Much of this impulse was first articulated during the gay liberation years when gays and lesbians first fought panic-like accusations and social anxieties in order to participate in large progressive coalitions, to get elected into political office and onto school boards. This meant unapologetically speaking out. Wayne Hoffman, who was involved with SexPanic! explains:

> I think the most important thing is that in addition to all the protesting and combating laws that are being drafted and all that stuff that we have to do – and this gets back to Harvey Milk-style gay activism – the most significant piece of activism that you can do as a gay man is to come out. It is by far the most important thing. The most important thing that you can do around pleasure is talk about it openly. That is by far the most important thing because that's the only time that people will ever be able to say, "Oh, I guess it's not just sickos and

> weirdos who cruise the Internet for porn, my friend does it. I guess that's no big a deal." "Wow, I guess doing drugs isn't only for wackos and psychos and drop-outs." "Huh? Wow, that's interesting. This person seems to hold down a job and have a marriage and still enjoy pornography. Imagine that."

Hoffman would play a key role in articulating a counter-public message for Sex Panic and propelling it into the larger public sphere. But Hoffman was not the only activist to make this point. "There are so few people who are out because they have kids or they have a job, we can't form picket lines very easily. It's hard to get a mass of people together," Wright concurred. Yet with SexPanic!, people outed themselves. "The people, perverted, will never be converted!" was one of the most popular chants. "I did that at one of these protests," Wright recalls. "I said, 'I love porn. What, are you going to make me go to a dark industrial area to get my porn?' A guy looked at me like I was insane," she confesses, laughing. Yet not enough people are willing to speak out or organize themselves around notions of pleasure. "In America, pleasure is considered either wrong or self indulgent," Wright explains. "So people think they can't stand up for pleasure."

Others, such as Marla Stevens, the policy director for GLBT Fairness Indiana, got involved with national advocacy around the sex panic debate for many of the same reasons:

> I came to the first meeting. I had been doing issues around that for years. I knew that it was really important that someone like me [get involved]. I had just come out of being the public policy director for the task force[NGLTF], and I had come off doing the March on Washington organizing, that had come out of being the largest lobbying effort in the history of the US capitol, so my street cred was pretty strong. And I thought that it was very important at that gathering of activists to have somebody who had that street cred stand up and say this is legitimate work and part of the work that all of us, including mainstream activists [should be doing]. And that, first and foremost, was my reason for doing it. And I

> also liked some of the folks that were doing it and wanted to hear what some of the folks had to say...And I wanted to connect with some sex-positive activists.

For Stevens, the link between play and sex-positive organizing was a simple part of organizing to create social change. “Especially strong public play, like the Michigan Womyn’s Music Festival, where people dance, that are open to everybody that wants to come. It’s the equivalent of street theater. It’s by example.” Thus, part of her job is getting people to think through issues of sexuality. She explains:

> There are a lot of people who are afraid of organizing around issues like public sex because they are afraid that it will get in the way of other larger issues they are working on, like marriage and family. Part of my job is helping people see that they are not unconnected. That it’s necessary to work on all of it, even if they don’t want to do public play, the right to do it is real. The violation of the law that is against it – all of those kinds of things negatively affect the things that they want to work on. Over time, they have become more sex-positive people, which has made them better people and makes better community.

Yet much of this activism required a specific form of political recognition. For many New Yorkers, this recognition began when they attended their first political meeting at the Gay and Lesbian Community Services Center in Greenwich Village. For many years, Keith Haring's homage to Bosch's Garden of Earthly Delights, depicting a panorama of pre-AIDS public sexual culture, covered the center’s second floor men’s bathroom (although now that bathroom has been converted into a meeting room). Kendall Thomas describes the impulse behind the space where ACT UP, SexPanic!, and many other pro-sex groups met:

> The service model of the Gay and Lesbian Community Services Center was obviously more closely allied to a political understanding of gay and lesbian identity, than was the life of the bars, the baths, etc. But I think that the bars, the baths, the clubs experientially made it possible for people to have an

> understanding, an understanding that they may not have been able to articulate, of pleasure, sexual and otherwise, as a political issue.

Many of the meetings for those involved in organizing against the XXX zoning law took place at the center. Here, the struggle against the politics of panic took on both practical and idealistic dimensions. Cindra Feuer, who was working as an exotic dancer at a club that faced being shut down at the time of the SexPanic! efforts, explains:

> Yeah, there was the jobs issue. But in my heart, it was a pro-sex issue. It was a sex panic issue. If you look at what is happening in this country today, that was just a foreshadowing of it, this forced modesty, this moralistic behavior hoisted by the government to get back to these Christian values. And I feel like Giuliani was exploiting that. I mean, look at Times Square now. It's emphasizing families.

William Dobbs, a lawyer and a key organizer with SexPanic!, further described the struggle in a radio interview:

> Well, I think we should go back to the roots of gay and lesbian liberation and recognize that sexual liberation is a key demand and front-and-center issue. Over the years, I think we have seen many groups, as they've gotten more bureaucratic and more attached to the political structure, running away from those kinds of issues. And maybe to use New York City as an example, there have been crackdowns and legal uses so as to strangle free expression, specifically erotica, XXX material. And to give your listeners a little thumbnail, New York City certainly has an extensive amount of sexual culture as I will call it – everything from foot fetish parties, dungeons, to XXX video stores, peepshows, strip clubs. And when the current mayor came in, some scattered protests against adult businesses picked up steam, and he proposed a legislative solution, which for the first time defined adult businesses. Mmeaning in the old days, if you wanted to open a bookstore, you could open a bookstore no matter what it sold as long as what it was selling was not obscene, which is prohibited by federal law. And 98 percent of the city was turned into, and is now, a censorship zone. Only about two percent of the city is land area where you could open a bookstore or a club and have topless dancing or burlesque or peepshow type stuff. What has driven this plan is both right-wing morality, anti-sex feminism, and real estate greed. And through the political and legal process as the country has gotten more conservative, it has been very difficult to fight this, because there is so much shame about sex. Interestingly, some of the front opposition, some of the people leading the opposition to this were queers, because many of us understand that if you take our right to choose what kind of videotape, in effect you are repressing sexuality, choice, and making it all that much more difficult for people to live in a world where sex is not some forbidden, shameful thing.

Yet shame was part of what was advancing the panic. It was among the obstacles to organizing around sexual play.

In the spring of 1998, during the organizing against the XXX zoning law, Feuer was invited to participate in a radio show to debate Walter McCaffrey, a New York City councilman and a primary sponsor of the XXX zoning law. The DJ asked her, "Have you ever met someone and not told them you do what you do?" She replied:

> Obviously, there is a stigma around it. When you have a climate like we have now, where there is all of this repression and this panic, of course, you're going to have some sort of behavior where you have these internal checks, where you're not immediately going to want to come out.

Such "internal checks" are powerful. According to Wilhelm Reich (1970), these inhibiting functions run contrary to movements for social change. Eric Rofes, a sex panic supporter, suggested:

> [E]ven a cursory look at the histories of our movement will show that sexual liberation has been inextricably bound together with gay liberation, the women's movement, and the emancipation of youth. Among the most effective ways of oppressing a people is through the colonization of their bodies, the stigmatizing of their desires, and the repression of their erotic energies. We believe continuing work on sexual liberation is crucial to social justice efforts (1997).

As noted above, Sex Panic! sought to challenge the left's lack of an overarching theory of sexuality. There is little language that adequately challenges our culture's Byzantine attitudes towards sexual diversity, especially in the face of morality campaigns. Sex Panic!'s Chris Farrell spoke to the problem:

> I joined Sex Panic! because there's no group making the same connections between the renewed sexual repression of the past several decades...The failure of the left to identify pleasure as a political principle worth fighting for does a lot to explain the moribund state of progressive politics these days. The failure of the gay movement to point out this fatal flaw and return sexual pleasure to the progressive agenda is unforgivable. We've suffered from a generation of gay

> leaders ashamed to call themselves cocksuckers...Instead of insisting that the status quo attend to the lessons learned by sexual outlaws, these homo-apologists promote that gay men and lesbians can adapt to the structures of the dominant culture. They deserve no more respect than the anti-sex forces who claim their repressive demands are "feminist."...Until the left learns the function of the orgasm, our fight against repression is doomed (quoted in Shepard, 1998 October).

The failure of the political left to articulate a pro-sex argument leaves a huge void to be occupied by moralists (Beauchamp 1991, p. 409; Osbourne 1991, p. 367).

Beyond Shame

Members of SexPanic! suggested that a vast cultural amnesia has robbed us of much of our cultural memory and the legacy of the significant contributions of queer artists and activists from the 1970s through the 1990s. Whether they were sex club owners, occasional porn filmmakers, or activists defending these venues, their work and play, their passions and plays spaces, all deserve recognition, for without it, a culture of social and sexual shame takes hold, argues Patrick Moore in his book, *Beyond Shame* (2004).

Such a claim is not without substantive philosophical roots in the sociological and queer theoretical writings on queer/AIDS activism. The ideas Moore eludes to are worth a brief investigation. The underlying point, which David Halperin explores in more depth in his 1995, *St. Foucualt*, is that queer life offers a route outside of imposed ideological structures and expectations about gender and culture – queer spaces allowing for personal and social transformation. Within this context, the search for another way to live within the culture becomes a work of art in itself. This is Moore's point, hence his rich chapters on the history and aesthetics of legendary queer public sexual spaces including the Mineshaft, the Saint, and the Catacombs clubs, as well as the rise of Lower East Side of

New York City. These were all spaces where personal lives overlapped with aesthetic explorations. In the second volume of the *History of Sexuality*, Michel Foucault elaborated on the "practices of the self" in question:

> Practices of the self are those voluntary and deliberate practices according to which men not only set themselves rules of conduct but also seek to transform themselves, to change themselves in their singular being, and to make their life into a work of art that carries certain aesthetic values and meets certain stylistic criteria practices of the self (1985, p. 10-11).

Philosopher Richard Rorty has gone so far as to suggest that some of the most important philosophy taking place today occurs within these transformative narratives and practices of self, these "texts of the lives of gay men" (1979). Views of morality, sexuality, and disease intersect in complex ways within the lives of queer people. For many, queer life offers a route outside of imposed ideological structures and expectations about gender and culture; queer spaces allow for personal and social transformation (Halperin 1995, p. 102). Again, the search for another way to live within the culture becomes a work of art in itself. While sex can inspire this high level of creativity, periods of moral panic, on the other hand, restrict such creative ways of approaching social and sexual life and community building. Hence, the ongoing imperative of queer/AIDS activism. While ACT UP rejected right wing discourses linking social and sexual liberation with social decline, the core point of AIDS activism became that pleasure and creativity were the only ways to halt the epidemic. The most effective way to fight a culture of sexual shame was through a "vision of sex as liberation and joy" (Bronski introduction to Moore 2004).

Yet the years between the gay liberation narrative – gay sex is good – to the narrative of the AIDS crisis – gay sex equals death – witnessed a powerful cultural amnesia. Within the context of the sex wars of the 1990s, much of the confusion can be traced to a very specific cultural debate.

The Birth of AIDS Prevention Activism

Cooper Union, New York, 1993*: "I have been hearing more and more about people slipping and having anal sex without condoms. And all of it seems to be happing in clubs. I think we should call on cops to monitor these clubs, assisting them in putting pressure to shut down those clubs where unsafe sex persists..." Michelangelo Signorile proposed to the floor at ACT UP's Monday night meeting when ACT UP was still meeting at the Cooper Union. He was uniformly shouted down. But the recommendation to change the focus of AIDS activism from external enemies (such as government and drug companies) towards gay culture and sexuality would transform queer/AIDS activism for the rest of the decade. More than ten years after the publication of Michael Callen and Richard Berkowitz's seminal AIDS prevention guide, How to Have Sex in an Epidemic, 60 percent of gay men in a typical cohort still reported having unsafe sex(Highleyman 2003b; Berkowitz 2003; Henriksson and Mansson 1995, p. 159).*

In February 1995, the West Side Club opened. It was the first new bathhouse in New York City since the St. Mark's Baths closed in 1985. "It's a bathhouse like the legendary bathhouses of old," Gabriel Rotello vented in his column in *New York Newsday*, a local mainstream newspaper.

The 1970s had been on everyone's mind that winter. Maybe it was the broadcast of Armistead Maupin's *Tales of the City*, a miniseries about a group of migrants who'd moved to San Francisco during the gay liberation years of the mid-1970s. Some twenty years and an epidemic later, the era did not look that bad. By the mid-1990s, unprotected sex was dubbed "playing the '70s game." Sexual freedom, including sex without condoms, was something the younger queers of the 1990s could only imagine. But for their older counterparts who had experienced those years, it was a powerful memory (Warner 1995).

American Playhouse went as far as to place a disclaimer before episodes of *Tales of the City*, distancing itself from the sex-positive images of "a bygone era." But it didn't work. In an essay entitled *How Societies Remember*, cultural anthropologist Paul Connertonnoted: "We experience our present world in a context which is casually[OR DID HE SAY "CAUSALLY"?] connected with past events and objects, and hence with reference to events and objects which we are not experiencing when we are experiencing the present" (1989, p. 2). Knowledge of the past is instinctually sustained through

physical acts, bodily memory functioning as social memory, he argued. Sex without condoms could be seen as a part of this social memory.

Countless commentators, including Rotello and Signorile, were taken aback by the continued practice of unprotected sex. Combined, their calls for state intervention into queer spaces helped ignite a new round of culture wars over the relationship between public sex and AIDS prevention, gay liberation and queer activism. Underneath these conflicts lay the omnipresent battlelines between good gays andbad queers that would dominate much of the of the1990s.

A Shifting Landscape

Dobbs described the situation in the mid-1990s, calling up the ghosts of ACT UP's past:

> In 1995, 26 years after we pushed the police back at Stonewall, gay men now spark the raids on queer gathering places. Freedom means the ability to make choices, whether wise or stupid. Plenty can and should be done to improve AIDS prevention, but get the sex cops – those with and without badges – out of our lives. Whose are these creeps who tell me with whom I can have sex or whom I can love?
>
> Consider the larger landscape. Nothing is happening on AIDS. Activist pressure has subsided. The best media coverage is in the obituaries. AIDS is just one more given in an ugly world. More deaths and more memorials. Continued anti-gay and anti-sex attacks by all levels of government.
>
> When I go to ACT UP meetings these days, I keep feeling the ghosts in that room. Marty Robinson, Vito Russo, Bob Rafsky, and many more... And I hope that a now-dead David Wojnarowicz will fly through walls to find Signorile and Rotello and the other collaborators. David will wake up with that solf[SOFT?] deep voice of his and say, "Your time's up."

Indeed, by the mid-1990s an air of desperation had emerged within AIDS activism. As Dobbs acknowledged, death-based attrition was wearing on the movement. In addition, a new wave of infections created new fissures (Gross 1993; Rofes 1996, p. 3).

Prevention slogans designed as a stopgap measure in the 1980s were no longer producing desirable results. Ads based on social control inspired indignation instead of

hope. The notion of a "second wave" of HIV/AIDS spoke to those who had been reached by the initial burst of HIV prevention activism, but had failed to remain vigilant as the epidemic wore on. Beginning in the early 1980s, gay men had been told to "use a condom every time" until there was a cure – which was expected to happen within a year or two. When, a decade later, nothing resembling a cure had unfolded, prevention messages had to shift towards addressing the difficult task of preventing disease for a lifetime.

Shanti Training, Folsom Street, San Francisco, 1993*: A fortuitous informal survey was taken of some 75 volunteer[?] AIDS caregivers at a weekend training sponsored by Shanti Project in San Francisco. Those with nonmonogamous partners who practiced safe sex 100% of the time were asked to raise their hands. At the time, the city was inundated with social marketing campaign posters proselytizing the virtues of latex. "Safe sex is hot sex," one glossy campaign proclaimed, featuring convincing photos of combinations of beautiful boy-boy and girl-girl scenes, with gloves, lube, and codoms in hand. But only half of those in the room raised their hands. HIV prevention was not as simple as "safe sex is hot sex." One of the city's darkest secrets was making its way out the closet. Conventional prevention strategies, while well intentioned, were missing the mark. Social marketing had proven manifestly insufficient at addressing the core issues needed to prevent another generation from becoming infected. People who knew better were being unsafe anyway. Root causes and solutions lay far deeper than anyone has imagined possible.*

Over the following months, a series of articles, books, and studies would confirm the results of the informal survey. It all began with a *New York Times* front-page headline, "Second Wave of AIDS Feared by Officials in San Francisco," which blew the lid off the city's dirty little secret. San Francisco and its gay community prided themselves on their prevention efforts, which they believed had dramatically reduced the rate of new infections. In fact, though, almost every gay man in America had gotten tested when the HIV antibody test first came out in 1985, and many found they were positive, so of course the number receiving positive test results went down in the following years. As Rofes pointed out, "Evidence was never presented which empirically linked the fall-off in new cases to education efforts, and a close scrutiny of the reported data suggests different conclusions" (1996, p. 173-8).

By 1993, infection rates were on their way up, and a new generation had started seroconverting, as survey after survey confirmed (Green 1996). Rofes, a leading AIDS prevention advocate, explained, "Everyone knows that the City's AIDS organizations don't have a clue about what to do about new infections, but they'll keep getting funded because they're the only game in town" (Rofes 1996, p. 175). Waves of recrimination followed.

Rofes' admonishment was followed by Walt Odets' 1995 *San Francisco Bay Times* essay, "The Fatal Mistakes of AIDS Education" – based on his then-forthupcoming book, *In the Shadow of the Epidemic: Being HIV Negative In the Age of AIDS* (1996). Odets, too, questioned the assumptions of ad campaigns run by agencies around the city. He contended that the "100 Percent Safe All the Time" message of AIDS education was ill-conceived and needed to reconsidered. When you tell someone, "thou shalt not," as any parent or teacher could tell you, they do the opposite – especially when it comes to sex. Unlike the advertising campaigns, Odets sought to embrace the complexities of queer sexuality. Prevention activists and therapists across the country would embrace his work, which led to a national debate around social marketing and HIV prevention (Patton1996; Green 1996).

"In the past, we've relied on social marketing, although right now we are undergoing a paradigm shift toward concentrating on psychosocial aspects of gay men's lives," said Derek Gordon of the San Francisco AIDS Foundation (SFAF), when asked just what sort of interventions are necessary to keep people negative. He went on: "Increasingly, gay men are making extremely complex decisions about levels of risk behaviors" (Shepard 1997a).

What had gone wrong? As the 1980s moved into the '90s, safe sex became dogma. "Did you have safe sex?" became a first question to follow any confession of sexual exchange. If a poor soul responded with a "No," waves of acrimony would follow – "Well, that was stupid." Any response beyond the childish "I'll never do it again" was

cut off, relegated to the closet. Dialogue about why a knowledgeable person would have unsafe sex anyway was shut off.

Of course, something always lies below the surface. "We need to look at assumptions that underlie the behavior [unsafe sex by those who know better]," explained SFAF's McArthur Flournoy. "Is it lack of information? No. Is it how I feel about myself? What are the circumstances I am looking at?" (Shepard 1997a).

Signorile vs Warner: Two Approaches to Risk

Signorile would begin to outline some of the dynamics Flournoy was talking about in his column in *Out* magazine, an offshoot of *Outweek* in which he had first written about "outing." In an October 1994 essay entitled "Unsafe Like Me," Signorile described an unsafe sexual encounter he'd had with a sailor in Hawaii. The next day, Signorile explained, he'd suffered an anxiety attack as he contemplated why he had put himself at risk. The problem, Signorile assured himself, was that he had assumed HIV was behind him. Most of his older friends had been infected years earlier and they were gone. The few positive friends that were still alive had had the virus since he met them. After the Hawaii trip, this all changed. One, then two, and then three people he knew reported recently testing positive. This "blew me away," the young gossip columnist wrote.

Over the next few weeks, Signorile examined what was wrong with his community and he insisted that other queers do the same. His conclusion: gay liberation had failed. Signorile felt queers had created a culture that is "more oppressive than anything that straight people ever hash up" (1994, p. 128). The enemy was no longer straights or governmental indifference. Gay culture was the problem. "And we must change it," he concluded (p.128).

Signorile would cast the “circuit boys” – a group of highly stylized young gay men who go to lots of parties – as the dangerous sex demons of the next generation of the epidemic (Rofes 1998). In contrast, he positioned himself as the protector of the innocent victims – young gay men just coming out. "It dawned on me just how much pressure is put on young gay men as they enter the gay community – more than ever before," he wrote. According to Signorile, the circuit boys taught the innocent victims that being gay was only about sex. The problem with gay culture was that it produced magazines and clubs and the like which exploited gay men's sexuality for profit (presumably unlike the rest of mass culture's billboards, movies, and such).

Years earlier, Signorile had made his name as a proponent of “outing” – revealing the sexual orientation of public figures – in the desperate hope that outing people would transform homophobic discourse. Given his desire to end the AIDS epidemic, he had thrown the liberal principle of privacy to the wind. Outing was rooted in his past experiences with closeted bullies, who still played a role in his psyche. In "Unsafe Like Me," Signorile was again projecting his own internal conflicts onto the community at large. He explained that he was in awe of the sailor (with whom he had had unsafe sex), and did not want to do anything – including asking him to put on a condom – that might jeopardize hooking up with this guy. This was about Signorile’s own insecurities. But instead of working them out with friends or a therapist, he blamed public sexual culture. Gay culture had created the pressure that had caused him to have unsafe sex again. The enemy was outside – not inside himself – and it had to be stopped.

With this resolution, Signorile concluded his essay with a warning for the community: "I fooled myself into believing I'd somehow escaped HIV. I feel invigorated upon having snapped out of it. I just hope that it’s not too late" (p. 129). He vowed would not make the same mistake again – and if it was up to him, neither would anyone else. Rather than deal with the complexities of his sexuality and culture, Signorile would make sure no one else would have to face the same problems he had; he knew what was best

for the community. Signorile developed a new-found confidence that he could assist the Giuliani administration without harming queer New York. In an interview the following summer, he explained:

> Even though we're in the middle of a right-wing Congress, we have come out of obscurity. We are not in the place we were during the Reagan Administration. I'm secure enough right now that as a cultural force and as a people, we can start to examine ourselves without constantly fearing we are playing into the hands of the right.

This would prove a profound misreading of history.

In stark contrast, Michael Warner would take a deeper look at the continuing dynamics of risk. His 1995 essay, "Why Gay Men are Having Unsafe Sex Again," suggested that a great deal more was going on with unsafe sex than Signorile was willing to consider. Warner began by making another call for better data. Unlike San Francisco, the New York Department of Health had made no concerted effort to outline exactly what percentage of gay men in the city were HIV positive or were having unsafe sex. A series of regional studies suggested that approximately 50 percent of the gay men in New York City had HIV; 20 to 30 percent of gay men said they'd been fucked without a condom, and another 35 to 35 percent said they had fucked someone else without a condom (Warner 1995, p. 32).

So it was clear that people who had been educated about safer sex were having unsafe sex anyway. But why? Warner suggested that the message of the international AIDS conferences in Berlin in 1993 and in Yokahama in 1994 was gay men would have to face the difficult reality that HIV was going to be with us for a lifetime. Like heterosexuals, a significant number of queers were simply ignoring prevention messages that said no degree of risk was acceptable. Instead, they had set a goal of safer, as opposed to 100% safe, sex (p. 32).

But something else was going on. Warner recalled cruising a man, going back to his apartment, and, given the risky charge of the moment, forgoing using condoms. But why? What was going on? Something deep inside himself found profound joy in the act. At the same time, it terrified him. "I recoiled so much from what I had done that it seemed to be not my choice at all. A mystery, I thought. A monster did it." But, despite the fear, he had unsafe sex again with the man. "I could tell by the heady thrill that my monster was in charge," he wrote (p. 32). And Warner faced the realization that fear and shame were not enough to prevent him from being unsafe. Danger was part of the excitement of the scene. Who was the monster?

From a Jungian psychodynamic perspective, this monster personified a lover archetype. Robert Moore and Douglas Gillette suggest that, "the lover is the archetype of play and 'display,' of healthy embodiment, of being in the world of sensuous pleasure and in one's own body without shame" (1990, p. 121). S/he is deeply sensual, aware of the physical world in all its splendor. S/he feels compassionately attached, emphatically in tune to a mysterious universal interconnection. Many gay men report that they derive delight from the baths by feeling connected with all men in a community through contact with one particular anonymous stranger; here this "lover" also connects the individual to a vast collective body, with memories, impulses, and feelings (p. 122).

Unsafe sex has to do with how societies remember – with their bodies. It has to do with a ritual process in which a person leaves historical time, entering a mythic narrative time and space. There is a reconnection to a psychological landscape in which queer sexuality was linked with liberation instead of domination. Sometimes unsafe sex has to do with playing out a memory. One partner may rub himself against the other, seeing how far the other partner lets him go. "That's a way of saying, 'Lets play the '70s game,'" Warner wrote (1996, p. 33).

Douglas Crimp argues that something far more powerful than just "poor self esteem" is at play when people "who know better" put themselves at risk. Queers deal

with a complex set of often very difficult circumstances. The pop psychology underpinning 12-step recovery philosophy fails to adequately address these dynamics. "Only if you can acknowledge that you have an unconscious can you admit doing self-destructive things without feeling guilty" (quoted in Warner, 1995, p. 33). Pop psychology fails to acknowledge the power of the unconscious. The person who wants to be unsafe, the monster, is one's self.

For many, the pleasure and excitement of sexuality is used as a response to personal depletion. Active sexuality may be part of an effort to grasp some sense of vitality in an otherwise psychologically barren, often homophobic world (Cohler 1999; Shelby 1994; Tolpin 1997). It is part of a hope of participating in the world of sensual experience in its totality – to be touched by everything, recognizing no boundaries. Warner suggests: "The appeal of queer sex, for many, lies in its ability to violate the responsibilitizing frames of good, right thinking people" (1995, p. 33). There is an inherent queerness in the sublime interrelation of Eros and Thanatos. Some are at their happiest and feel most alive starring into the abyss. These are inherent dynamics of play. Some like to jump out of planes; others like to jump off bridges hanging by little more than a bungee chord; still others like to "play the '70s game." Rofes explains that in the context of play:

> [W]e have to include a discussion of risk in this 'cause to me risk is pleasure and risk is meaning. And yet we continue to try to create safe spaces that don't have authentic risk to them – no drugs, no unprotected sex, no other things. And it's not what people like, where people can take risks and go and enjoy it.

The answers to unsafe sex had to do with questions about what makes life worthwhile. But not that everyone agrees with this argument, as Hoffman explains:

> Call me cautious, but I've always thought that play should be responsible. And it doesn't matter what you are talking about. If you are talking about having sex, doing drugs, or running naked through the streets, you don't do things that go beyond your threshold for risk.

Yet a fair number of those people tapping into this risky play live very close to their fiery creative potential. They have little interest in stopping at socially created, constructed boundaries (Moore and Gillette 1990, p. 125,129). To deny or flatten out erotic potential is a vast mistake. Although many mental health professionals take this route, the goal should not be to “blandify” passion. Moore and Gillette (1990, p. 26) suggest that few people aspire to be sort of gray/normal. "Often, the definition of normal is "average." We live in an "age under the curse of normalcy," elevating the mediocre. Warner's central argument in *Fear of Queer Planet* is that queer identity represents a critique of "regimes of the normal." For some, risky sex represents such a challenge. The question is how to channel the creative potential of Eros in a healthy manner. Such questions lie at the center of the emerging HIV/AIDS prevention movement.

Warner suggests that safer sex needs to be constructed through a lens that acknowledges the totality of a person and a culture. "We need a prevention movement," Gay Men’s Health Crisis (GMHC) policy director Mike Isabel argued in Warner's piece. No one really knew what that movement would look like. But over the next few months, all of New York would find out (p. 32).

GALHPA vs APAL

Chelsea, February 1995: A new study stating that HIV infection rates among gay men were up had hit the East Coast. GMHC held a community forum to address the news. Some 60 people, including many of the key players in the ensuing sex wars, came to the event. Rotello was one of the panelists. Armed with the new data, he clumsily attempted to summarize the alarmist study predicting 100 percent death rates for gay men by the year 2000. On one side of the room sat Warner, a professor at Rutgers University, and Columbia’s Kendall Thomas, the emerging cognoscenti of the movement. On the other sat Signorile. The battle-lines were drawn for a vast new round of sex wars.

Questions of unsafe sex and community ignite strong feelings. "People go mental over this stuff," one community activist reflected. A number of underlying dynamics were involved as gay journalists battled queer theorists and community activists battled through the new prevention movement. Bertram Cohler, a gay psychotherapist, has written extensively about transference and countertransference responses among gay therapists and their gay clients in the time of AIDS (1999). To the extent that both sides in the new sex wars sought to come to terms with the arguments of the other, and given the emotional responses arising from these interactions, Cohler's insights bear mentioning.

A vast body of work suggests that the gay therapist, who may have felt a degree of anxiety about his/her own sexual identity since childhood, may experience more internalized self-criticism than a straight therapist in similar circumstances. This affects the way s/he works with his/her patients. Criticism of the client's preferred sexual practices, kinship patterns – monogamous or promiscuous – and lifestyles may arise both explicitly and implicitly within the therapeutic encounter (Blechner 1997; Forstein 1986; Stein 1988). Reactions between gay clients and gay therapists to issues of unsafe or risky sex may be significantly more intense than between straight therapists with gay clients. The context is more loaded with meanings. Thus, it is no stretch to image the same tensions emerging between queer prevention activists of different camps.

The HIV treatment revolution and new insights into routes of transmission have significantly changed the parameters of working with HIV positive gay men. Today – while it takes two to have unsafe sex and uninfected partners should definitely take precautions – unprotected sexual contact with another on the part of HIV positive clients may lead to intense feelings of anger and even disgust in the therapist. Many see the faces of lost friends when they hear about others having unsafe sex. It represents a vast personal tragedy and a cultural failure. Thus, Cohler (1999) argues that queers often get

more upset with each other about this stuff than straight folks looking in from the outside. They are not called “sex wars” for nothing.

By the spring of 1995, queer New York was beginning to feel the practical effects of Signorile and Rotello's calls for the destruction of the city's public sexual culture. Bill Dobbs (1995) explained:

> Michelangelo Signorile, a gay writer, gets fucked without a rubber in a hotel room in Hawaii. Back in New York, he writes about the episode and uses it as a springboard for a campaign to attack HIV-positive gay men and destroy the keystone of sound HIV prevention policy: individual responsibility. Signorile and a small group which includes other gay journalists write op-ed pieces attacking commercial spaces where gay men meet to have sex. The group helps trigger editorials calling for the padlocking of sex clubs. Quick to accuse other of hypocrisy, Signorile’s sexual conduct begs many questions: If he couldn't or wouldn't stop himself in Hawaii, should his liberty be taken away? By raising the age of consent or putting him in a mental institution? Should his freedom to get fucked in the ass be banned with a sodomy statute? Should his hotel room door be removed so the authorities can monitor his behavior? Signorile has asked for laws to smash the doors on bathhouse cubicles.

By March, SexPanic! member and *POZ* magazine columnist Stephen Gendin was worried. He had put out a call for more activists to address the future of HIV prevention work in the city. The problem was that he had scheduled the forum for the same night as the Academy Awards, and he was worried not a gay man in the city would miss the awards show – Tom Hanks was up for best actor again. As it turns out, 50-plus people came, including Warner and Thomas. Within three weeks, the group that came together that night would be talking about what to call itself. Gendin wanted to call the group PAT, for Prevention Action Team. In the end, AIDS Prevention Action League stuck. APAL was born.

In the meantime, those who sat on the other side of the room at the February GMHC forum were taking another approach. Rotello and Signorile formed Gay and Lesbian HIV Prevention Activists, or GALHPA. Their goal was to end HIV transmission in commercial sex establishments. According to GALHPA, HIV transmission among gay

men was "becoming epidemic again." Implicit within their mission was that it was more important to identify and target places than particular practices. The distinguishing point was between commercial sex establishments or at home. Their view was that the only way to end HIV transmission at sex clubs, bathhouses, or backrooms was to get them gay men to follow a series of guidelines they had identified.

GALHPA offered to work with and monitor these establishments to help them comply with these guidelines, but insisted that “those that do not should be closed." GALHPA's mission included the paternalistic warning that those who enjoy the baths should make them safe, because if they don’t, "the city will shut them down." Implicit within this salvo was the message that GALHPA would be working with the city to help shut down clubs the group did not approve of. "They were kind of like the House Un-American Activities Committee," one early APAL member recalled. "Signorile was like Ronald Reagan." GALHPA knew what was best for queers, even if the queers did not agree.

GALHPA's guidelines to end unsafe sex in commercial sex establishment emphasized social control.[1] In addition to calling for clubs to kick out those who might be having unsafe sex, they called for clubs to “comply with NY Department of Health code regulations.” They suggested that:

> Clubs must be able to monitor the sexual goings-on in clubs. As such, there must be proper lighting and cubicles cannot have doors. This does not include video booths as long as only one person uses the video booths at a time and management can monitor this. In addition, there cannot be holes in between video booths.

This guidelines included a list of "Endorsers," including Rotello and Signorile, and "Non-Gay Endorsers," that included one additional name. Following the listed guidelines was

[1] I am grateful to former APAL members Stephen Gendin and Brownie Johnson for sharing their APAL files with me. The GALHPA mission statement has not been published anywhere.

an oxymoronic call for open meetings among those who agreed: "Meetings are open to those who sign on to these principles."

A number of problems were inherent in the approach deployed by GALHPA. By linking increased rates of HIV infection with commercial sex establishments, the group disregarded the core principle of a decade of prevention activism: practices – not places – cause HIV transmission. This was the cornerstone of the safer sex project gay men had understood for a decade. Monogamy and abstinence were unsafe alternatives because they are unworkable. Few actually remain abstinent. Telling people to "just say no," with no other alternatives, is just going to push people to have unsafe sex.

GLBT people invented safe sex based on the implicit understanding that – epidemic or no epidemic – sex is not limited to just penetrative intercourse. Promiscuity taught queers not only about pleasure, but also about its multiplicity of possibilities. With time-honored preparation and a spirit of experimentation, this consciousness about pleasure allowed queers to change sexual behaviors quickly in the wake of the epidemic, especially when compared to a century of behavioral therapies which never accomplished a thing. While GALHPA felt that queer sexuality was perversely distorted, the message of safer sex was that the long history of gay sexual flexibility, its relation to promiscuity, and the ingenuity needed to constantly adapt to homophobic culture was the only thing that could save queers (Crimp1988/1991, p. 252-3).

GALHPA's approach marked a profound shift in community prevention tactics from one of education to one of regulation. The law-enforcement ethos of the new Giuliani administration had been appropriated by this group of gay journalists. Yet many others in gay New York were disenchanted with their call to enforce the highly suspect city Department of Public Health codes. To the extent that these regulations forbade all oral, vaginal, and anal penetration in "public" places such as commercial sex establishment and private parties , regardless of whether condoms were used or not, they comprised an unworkable prevention strategy (Dangerous Bedfellows 1996, p. 15).

During the first round of San Francisco bathhouse closures in the early 1980s, Bérubé (1996, p. 215-6) pointed out that when legal sexual spaces are closed, more people are driven underground, to have sex in illegal spaces such as the streets and parks.

The message of the "second wave" infection data was that queers had grown weary with unworkable prevention strategies. As Odets warned, gay men were not responding to the outmoded, sexphobic strategies of public health workers. Telling gay men to use condoms for oral sex when no clinical data implicates this practice as a route of HIV transmission gave the message that gay men should ignore the warnings of those in the prevention establishment. Increasingly, a disconnect had been growing between community members and those paid to work in AIDS organizations to create HIV prevention policies. The logic of GALHPA's proposal was seen an attack on the lives of those who depended on these spaces, an attack on the lives of sexual outsiders. For many in the closet or lacking the financial resources to sleep with a lover at home, public sexual culture is the only place to experience queer identity. GALHPA's proposal to take the doors off the stalls, cubicles, and booths in public sex establishments had everything to do with social control and nothing to do with prevention. To the extent that this group of gay activists called for state inspectors to enter queer spaces to police behavior between consenting adults, they took part enforcing the contemporary sexual caste system. In past eras, homophobes played this role. Now neo-con gays were doing their dirty work. GALHPA produced a conservative message the media was happy to report, portraying queers as promiscuous disease carriers. Inherent within the GALHPA approach lay a confusion between morality and public health, relinking lifestyle and mortality, aligning rhetoric about "community standards" with anti-gay rhetoric (Dangerous Bedfellows 1996, p. 15-7).

Context had everything to do with the GALHPA prevention strategy. This strategy coincided nicely with the decreasing grip of AIDS on the gay lobbying agenda,

which had shifted toward a less threatening series of heteronormative proposals including gays in the military, [NOT ONLY HIM]gay marriage, and the like (Schmalz 1993).

In addition, GALHPA's strategy was developed simultaneously with a massive gentrification plan implemented by the Giuliani administration. The new mayor had proposed a new XXX zoning law to rid the city of 99 percent of its adult businesses, gay or straight. Shutting down sex clubs played well to the outer-borough constituencies that had elected Giuliani, while at the same time furthering the his real estate development plans. The strategy was to balance the city budget by increasing tourism and gutting social services. The mayor had proposed to close the Department of AIDS Services when he came into office (Aronowitz 1997). If it had not been for the work of ACT UP, this plan would have passed. While ignoring the infinite revenues of sex tourism, the mayor felt that he had to create a "pro-family" image of the city to increase tourism (Gendin 1996, p. 109). He would legitimize the pro-family message of the Disney Corporation by giving it a $29 million dollar tax break to open up shop in Times Square. In exchange for the company's support, Giuliani sought to erase all signs of an alternative subculture that did not fit within this totalizing middle-class vision of family life.

In March 1995, Gendin called his old ACT UP colleague Signorile to ask why he was doing what he was doing (1996, p. 109). Given their history, Gendin thought he could help Signorile rethink the dangerous implications of a gay man asking the state to further regulate queer sexuality. In the end, Signorile just ranted about how important it was to get the clubs closed. He explained that he was not worried about closeted homophobes or the religious right any more. He had seen the real enemy of the gay community, and it was itself. Signorile seemingly had no conception that what he was doing was profoundly dangerous. He was not concerned about the implications of calling in the state to regulate queer sex (and by extension morality) during a period in which anyone deviating from hetero family norms was alreadyviewed with suspicion. He saw no problems with inviting the police, taking orders from a former prosecutor turned

mayor, to monitor the sex clubs of gay New York. As far as Signorile was concerned, the failure of 100 percent safe sex was a far greater threat to queer New Yorkers than any policy Giuliani could come up with. Faced with gays' inability to regulate their own desires and behavior, state-enforced social control would be necessary.

Gendin recalled feeling depressed after the conversation (1996, p. 109). Signorile sounded tired, Gendin wrote, as if he had given up on gay New York and the prevention models they had fashioned. By the mid 1990s, Rofes (1996) notes, the bargaining phase of the collective gay grief process over the pandemic – which had motivated the safer sex messages – was coming to an end. Many, such as Signorile, did not know where to go from there. So he sought a quick fix. For him, closing sex clubs represented a solution that could produce results when nothing else had. And he was not alone in his desperation. After the Yokohama AIDS conference in 1994, Harvard Professor of Epidemiology Jonathan Mann bemoaned: "It is now evident to all that while the first period, the first global AIDS strategy and all our work based upon it, was courageous, extremely important and necessary, it is also manifestly insufficient to bring the pandemic under control" (quoted in Pollack 1994).

Odets (1995) comes as close as anyone to describing the daunting task gay men faced as they tried to live healthy lives as they faced the second decade of a seemingly unending epidemic. He was the first clinician to address the silent epidemic of grief and its relation to safer sex – or the lack thereof – among HIV negative gay men. Countless clinicians had addressed the psychological needs of people with HIV/AIDS and their caregivers. Odets' private practice informed his insight that HIV negative, as well as positive, gay men were playing out AIDS-related grief in countless strange ways, including by having unsafe sex.

To many, the emphasis on the psychological needs of HIV negative men appeared absurd, and they ridiculed those supporting such research. Some described the call for HIV negative support groups as "viral apartheid" (Tuller 1993). *Outweek* rejected a first

draft of Odets' essay on HIV negative men with the dismissal: "moot." But working with Rofes, Odets offered a series of trainings, including one at San Francisco's Shanti Project, on the clinical dimensions of the lives of HIV negative men. A cornerstone of this work suggested that an inordinate number of relatively "healthy" HIV negative gay men were suffering from symptoms of adjustment and mood disorders related to loss. Depression had imbedded itself into the psyche of a large cohort of queer people. For many negatives, the experience of living in grief-soaked disease epicenters resulted in profound levels of anxiety. For some, the result was survival guilt – why go on if this world is going to be so painful? Unsafe behavior inevitably followed (p. 19 -20).

APAL sought to come up with fresh, more coherent prevention strategies that avoided GALHPA's regulatory approach. As venues where men had been free to be queer without reprisal for over a century, bathhouses had been an integral part of New York gay culture (Chauncey 1994). APAL sought to emphasize the importance of public sex venues as part of queer history and culture, hoping to utilize these spaces for education. As such, a sex-positive message was integral to their work. With it, they were able to educate men to adapt to circumstances while acknowledging the importance of sexuality to good health.

APAL hoped to get people thinking creatively about how to enjoy safer sex play,

> including non-penetrative acts, instead of giving up their needs for sexual contact (Dangerous Bedfellows 1996, p. 16). The group used basic social science data to debunk the myth that there are causal links between promiscuous sex, public sex, and the second wave of HIV infections. For years, peer-reviewed reports (Henricksson and Mansson1995; Murray and Paine 1988; Murray 1995; Patton 1985,1990) had quantified and qualified the fundamental principle that there is no relation between the number of sexual partners a person has and HIV infection. By the mid 1990s, this knowledge was further reflected in a number of ethnographies (Bolton 1995; Bolton, Vince and Mak 1994; Hendricksson and

> Mansson 1995; Cohler 1998). Most confirmed the position advanced by Bérubé during the first round of bathhouse closures,in San Francisco and New York in 1984 and ’85 that the baths – as venues where prevention education takes place and norms of risk reduction are reinforced – can actually promote safer sex.

APAL's abiding principles and approach to data stand in stark contrast to those of GALHPA. Warner outlined and drafted the group's mission statement (see APAL Mission 1996). Unlike GALHPA, APAL was formed as an open organization, without litmus test for membership, dedicated to HIV prevention through advocacy, action, and education; in order to advance its agenda, APAL held open meetings every Thursday at the Gay and Lesbian Community Services Center.

. The group sought to support queers in reducing the spread of HIV and "sustaining a sexual culture in which we can survive." Warner was careful to note that though the group held certain beliefs, no specific doctrine was required to fight to reduce new infections. APAL work built on the following philosophical underpinnings about individual responsibility in relation to a larger community:

- Prevention activism is intended to give people the tools to make their own choices. Activists can influence but should not seek to coerce others.
- Prevention activism must be designed for the long term, not as a stopgap measure in lieu of a cure.
- Prevention activism is not the government, a social service agency, or anyone else's job or responsibility.
- Empowerment and education are essential components for sustainable solutions to reduce HIV infections. State regulations and policing are not.
- Solidarity among gay men is essential. AIDS and its implications weighs on multiples aspects of our lives...We do not deal with grief by ourselves, the gay public world is a necessary resource for survival. We must fight to protect it.
- HIV transmission, not promiscuity, should be the target of prevention activism. Unsafe should be distinguished from public sex.
- Prevention activism must acknowledge and seek to meet those having unsafe where they are at, without condemnation.
- To be realistic, negative men cannot expect positives to protect them and vice versa. People must take responsibility for their own protection.
- Positive and negative men should be encouraged and supported to have sexual lives.

- Shame and guilt will not prevent new infections, open and honest discussion will.
- Prevention goals must be realistic or they will not work. Programs requiring absolute safety which unnecessarily impedes pleasure or makes people feel inadequate cannot be sustained.
- Prevention strategies must incorporate holistic approaches incorporating multiples aspects of people's lives, not just "behaviors."
- Governments, local, state, and federal, must assist and respect gay men in their work to keep another generation from getting sick. AIDS must not be used as an opportunity to impose erotophobic and homophobic policies onto us.

Greg Gonsalez, an ACT UP veteran who went on to form the Treatment Action Group with Mark Harrington, outlined APAL's approach. While the group believed in the need for community-based activism to prevent the further spread of HIV, it did not believe the route of strict enforcement of state health regulations and sex club closures would achieve stated goals. The group's nine principles included:

1) Gay and lesbian communities have many different views on how to contend with the increasing HIV infections. They all stem from care for gay and lesbian people. This being said, no self-appointed community activists should purport to speak or act as police for the many communities of queer New York, especially without engaging in a discussion about options. Proposals to close sex clubs as HIV prevention policy is not an option approved of by much of queer New York.

2) Current state regulations, albeit designed under auspices of public health, fail to differentiate degrees of risk between protected and unprotected intercourse or between anal or oral sex. Regulations designed to control sexuality without acknowledging degrees of risk are counterproductive. Use of tools of the state, such as police, for enforcement are even more dangerous.

3) Bathhouse closures will not stop queers from having anonymous or public sex. Gay men have incorporated anonymous sex into their lives for centuries. Value judgments will not stop this practice, which queers of all ages and walks of life have embraced as meaningful. Shutting down legal venues for public sex will only push the activity out into the piers, streets, parks, and hallways, and other dangerous places where it is difficult to disseminate HIV education and prevention materials.

4) Bathhouse closures stigmatize behavior, impeding frank communication. This creates obstacles to promoting behavior change, a cornerstone of prevention efforts. Discussion about feelings and attitudes about the sex queers have in the

face of an epidemic is the most productive tool in preventing increasing rates of infection.

5) It is the type of sex, not its location, which creates the risk of HIV infection. A wealth of data shows that a substantial portion of high-risk behavior takes place in the bedroom. Bathhouse closures, as a prevention policy, fail to address the vexing dilemma of sexual safety in relationships which can be sustained for a lifetime.

6) If prohibition of queer public sex without consideration of risk factors amounts to a sensible public health solution to curb further infection, then why not outlaw gay sexual expression in the home as well? Community members see the difference, homophobic legislators, on the other hand, fail to draw a distinction. They use the language of gay advocates of bathhouse closures for their own purposes.

7) Bathhouse owners must be more responsible for AIDS prevention among the patrons from whom they earn a living.

8) Do not demonize queers because of the locations we choose to have sex. Do not take away our choices or characterize us as out-of-control victims unable to take care of ourselves. Dialogue about the role of sexuality for queer New York is necessary. Do not polarize this conversation before it starts.

9) We are all responsible to be prevention activists, to fight to stop the spread of HIV, to fight for monies for prevention strategies, and to have sex safely, well and often.

A veritable "who's who" of queer New York writers, activists, authors, and health-care providers signed on to the nine principles Gonzales articulated. Signatories included Bérubé; Gendin; former ACT UP member and executive director of Housing Works, Charles King; long-time activist and author Amber Hollibaugh; *POZ* magazine publisher Sean Strub; Joseph Sonnabend, MD; and queer theory proponents such as Warner, Lisa Duggan, and Simon Watney, among others.

The Debate Hits the Mainstream

By late April, the bathhouse debate was in full steam. People on the right, left,and center were offering opinions on the second national bathhouse debate in a decade. A

central principle of the second wave of AIDS activism waged by ACT UP was to delink queerness and death. Bérubé argues that sex panics are born when "innocent victims" are demarcated from "sex monsters." ACT UP's goal was to dismantle grotesque images that equating gay people with AIDS carriers.

On April 20, 1995, the *New York Post* ran an editorial calling for the city – in the bold words of the headline – to "Padlock the Sex Dens." In so doing, the *Post* declared that queer culture and AIDS are inherently linked. Innocent New Yorkers had to be protected from "the public-health threat posed by promiscuous, unprotected homosexual sex." The editorial lambasted those public officials who catered to "the homosexual lobby" for their political cowardice in allowing sex clubs and theaters, such as the New David, to reopen if these were carefully monitored. This idea seemed inherently ridiculous to the *Post*: "An institution that requires 'monitors' armed with flashlights to ensure that on-premises sexual activity is 'safe' – vis-a-vis the transmission – has no right to remain in business." According to the *Post*, closing the clubs was the only thing that could be done "in the face of a sweeping and lethal epidemic."

This debate overlapped with ongoing discussion in the national news media, the *New York Times*, about a second wave of HIV in the mid-1990s and general attacks on people being sexual. The *New York Times*, for example, ran stories on leathermen on Castro Street in San Francisco. The rest of the world was getting hysterical about unrepentant open sexuality and pleasure. By 1995, a national conversation had emerged about pleasure, prevention, what goes on in queer play spaces, and public space in general. Wayne Hoffman recalls:

> But the horrible part of it to me was that, yes, that debate was happening in public, in the *New York Times* and the *Village Voice*. It was a debate that was instigated by gay people. The people writing these articles you are talking about were saying, "Oh my god, people are having unsafe sex! Gay people are reckless! And gay people are out of control! The second wave, it's coming any second!!! The second wave of AIDS. Gay men are suicidal and they are murderous!!!" That was gay people writing about it. They were the one's going to the mayor.

The Emergence of the Gang of Four

GALHPA Gabriel Rotello had lashed out publicly when a new bathhouse opened in Manhattan, calling it "a bathhouse like the legendary bathhouses of old, those bustling hives of contagion that helped spread death throughout the gay male world." Rotello and Signorile, and their group, GALHPA, argued that any club that allowed more than mutual masturbation should be closed. GALHPA helped the Giuliani administration identify sex clubs to be closed. Signorile went so far as to public calling for GMHC to allow undercover cops into their Morning Party fundraiser to arrest queers using drugs (Rofes 1998). The right to sexual self-determination and the ability to meet free from the intrusion of law enforcement agents were cherished principles. APAL viewed Signorile's calls for government intervention as a patent betrayal of the legacy of Stonewall and queer/AIDS activism (Eigo 1997c).

As part of the ongoing debate, both APAL and GALHPA members wrote intensely personal essays about unsafe sex, although with vastly different conclusions. While Warner looked carefully inward, considering the drive inside himself to be unsafe, Signorile lashed out at a gay culture that he thought overemphasized physical beauty. Without this pressure, Signorile was sure he would have felt more comfortable asking his partners to wear condoms. "Quite honestly, I do not trust myself," Signorile confessed in the *New York Times* in 1995, using this platform to recommend that sex clubs employ police to monitor the behavior on their premises. Hoffman reflects on the public nature of the debate:

> Even though these discussions took place in mainstream venues, they were taking place between gay people. In the debate over AIDS in the 1980s, it was gay people vs. straight people. Gay people had gained access to the mainstream media. They were writing for *Newsday* and the *New York Times*. They were credible. So by the 1990s, you have almost the identical argument ten years later, except this time, its gay men that are writing that gay men should be locked up. The publications have learned that if you let straight people say those things, you appear homophobic, but if you let gay people say those things its fine. And you

> have places like *The Nation*, which often has difficulty as a progressive publication telling what's really on the left from what's on the right. They were writing these vaguely proto-fascist articles about sex until someone sat down with them and said, "You realize this is really not a liberal position at all. Can you tell where the left is on this?" And they couldn't. They were thinking we're leftists, so we let gay men speak without questioning them. And the gay men we're letting speak are really conservative on sexual issues. "But they are gay, so they must be liberal." I'm like, "No, some gay men are really conservative."

AIDS activists had been here before. Twelve years earlier, a *New York Post* journalist wrote an expose on gay sex clubs. In response, Governor Cuomo instituted a new health code banning oral, vaginla, and anal sex, with or without condoms, in commercial establishments. Police used this code to close countless clubs in 1985 (Bérubé 1997).

So when Rotello (1995) wrote a column in *New York Newsday* describing the unsafe anal sex he witnessed in a club as a "sex murder/suicide," activists cried foul. HIV prevention cannot be reduced to shock and sound bites, they argued. For all anyone knew, these two men had already discussed their health status. This type of journalism accomplished little but fanning flames and selling newspapers. Yet Rotello and Signorile did not seem to mind; they were finding an audience.

Yet unwittingly, the Gang of Four ignited a new wave of research aimed at considering the meanings of public sexual culture (Dangerous Bedfellows 1996; Monteagudo 1997). Cultural anthropologist William L. Leap, who edited a volume on the subject in 1999, explains:

> Male centered public sex is not, as Rotello and Signorile maintain, a spontaneous unstructured product of unrestrained bio erotic urges, something manageable only in terms of the regulatory authority of the (patriarchal) state...Male centered public sex is *culturally* constructed – with physical, historical, as well as imaginary terrains, negotiated risks and negotiated safety, verbal declarations and silence, as well as gay pride, closeted desire, and heterosexual identity all contributing to such constructions (1999, p. 6).

Yet, instead of embracing the complexities of public sex, the Rotello and Signorile had taken the most intricate of questions and flattened them into simple sound-bites.

Sociologist Pierre Bordieu notes that such journalists put a premium on presenting their positions in "uncomplicated, clear, and striking terms." In order to do this, "they must avoid the quagmire of intellectual complexity" (1996, p. 3).

While the Gang of Four advanced one-dimensional stories, members of APAL (who would later reform as SexPanic!) sought to embrace the nuanced decisions gay men were making about their own lives and needs, without condemning anyone. This message built on lessons from APAL's principles of HIV prevention activism:

> Prevention activism is more than getting people information. Many gay men are having unsafe despite knowing otherwise. People must be free to talk, free of judgment, about the meaningful reasons they have had unsafe sex. This is how we can learn from and prevent future unsafe experiences.

Few psychoanalysts would disagree with this point. University of Chicago professor Jonathan Lear (1998) has argued that given the human propensity toward irrational behaviors, it is more useful to consider the meaning of irrational acts, rather than condemn them. Freud discussed this process in his seminal essay, "Remembering, Repeating, and Working Through." If irrational acts are not open for discussion, then lessons cannot be gained from them. If an irrational act, such as unsafe sex, is to be prevented, it must be discussed and understood. People will simply repeat such acts if they are not brought into the realm of conscious thought. There are many reasons why people – from the president to the street person – engage in unsafe, risky sexual behaviors, which they know will have profound consequences. Building on this sentiment and the work of the Odets, APAL sought to create a venue for gay men to reflect on their sexual experiences.

Walter Armstrong, who was active with APAL, recalls:

> I discovered Walt Odets' book, *In the Shadow of the Epidemic.* That was a very revelatory experience for me and that was when APAL sort of took off. And I really wanted to operationalize as much as possible what I saw as his theoretical points. And I really thought what people need to do, like specifically what those story books were about, were trying to put into words and pass on different kinds of categories of experience that represented unsafe sex points of

> reference. I felt like people were still really unable to talk about having unsafe sex. There was shame and guilt and it was just not understood. And yet everybody was doing it.

Thus, Armstrong, who by this time was the editor of *POZ* magazine and was working with Gendin, collected a series of narratives of unsafe sex and distributed them as a package called "APAL Pen Pals." "Think about the types of sex you are having, speak honestly about your life. Understand your desires. These are the first steps of HIV prevention," the package declared. It continued:

> The stories contained in this envelope are true. APAL has collected them as a wake-up call to our community: a lot of unsafe sex is going on among gay men, for various reasons…We must face up to this fact. But we must also go beyond painting a picture of what is happening. We must struggle to understand why.

The message ended with an invitation. "Join us to help us develop strategies to keep ourselves safe." Inside the package was a call for stories. "Please write a sexual experience you've had. Tell us what happened, how you felt at the time, how you feel now... Submissions may be anonymous. APAL will add stories to this campaign and will display them at some public event." Some of the printed narratives involved dominance; others involved calculated risk, and still others involved care within the context of a fantasy of "playing the 1970s" game. which Michael Warner (1995) describes in his essay, "Why Gay Men are Having Unsafe Sex Again." The APAL Pen Pal writes:

> I was in love with a man named Martin. We never discussed safer sex. We simply avoided what we thought to be unsafe sex. We mutually masturbated and had anal sex of any kind. One night, as we were making love, he brushed his cock up against my anus. I spread by legs wider, as he teased the opening. He looked at me, and I looked at him. I knew at that moment that I would let him fuck me. Without a condom. And he saw that. He smiled, and bent down to kiss me. He didn't penetrate me that night, nor any other night of our short-lived romance. I loved him just enough that I would have allowed him to do it. And maybe just maybe he loved me enough that he didn't take advantage of that.

Dangerous Play

While it is easy to demonize barebacking (intentional sex without a condom), APAL was advancing far more complex sexual narratives than the one-dimensional narratives heard in the media about unsafe sex. There were few venues for people to talk about this struggle between Eros and Thanaos. Armstrong continues:

> I guess I also became fascinated with the idea that you could feel like you should have sex and you should die at the same time you wanted to have unsafe sex. There were just all these paradoxes and it was all coming out through sex and through condoms. And I felt like it was just something really great about all of [US?] being in that place and being able to mine that material. Plus, it was words, and I always liked playing around with words.

Thus, word-play, storytelling, was a part of the new AIDS prevention activism. It was part of trying to make sense of a distinct moment. “In the second decade of AIDS, it is no longer enough to get out information on unsafe sex, even though we know about condoms. Prevention activism must enable gay men to think through our reasons and desires for being safe or unsafe,” the front page of the APAL Pen Pal package announced. ‘We must find a way to live for an infinite future, helping both negative and positive men to keep uninfected.” For APAL, part of that process was through frank discourse, discussion, and story telling. And in some ways, those stories are community-building stories. It was building a community in which gay men were not expected to lie about their needs.

While conventional AIDS prevention social marketing advanced the ”Safe Sex is Hot Sex” mantra which no longer seemed to effectively speak to people,APAL instead sought to build on the lessons of the harm reduction approach, building community

through honest acknolwedgement that humans are messy and moral judgement can be counterproductive . Armstrong continues:

> I guess one of the things I really liked about it was it was pretty non-judgmental. We weren't telling people to have unsafe sex. But we certainly were not telling people not to have it. And it was in that gray area. Like, this is just what we have done. And maybe this will strike a chord. You leave it very inconclusive. Its either people will love it or hate it.

In "Remembering, Repeating, and Working Through," Freud argued, "You are not cured because of what you remember, you are cured because you remember." People were having a lot of unsafe sex, but they were not remembering that they wanted it. They were repressing the memory, rather than acknowledging the memory or the desire and doing it safely. By not remembering, people were not taking care of themselves as much as they could. But with the Pen Pal project, APAL was building a community in which people were allowed to remember, and part of this included remembering the sex of the gay liberation years in the 1970s – or just watching porn movies about the 1970s if one was not old enough to have been there (Hoffman 1996). Many came into sexuality before AIDS was part of a sexual landscape. Those memories were and are important. It's not that anyone was arguing that AIDS wasn't here. They couldn't. But sexuality before AIDS was also important. "And it wasn't one or the other," Armstrong says. He continues:

> And there is so much grief over the loss of it [Crimp 2002; Hoffman 1996] that I think people's hearts would break if they had to experience that consciously. The price of not experiencing it was taking really stupid risks. Whose to say they are stupid, even. And none of that has been worked out.

Part of what the Pen Pal project acknowledged was a desire for many gay men to communicate about the authentic struggles and experiences, which were not being captured or addressed in the social marketing campaigns or the commodification of queer

experiences that resulted in nice gay neighbors in movies or television shows. “It’s our messy acts we’re out here defending. We don’t want to be sanitized,” Michael Warner suggested (1997b) during the SexPanic! debates. Kirk Read, a young gay activist who never experienced the carefree sexual culture of the 1970s, elaborates, “I’m so bored with social marketing and clear messages and just the attempt to completely eradicate poetry from our lives.” A clear core part of play is acknowledging the nonlinear part of our experiences, the experimental, affective aspects of human interaction. “Not that queer people have a lease on poetry, but we’re just communicating to the wall right now,” Read continues. “It’s so linear and dead-end.”

Part of the messiness Armstrong, Read, and Warner were discussing was the difficult reality of unregulated, uncontrolled play. Here, it is useful to view sexual play and its related meanings within a context that acknowledges both the affect of care as well as the possible destructive Dionysian results of pleasure and risk. In the same way as the impulse to create can be a destructive impulse as well, the impulse to play can most certainly be viewed as dangerous and destructive as well as generative.

Shortly after his book, *The Trouble with Normal*, was published, queer theorist Annamarie Jagose asked Warner about the work’s “flurry of contradictory energies that animate sex” (2000). Jargose noted the author’s recognition of both the regulation of sex as well the view of sex as “a loss of control.” While good citizens are expected to keep sex under control, it’s rarely so simple. “How does this divided experience or characterization of *sex play* itself out in the struggle for what we might still refer to as sexual liberation?” Jagose asked. Warner’s response was equally vexing:

> Again, a question that calls for a more complex answer than any of us currently know how to give. Many people want us to pursue, as the inner goal of gay politics, one or the other of these poles of tension. There are some who see sex as authentic expression, and would like to integrate sex more with identity, to be fully out of the closet and to have sex lives that we can affirm in the broad daylight of moral discourse. This is the position, more or less, not only of some conservatives but also of many movement progressives such as Urvashi Vaid. On the other hand, there are people who think that the only sufficiently honest and radical move is to acknowledge all the ways that sex can never be assimilated to identity, pride, or perhaps even politics at all. It is loss of control, abjection, and perversity, and can never be recuperated. Here I am thinking especially of Leo Bersani, who stresses the self-shattering impulse in sexuality and all the ways it resists the stories that we like to tell of politics and sociability (Jagose 2000).

For many in APAL, the point was to create a politics that acknowledges these complex relationships among authentic play, sexuality, and health. "HIV prevention requires taking into account the diversity of people's sex lives, that prevention should be grounded in people's desires and pleasures," Warner argued (Smith 1998, p. B11). Within community, not without, individuals can find freedom from harm.

At its heart, discussion of public sexuality and pleasure has everything to do with a hunger for authentic experience and play. As Eric Rofes explains:

> First off, I do want to say that I do think that people get their needs met or book. For example, I think that recent research in San Francisco around gay men and serosorting is really interesting in this way. I've long suspected that rank-and-file gay men are getting what they want sexually and doing it as safe as they can, even though prevention and research has told them to do something else. And the research is showing that, in fact, these people at UCSF have done this research looking at why is there an increase in syphilis and gonorrhea but there is not an increase in HIV among gay men. It's because gay men who are getting fucked without condoms are generally fucking with people of the same antibody status. To me, this is revolutionary. In an era when being fucked without a condom is seen as unsafe regardless, rank-and-file gay men by the thousands have found a way to get their needs met, have their fun, get their sexual meaning despite it. The lesson is that in fact people will get their meaning, and their fun, and their play and they go to sites where its provided. And if your organizing project doesn't include it, you will only affect the people who get their needs met through that particular site. And that will be a limited group culturally and number-wise. People won't show up if they don't get their needs met. People don't get fooled. They will come to one or two events or meetings but if it's not meeting their

> needs, why come? For me, the question is how to create organizing spaces and social justice spaces that are really doing that.

Here, play can be recognized as both an expressive desire and practice, as well as a part of movement organizing.

According to researchers at the University of California San Francisco's Gladstone Institute of Virology and immunology, who are conducting the "Positive Partners" HIV Superinfection Study, serosorting refers to the selection of partners based on HIV status. Given that many HIV-positive people have made the conscious choice to have sex only with other positive people, the Gladstone researchers decided to study the phenomena. Over the last ten or fifteen years, more and more men in San Francisco have reported having unprotected intercourse, yet rates of HIV have not increased substantially. Serosorting has allowed rates of HIV infection to remain stable despite the increase in this form of high-risk activity (Gladstone Institute 2006).

Regardless of what Signorile, Rotello, and company had to say, people were still going to persue pleasure – and for many that meant risky play. For Rofes, the question remains: "Is there play with no risk?" It's a point he's written about frequently. "For many, the forbidden becomes desired; taboo produces cravings; the return of the repressed is made corporeal and is experienced as an enormous hunger" (Rofes 2005a, p. ??). Play and risk are intricately connected. It's a point many have long acknowledged (Bateson 1972, p. 181).

APAL built on Rofes' contention that the rank-and-file have to get their needs met or they will bolt. The group organized a number of events centered around the notion of safe play, as [APAL member?] Jim Eigo explains:

> APAL decided that the generation of pleasure in the name of community would be a worthy end in itself. APAL's Save Our Sex Party, September 7 at Zone DK, was AIDS prevention work as well. The fucking onstage, in defiance of a health code, was an education, and it spread its energy to the party-at-large: 450 men of different races, shapes, ages, classes coming together in a model of supportive, safer public sex in the face of city harassment (2002).

While this strategy – expressive play and community building – became a central focus for APAL, others such as Hoffman were more focused on the pure politics of the attacks on these spaces. Hoffman, who attended the Save our Sex Party, explains:

> APAL was really hands-on personal stuff, but it wasn't really quite my strategy. It wasn't my main focus. When I think of my allies, we all have different notes that hit us. But that one wasn't one that hit me. Learning how to intervene at a sex party and teach them how to use a condom is not what I'm going to do. It's not my big interest. I'd rather make sure that the venue that they are in is staying open. APAL's focus was what people do together.

As the APAL/GALHPA debates wound down in 1995, Hoffman worked with a group of New York University graduate students to edit a volume that encapsulated many of the issues within the ongoing prevention wars. This well received volume, *Policing Public Sex: Queer Politics and the Future of AIDS Activism*, included essays by Odets, Bérubé, and Gendin, an interview of Lidell Jackson by Kendall Thomas, as well as essays by Hoffman and the other editors (Dangerous Bedfellows 1996; Monteagudo 1997). The volume successfully captured the debates about civil liberties, public health, and activism at the core of the APAL/GALHPA schism.

When I read *Policing Public Sex*, I thought, "Wow" I had never heard anyone frame the conversation about how clubs could stay open in such a nuanced way. Rofes (1998) and Michael Bronski (1998) would build on this work to suggest that the sex wars over public play spaces raise core questions about what it means to live in a pluralistic democracy. The debate centered on the importance of spaces for public debate,

connection, contact, and Eros staying open and accessible to all. The richness of the volume resulted from its praxis. These were activist scholars writing about their experience with very public debates about the spaces where they worked and played.

Others involved in the activism of the APAL (and later SexPanic!) period were motivated to continue to build spaces that honored APAL'S call for "the generation of pleasure in the name of community.". For many who organize public sexual events and venues, the creation of spaces where people want to play is an image of the world in which they want to live. Abby Ehmann explains:

> Well, I think that I can help change the world image within the boundaries of the walls where I do my own thing. The events that I produce, like I just did one of my sex parties/anything goes events Saturday night, and I wish there were some way to bottle it, a perfect alchemy, to say this is exactly what I'm doing. But I put it out there. I try to create a certain kind of ambiance, I invite certain people to perform or participate, and then hope that the right people pay to come and play. And that they do come and play and interact. And they do. But I never know if they are going to. I try to create what I consider the perfect world in what I do. (Personal interview with author, 2005)

Sex club organizer Lidell Jackson, concurrs:

> The sex clubs created some sort of close circles, because a lot of the same guys kept coming, and a lot of the same guys started to know each other and started to trust each other and hang out and play with each other. There was a level of camaraderie that developed and then, not to sound schmaltzy, a brotherhood (quoted in Merritt, 1992).

What really emerges is an image of a community. In contrast to the cold, isolated formalities of the outer world, his Jacks of Color co-founder Kobi adds: "There's definitely more of a bonding here... People say hello or smile at you, and even with the sex play, things can go more into a group thing" (quoted in Merritt 1992).

Yet as much as anything, these party spaces create somewhere to play and discover parts of the self in relationship with others. For many, the result is the image of a

liberatory world. Within the context of a question about playing and the possibilities of exploring, Ehmann explains:

> The party that I was just at, there were guys giving guys blowjobs. There were women giving guys blowjobs. There were women with women. There were men with men. There were dominatrices with submissive guys. There was this guy getting fisted and then all sorts of sundry constellations of people on the beds and stuff. So I do think people are exploring. Because my parties are very accessible and because I am very accessible, I do tend to attract a lot of people who have never been to an event like that. I guess in a way, I am helping people put on the training wheels, where people really are exploring and they are doing things that they have never done before by virtue of being there, even if all they do is stand around and talk and the sex is in the next room, and then go home and say "I went to a sex party this weekend and it wasn't scary and it wasn't gross and people were not weird." To me, that's doing my best to create my perfect world. Last week was pretty happy. When I can bring together couples and singles and newbies and young and old and exhibitionists and voyeurs and tops and bottoms and sex people and dancing people and Burning Man people and professional doms. Someone emailed me and said, "You sure do a good job of bringing together," all the kinkiest people, very friendly warm and comfortable people.

The Sex Wars Flare Up Again

The parties Jackson and Ehmann organize are semi-private and by invitation. Thus, they tended to elude the eye of the Health Department or the morals police. A more difficult struggle was to keep more public, accessible clubs open for all.

The cities of New York and San Francisco had starkly different experiences with this project. Bathhouses are spaces for more than sex – they are integral parts of New York's queer culture (Chauncey 1994, p. 200-225). Gay activists have traditionally fought closure of their spaces on these terms. Gay bathhouses were shut down in New York in 1985 because of the threat of AIDS. Yet the demand for community spaces

continued, and other commercial sex establishments for men reopened in the following years (Bérubé 1996). Hoffman explains:

> San Francisco and New York had very similar discussions and arrived at opposite conclusions. San Francisco's was that public sex was allowed. It was private sex in public that was outlawed. You couldn't have a cubicle that didn't have windows. You couldn't have any doors that locked. You couldn't do anything that couldn't be monitored. That was San Francisco.
>
> New York was the opposite. Anything in public could be outlawed. Anything in public was outlawed, anything. What that meant in New York was a conscious deceit. As long as you could wink at the police and the city and say there's nothing doing on here, then you could stay open. And they couldn't prove anything. As long as people were behind locked doors, there was no way to tell what they were doing. And you could say, "Look, people are just renting rooms here." And those places stayed open. So the trick in San Francisco is, you have a different loophole, but at least its built upon honesty and transparency. In New York, the policy elicits deceit 'cause as long as you lie, you're fine. The minute you get to the truth, you are sunk.

On the other hand, in San Francisco, "They left [public sexual] spaces open but closed bathhouses that had closed, locking doors that couldn't be monitored. That's the distinction," Read explains, contrasting his city with New York. Ever the realist, Read, who worked in a number of San Francisco clubs, notes, "Basically the idea is that gay men will not use condoms in privacy. You know, it's true. Left alone, if I didn't go through there with a flashlight, that's what would happen." Still, many favor the openness of the San Francisco approach. The cornerstone of the harm reduction philosophy is acknowledgement of the complexity of human desire and the need for honesty. The implicit understanding is that policies based on deceit do not support public health. As Patricia Siplon (2002) states, these debates over HIV prevention have everything to do with primary struggles between abstinence and harm reduction approaches to sexuality and health.

Open acknowledgement of queer sexuality and desire is a difficult frame to maintain. Yet this is exactly what a new cohort of activists who got involved with activism during this period tried to do. “I think sex spaces are one of the main reasons I moved to San Francisco. And since I’ve been here. I’ve been involved in different efforts to reopen the bathhouses,” Read explains. The possibility to write about, organize, and play in public sexual spaces was one of the thing primary reasons for Read moving to San Francisco. New voices were needed in a national debate about an increasingly precarious series of public spaces that activists had fought for over decades. Discussing the New York experience, Hoffman continues:

> I know the city is afraid of appearing homophobic by shutting down gay spaces, but all we have to do is expose the truth because the law forbids them from existing. The law didn’t care about how it happened or whether there was a hole in the door or whether there was a lock on the door, the law said, “No. Period.” So it was just a question of having some gay people stand up and turn on the lights.

By the end of the 1995, APAL was reaching the first of many limitations of organizing around both notions of intergroup play and as well the defense of space to play. Jim Eigo situates this discussion within a broader assessment of queer politics:

> ACT UP in its first several years had been notably effective on three fronts: articulating issues, generating corresponding public actions and using the media. APAL had been good at the first but spotty on the others. In the wake of APAL’s enormously popular Save Our Sex Party I’d hoped that AIDS activism had ripened into its sensual phase, where every action was a carnival, *a gumbo of sex and play and politics*, in defiance of a disease and a regime that would throttle all pleasure. But it was not to be. The overwhelming effort it took to fight off a city that was bent on closing all gay sex spaces siphoned off most of the energy of the few dozen activists who remained working with the group by late fall 1995. Just before Christmas the group held one last (successful) community forum (plus a porn-swap that doubled as civil disobedience since the sale of sexual material took place in defiance of rezoning) and packed it in (2002; emphasis mine [?]).

But in the fall of the following year, the *New York Times Magazine* ran Andrew Sullivan's essay, "The End of AIDS" (1996). While elaborately detailing the resurgence

of circuit parties, Sullivan minimized the plight of those currently hardest hit by AIDS, the urban poor, drug users, and minority women. He failed to acknowledge these populations until the fourth paragraph of the essay. Implicit was the message that AIDS was in a "twilight" now that it no longer disproportionately affected economically privileged gay men. Sullivan, a gay man and Tory Thatcherite, had essentially replicated the Reagan/Bush message to those suffering from the epidemic: your problem. Many from ACT UP and APAL felt that Sullivan had jeopardized the work ACT UP had been doing for a decade to help people recognize HIV/AIDS as a public health emergency which required urgent attention from the highest levels of government. But the landscape was, of course, changing.

After the historic 1996 international AIDS conference in Vancouver, journalists began to write about a new set of AIDS drugs, protease inhibitors, and medication "cocktails" that finally – some fifteen years into the epidemic – were producing results. While the drugs did not work for everyone and the primary health care required to make use of the new treatment regimens was not accessible to all (Garrett 1999; Adler, et al. 1993; Moore and Paine 1994), many people with HIV were now able to live longer, healthier lives. AIDS had changed, and so had the cultural landscape surrounding it. The new drugs allowed assimilationists to distance themselves from the radicalism of AIDS activism and its links with other social justice movements.

Sullivan's essay spoke to a problem of history and memory. What would be the lessons of the AIDS crisis years? Sullivan openly worried about the “post-AIDS gay lifestyle," noting, "people feared that the ebbing of AIDS would lead to a new burst of promiscuity, to a return to the 1970s in some joyous celebration of old times.." (1996, p. 55). According to him, the gay liberation years had permitted gays to live without responsibility, "in return for an acquiescence in second class citizenship." The 1970s were a time when "straights gave homosexuals a certain amount of freedom; in return,

homosexuals gave away their self respect." Only with AIDS did gays gain respectability, despite the "irresponsible outrages of Act-Up" (p. 60).

Sullivan saw assimilation, marriage, and military service – rather than sexual freedom — as the rightful heirs of a post-AIDS gay agenda. His agenda spoke to a number of problematic questions: Would the notion that "queer sexuality equals contagion" and "everyone needs to get married" be the legacy of the crisis years? In the following years, would the GLBT movement divide into radical liberationists and assimilationist homophiles again as AIDS receded from the gay agenda?

AIDS had changed and so had the culture around it. Following the Vancouver conference, activists battled over how to decode the significance of each new scientific breakthrough. Like so much with HIV, these interpretations were mediated through competing narratives. In a typical example, reports from Vancouver suggested that combinations of antiretroviral drugs, including protease inhibitors, could reduce HIV to undetectable levels in the blood. The *New York Times* reported the breakthrough as a challenge to HIV prevention efforts. It was an argument fraught with misconceptions.

To confirm its position, the *Times* – which seemed to have only four gay people, all exceedingly conservative, in its Rolodex – called the reliably histrionic AIDS advocate Larry Kramer for a quote. But instead of challenging the way the *Times* covered the story, as he had in years past, Kramer condescendingly lashed out at gay men: "If you test low on the PCR [a test that measures HIV levels in the blood], some people are using this as an excuse to literally go out and have unsafe sex again, assuming incorrectly that they have no more virus in their system." Second, the *Time*s contacted Rotello, whose book, *Sexual Ecology: AIDS and the Destiny of Gay Men*, was to be published the following year. "A very effective way to reduce the contact rate is to make relationships more attractive," Rotello argued, mimicking Sullivan's message. "One of the best ways to do that is to show people how they can exist as couples safely" (Dunlap 1996).

Some fifteen years into the epidemic, few continued to embrace a crisis ethos (Rofes 1998). Nonetheless, AIDS had not gone away. Early in 1997, the *New England Journal of Medicine* reported that 26 percent of HIV-negative men were less concerned about HIV risk in light of treatment advances, 13 percent were willing to take more chances, and 15 percent conceded they had already done so (*LGNY* 1998). While troubling to many, these reports infuriated Signorile, Rotello, Kramer, and Sullivan. The idea that gay sex was responsible for a new wave of infections inspired this group to embrace the conservative contention that gay sexuality is not only dangerous for homosexuals, but for society at large (Goldstein 1997). They sought to turn AIDS prevention back into unquestionable dogma in which open discourse is replaced with shame. In response, knowing queers dubbed these journalists "the Gang of Four," a reference to the Chinese leaders who sought to replace intellectual engagement with dogma during the Cultural Revolution (Thurston 1988).

In 1997, Rotello, Signorile, and Kramer revisited the APAL/GALHPAdebate in print. Rotello's *Sexual Ecology* attacked the "condom code," a belief that condoms can both prevent HIV and allow for gay liberation's sexual possibilities. For Rotello, condoms were a "technical fix" to a problem that could be fixed only if gay men rejected sexual permissiveness. In May, Signorile's new work, *Life Outside: The Signorile Report on Gay Men: Sex, Drugs, Muscles, and the Passages of Life*, hit the stores; in it, he argued gay culture, especially the party circuit, was to blame for the continuing spread of AIDS. The same month Kramer attacked gay community-building in *The Advocate,* a gay national news magazine, saying, "That culture has killed us" (1997a).

Enter SexPanic!

By the mid-1990s, Bill Dobbs was miserable. The ACT UP years from 1987 to 1993 had been a dynamic period in queer activism. The following years, however, were beset by one political loss after another. Rudy Giuliani had been elected in late 1993; the

following year, celebrations of the 25th anniversary of the Stonewall riots created a huge split in the GLBT movement; and in 1995the XXX zoning law was passed. By 1997, the publication of the books by Signorile and Rotello – two former ACT UP members – and the debate they sparked only added to Dobbs' woes.

In the spring of 1997, Dobbs called his old ACT UP and APAL buddy, Jim Eigo, demanding that he do something. Eigo was one of the city's more thoughtful and tenacious prevention activists. Almost a decade earlier, Eigo worked with Mark Harrington to orchestrate the group's "Surrender Dorothy" campaign against Stephen Joseph, the head of the New York City Department of Health, who was pushing for HIV names reporting, mandatory testing, and heavy crackdowns on prostitutes. In response, Eigo organized an ACT UP affinity group to picket all of Joseph's appearances. When every AIDS and GLBT organization in the city opposed names reporting, then-mayor Ed Koch, worried about politics, pulled the proposal (Crimp and Rolston 1990, p. 72-76). A co-founder of ACT UP's Treatment and Data Committee, Eigo is perhaps most famous for his work helping win expanded access to experimental HIV drugs. In July 1989, Eigo testified before Congress – stating that "people whose only alternative is death or deterioration cannot ethically be asked to wait for bureaucratic niceties" – and wrote the first draft of the federal policy to create expedited drug approval (Brouwer, 2001, 99Eigo, et al. 1988; Epstein 1996).

Following Dobbs' challenge, Eigo spent the next three weeks drafting an "Activist's Critique" of Rotello's *Sexual Ecology*. In it, Eigo outlined the claim that AIDS activism and community building were intricately linked with a need to create and enjoy places for people to play and build kinship together. He wrote:

> Applying some of the community lessons that activism taught me, I now play to promote personal, partner and group pleasure and health, and persist in believing that the best long-range prevention, supporting habits to be maintained over a lifetime, will be fueled by desire rather than fear (1997).

In this “Activist Critique,” one can see the same conviction of authentic care for the queer body politic that Eigo had brought to the fight for expedited drug access. Justice,pleasure, play, and sincere caring accompany much of Eigo’s work. During one the takeovers of Stephen Joseph’s office, Eigo sat locked down with a gentleman in a floral print spring dress. As activists were being lead out of Joseph’s office, Harrington remembers, “the cops asked how many of us were HIV positive. And Jim Eigo said, ‘We all do.’ And Jim is HIV negative. But he didn’t think he should be drawing any distinctions between any of us, at least as far as the cops were concerned.” For Eigo, everyone lived with HIV, regardless of serostatus. Thus, they all needed to be able to take care of the community body.

Eigo’s “Activist Critique” continues:

> Rotello tells gay men outside the core that they can't just ignore us: core members are dangerous because they occasionally infect outside the core. This invites action against the core group and misses the point: *many in the core group play safe.* For some of us, multipartnerism has not been a threat to our safety, but its source; and semi-private and commercial sex clubs the platform for that safety, a platform that Rotello and his fellows would, in the name of unproved theory, deny us (1997; italics mine).

Dobbs and Eigo sent it all over the country.

In meantime, Crimp and Warner, two queer theory professors, were having a conversation of their own about the new attacks by Rotello and Signorile. Much of it began at ACT UP veteran Gregg Gonsalves' regular HIV positive support group, which Warner attended. Golsalves recalls, "We had one of our regular support group and at the end, it moved to talking about Gabriel Rotello's new book, and we all got sort of exercised about it." Warner continues:

> We were just sitting around talking about how depressing it was that we kept hearing these stories about bars being closed... And then we kept turning to the gay press, and instead of seeing coverage about this or resistance to it, we would see these reactionary screeds by Rotello and Signorile.

“People were not happy with the sex negative rhetoric,” Gonsalves explained to me when I interviewed him. So, he suggested they do something about it, and Warner agreed. Gonsalves reached out to the grassroots, while Warner and Crimp did outreach to academic circles (Crain 1997, p. 32).

Warner and Crimp were enormously influential thinkers. Over the previous decade, Crimp had helped inject a scholarly analysis into ACT UP's response to the health crisis. His seminal anthology *AIDS Cultural Analysis/Cultural Activism* and *AIDS DEMOGRAPHICS* (co-authored with Adam Rolston) served as some of first and best extant examples of queer theory applied to the epidemic. During the early years, Crimp even had his own groupies, or "Crimpettes," at ACT UP meetings. Warner's 1993 anthology, *Fear of a Queer Planet*, helped propel queer theory onto academic reading lists nationwide.

Warner envisioned the group as more queer than gay: "We're not simply advocating a redemptive gay identity and its acceptance by the mainstream" (Crain, 1997). The point was to create a vast, new queer politics, capable of challenging the repressive model envisioned by the Gang of Four. Such a politics would be fully invested in respect for sexual diversity and the use of pleasure as a political principle. It did not matter whether those guys busted at the World Trade Center were gay or not; they were being persecuted out of a vast cultural erotophobia. Refocusing sexual liberation from gay identity issues, "queer" becomes a broader notion. This was a queer activism positioned for anyone who rejected repressive sexual norms (Crain 1997; Goldstein 1997a).

Their outreach produced a dynamic convergence of sex workers, anti-censorship feminists, members of transgender communities, and even a few "straights," none of whom were included in the dialogue up to this point. Remnants of the brain trusts

remaining from APAL, ACT UP, Queer Nation, and Prostitutes of New York (PONY), as well as many of the region's leading queer theorists and prevention activists, met in May to discuss the strange state of affairs. An A-list of gay and lesbian New York attended these meetings, professing a fear for the future and a desire to articulate a response to the repressive politics of Giuliani and the Gang of Four. The “anti-gay/anti-sex” message of the Gang of Four was understood as a classic American sex panic. With a tinge of irony, the group would call itself SexPanic! Like APAL before it, this new group began regular Thursday meetings at the Gay and Lesbian Community Services Center in the West Village.

Until SexPanic!, there had never really been such a "queer," as opposed to strictly gay and lesbian, grouping. Queer Nation, an ACT UP spin off of the early1990s, had conceived of “queer” as a decidedly separatist notion (Duggan 1995). "I Hate Straights" had been one of its mantras (Berlant and Freeman 1993). Unlike other gay and lesbian groups, SexPanic!, was a queer organization which sought to protect sexual self-determination for everyone. SexPanic!'s conception of queer could be understood as both anti-assimilationist and anti-separatist. SexPanic! tried to exist in those gray spaces that don't conform to sound bites and are rarely organized into political work.. By its very nature, the group rejected the specter of accusation, turning the stigmatizing charges of "pervert" and "whore" on their heads. Notions of “queer” served as a cultural aesthetic critique. SexPanic! had as much to do with the sexual citizenship of exotic dancers and other sexual outsiders as it had to do with gay and lesbian groups. Sexual liberation would benefit everyone.

SexPanic!'s coalition presented a unique opportunity. Could such an experiment work in the laboratory of urban politics? No one really knew. Queer theory had found widespread success in the academy; the same could not be said for the gay press or grassroots activism. Both the national and local gay press failed to cover the development of this new philosophy, even in New York, where the field was practically born. Crimp

notes: “People who do this work are engaged with thought that's advanced and difficult because its trying to advance new ideas” (Goldstein 1997a).

Yet there is an always a space for new ideas, such as a post-identitarian politics. For many, the notion that we have entered an era in which social identities are unnecessary is uncomfortable. Social constructionists have spent a generation debating this very question. While certainly notions of “race” and cultural categories such as “gay” or “straight” may be better viewed as historic productions than as biological realities, when it comes to questions of public policy – of affirmative action or gay anti-discrimination laws which depend on these very social categories – many of the same theorists and activists advocate for a strategic essentialism favoring fixed social identities (see Gamson 1998). SexPanic! never aimed to advance such a compromise. And some of the group’s ideas, like queer theory itself, were not well received. Crimp acknowledges: “The result is that even some intelligent gay people ritualistically reject queer theory.... We need to take on the task of conveying our work to a larger audience” (Goldstein 1997a). Part of SexPanic!'s work was to advance this new way of looking at culture and politics. By fortifying its rich intellectual base with activism, SexPanic! was creating a new way of conceiving of gay and lesbian politics (Goldstein 1997a).

The group’s core task was to shift public discourse from condemnation toward recognition of the complexities and possibilities of public sexuality. Building on APAL’s work, SexPanic! formed to challenge this line of retrospective judgments. SexPanic!'s Kendall Thomas, a Columbia law professor, spoke to Sullivan's interpretation of history. "I simply reject the narrative about disco balls and loud dance music providing the undercurrent for this almost Dionysian story of infection because it suggests to me that gay men, rather than a virus, led to this epidemic" (*Out* 1997).

A Teach-In…and More Ink

Over the next few weeks, the group members began a vast conversation. Many SexPanic! meetings took on the feeling of a French salon. One night they would discuss marriage, another the psychodynamic underpinnings of unsafe sex. The group's first effort was a teach-in at the gay community center in the heart of New York's Greenwich Village. Thomas and Consalves opened the event, their presence implicitly promising a dynamic link between the academy and grassroots activism.

Various SexPanic! members gave presentations. Bérubé, a MacArthur fellow and author of *Coming Out Under Fire: The History of Gay Men and Women in World War II*, presented a history of sex panics. Bérubé had been a member of the San Francisco Gay and Lesbian History Project in the early 1980s, and had argued against the 1984 bathhouse closures. Dobbs spoke about the citywide zoning law and the court battle preventing the law from being enacted. Warner and NYU professors Phillip Brian Harper and Lisa Duggan presented on the underpinnings of the new queer politics as they related to the current panic. Implicit in the teach-in was the notion that there was another way of looking at what was happening to queer New York that was not being presented in the gay press. Contrary to the mayor's public relations "decay" narrative, Manhattan's character – its public sexual culture – did not need to be eroded in order to make New York friendly to business. Something very precious would be lost if New Yorkers did not take action.

Crimp, Harvard's Anne Pellegrini, and Carole Vance were in the audience at the teach-in. Vance had edited *Pleasure and Danger*, a collection of papers presented at the 1982 Barnard conference, "Towards a Politics of Sexuality," where modern queer theory began. Duggan and Vance were two of the founders of the 1980s Feminist Anti-Censorship Task Force (FACT). Their presence was not lost on anyone. FACT had been formed in 1984 to articulate a feminist response to Katharine MacKinnon and Andrea Dworkin's ordinance to define pornography as a civil rights violation against women. The brief that FACT filed was persuasive enough that the Supreme Court struck down the

proposed law (Hunter 1986, 1995). Commonsense prevailed against censorship in 1986. Hopes ran high that the same thing could happen with the current sex panic. Could similar arguments create enough opposition to the city zoning law to halt club and store closures?

Demons of sex wars past were also present at the teach-in. During the question and answer section, Gary Bush, another activist, stood up to announce that he was what is known under Megan's Law as a “sexually dangerous predator” and had been jailed for four years for having sex with a seventeen-year-old. Bush received a respectful ear. Over the next six months, rarely would press coverage of SexPanic! fail to bring up the specter of child seduction. Caleb Crain (1997, p. 33) offered a typical example: "This government-tagged sexual predator represents a question Sex Panic! has not yet answered... He may yet force Sex Panic! to choose between political viability and pure queerness." While Rofes and other SexPanic! activists posited that there was room for both “suits and sluts” within this movement, the specter of child seduction had been linked with the group.

Throughout the summer, work continued on formalizing an agenda that everyone agree on. It included the following:

1) Condemnation of the assimilationist rhetoric of the “leaders” of the gay and lesbian movement.
2) Commitment to fight the loss of queer clubs in Manhattan.
3) Condemnation of the increased numbers of entrapments and arrests.
4) A renewed call for respect for sexual diversity. In the group's words: "When norms of purity go unchecked, sooner or later we all lose that test."
5) A call for a more honest approach to AIDS prevention work that acknowledges the complexity of sexuality (Crimp. et al. 1997).

A new vitality filled the air of the West Village in the summer of 1997. Over a series of nights, SexPanic! members placed the "Turdz" flyers inside copies of books by members of the Gang of Four in bookstores all over the city. In July, *Lesbian Gay New York* (*LGNY*), a local gay paper, panned SexPanic! for this prank. Others noted the

misspelled, "Turdz" on the flyer. Kramer took his first stab at SexPanic! in *LGNY* that summer, castigating, "I did not fight all those hideous battles, and watch all those people die, so you young kids could go out there and make the same fucking mistakes..." (1997c). George De Stephano, a gay writer, responded the following week:

> I am so fucking tired of Larry Kramer's tirades about gay men and gay culture. His latest space-wasting screed recycles his usual demeaning horseshit about gay men "thinking with their cocks," a penchant which purportedly "annoys" lesbians. Who are these dick-brained men he's constantly berating? Not anyone I know, that's for sure (quoted in *LGNY* 1997, p. 17).

The battle lines were drawn. SexPanic! spent the rest of the summer meeting, fleshing out the agenda, drafting essays, sending letters to editors nationwide, and going point-counterpoint with the Gang of Four as the "new sex wars" raged.

By August, several SexPanic! members had published articles and letters in response to Kramer's July "How Can We Be Gay Now?" article. Eigo responded both to Kramer and to the attacks on the group for leafleting Signorile's and Rotello's books:

> Get used to it: SexPanic! has just begun. Over the brief six weeks of our group's existence, several hundred savvy and passionate fags and dykes have participated in its fledgling activities. Unlike the coterie of media deadwood that fuels *LGNY*, we do not believe that AIDS is Nature's revenge, and we do not believe that mimicking white heterosexual America is a cure-all. SexPanic! is beginning to articulate a vision of Queer America that stands in marked contrast to the great gray suburbia that *LGNY* and its staff of fundamentalists would have us all check into. Stay tuned; it could make being gay fun again (1997b).

SexPanic!'s flyer at the Gay Pride parade in June drew attention to a major group of issues. That was a short-term response.

New York's New Comstock

SexPanic! members recognized a distinct temperance era logic (Wagner 1997) in the policies that accompanied the election of Rudolph Giuliani as mayor in 1993. His efforts seemed to parallel the thinking of the Gang of Four. With his ascent, a new Comstockery took hold in the city. George Bernard Shaw coined this term after Anthony

Comstock, the social and moral crusader from the New York Society for the Suppression of Vice. The Oxford English Dictionary defines the term as, “Excessive opposition to supposed immorality in the arts; prudery.” From the Reconstruction years through WWI, Comstock (1844-1915) tracked anything he considered obscene – from busy flea sex shows, to Julius Schmidt’s condom bootlegging business, to Margaret Sanger’s reproductive rights literature (Gilfoyle 1992; Kendrick 1996; Museum of Sex 2002). Giuliani followed Comstock’s lead.

“I would say the biggest limitation we ever ran into was a mayor named Rudolph Giuliani, he would arrest you for cracking a joke. And put you through the system and make you eat really, really crappy baloney sandwiches,” Dana Beal, one of the Yippies explained when discussing the obstacles he faced when organizing his pro-marijuana marches throughout New York City. “Giuliani was such a grim man.” Another interviewee, SexPanic! organizer and party promoter Abby Ehmann, reflected, “Giuliani just wanted to fuck with anybody who wasn’t just like him.” The theme of Giuliani’s attack on difference runs throughout the interviews. The result was a push toward hyper-control of movement in public space. New York writer Linda Stasi lists the unprecedented restrictions of the Giuliani years:

> Don't drive a cab. Don't sell a dog. Don't dance without your clothes on in a club. Don't dance with or without your clothes on in a bar. Don't make noise. Don't take handouts if you're a disabled single mother... Don't peddle art on the street. Don't protest at City Hall. Don't protest at all. Don't cross the street. Don't cross the mayor (1998).

Sociologist Susan Christopher notes, "The need to control leads to a homogenized, administratively segregated urban environment" (1995).

Soon after his election, Giuliani initiated a series of efforts to institute and enforce “quality of life” policies that facilitated middle-class renewal of New York

neighborhoods. The mayor's efforts were largely a response to the politics of fear (Didion 1992), which had overwhelmed how New Yorkers viewed public space during the early 1990s. The mayor skilfully played on these anxieties as he deployed a series of narratives of moral panic (Cohen 2002) related to classic panic themes of crime (Hall 1978), race (Chambliss 1995) and sex (Crimp, et al. 1998) to justify hitherto unprecedented encroachments into public space in the name of redevelopment. Giuliani's tactical manipulation of social anxieties was consistent with a dominant theme of urban political thinking. Geographer Neil Smith explains: "In the 1990s an unabated litany of crime and violence, drugs and unemployment, immigration and depravity – all laced through with terror – now scripts an unabashed revanchism of the city." By "revanchism," Smith explains: "It portends a vicious reaction against minorities, the working class, homeless people, the unemployed, women, gays and lesbians, immigrants" (1996, p. 211).

This politics found its genesis in the years before and just after New York's fiscal crisis of the mid 1970s. Narratives of decline (Beauregard 2002) were easily manipulated into a politics of blame and resentment of those who utilized public assistance, those who used public space. William Sites explains: "[B]lame tended to resurrect time-honored themes in U.S. politics – the unworthy and dependent poor, the misguided generosity of social reformers, the unreasonable demands of racial minorities, the irresponsibility of free-spending politicians" (2003, p. 39). These themes would become the cornerstone of the Reagan Revolution in the 1980s.

By 1993, Giuliani skillfully played on the politics of "revenge as an antidote to insecure identities" (Smith 1996, p. 211), and he rode to victory this resentment of crime, the homeless, those on public assistance, and social outsiders who made use of New

York's public sexual cultures and spaces. Over the next eight years, he played on a "prurience" of decay of public spaces, stirring anxieties about urban decline to justify shifting public resources from service provision toward urban policing (Katz 1986, p. 251-92; Sites 2003, p. 31-69). These policies favored renewed social control of public space in an effort to generate support for their redevelopment (Garland 2001). Giuliani efforts incorporated a pro-growth approach to running the city in a way that improved its image as well as its property values. He proposed wiping signs of decline – including homeless people – off the streets and out of the neighborhoods (Mele 2002, p. 10). The underside of this "quality of life" campaign was increased police brutality and social control, and the "blandification" of urban space as the mayor set his sights on locations of difference (Sites 2003 , p. 60).

"You must hunt these men as you hunt rats, without mercy," Comstock boasted in 1876. He was referring to his crusade against those who supported vice, reproductive rights, and women's rights (Turner 2002, p. 33). With the advent of his "quality of life" campaign, Giuliani took his place in a long line of "moral crusaders" – from Comstock to New York mayors Fiorello Laguardia and John Lindsay – who used sexual prohibition as a political tool. Theirs was an effort to squelch sexual expression in the streets of their city. These efforts were followed by the expansions in freedoms in the 1970s, and the ensuing restrictions during the AIDS years and Giuliani's war on sex in the 1990s.

Just What Exactly is a Sex Panic?

Sex panics are generally the product of cultural backlash. In the 1930s, panic emerged in Germany as high civilization contrasted with an underlying menace (Willet 1987, p. 7). Cultural pressures of pleasure and retribution, decadence and purity triggered the process. New York's sex panic began as Giuliani set off a similar backlash against

individual freedoms. The result was a "quality of life" campaign to re-civilize New York (Burr 1998). To stabilize the city, the mayor argued civil liberties would have to be sacrificed. On April 20, 1998 he told *New York Newsday*: "Freedom is about the willingness of every single human to cede lawful authority, a great deal of discretion about what you do and how you do it." Soon after his election, a number of gay writers – including the Gang of Four and other so-called "progressives" – followed the new mayor's lead and strategy. Welfare moms, promiscuous queers, street people, strippers, and artists became targets of this cleansing. To the extent that undesirable communities embodied the city's decline, they were driven from public view as chain stores took their place.

"During a sex panic, a wide array of free-floating cultural fears are mapped onto specific populations who are then ostracized, victimized, and punished," Rofes explained (1998). Bérubé defines a sex panic as "a moral crusade that leads to crackdowns on sexual outsiders" (*Gaywave* 1997). Stereotyping used as a political tool turns prostitutes into “fallen women.” Inconsequential threats, such as public sex, are translated into calls for absolutist positions, moral barricades, quick fixes, and imaginary solutions. Fear of difference lies at the core of a generated panic (Weeks 1985, p. 45).

Cultural institutions draw parameters around deviance during a moral panic. Stanley Cohen describes the process:

> A condition, episode, person or groups of persons emerge to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests; its nature is presented as a threat to societal fashion by the mass media; the moral barricades are manned by editors, bishops, politicians and other right-thinking people... Sometimes the panic passes over and is forgotten, except in folk-lore and collective memory; at other times it has more serious and long-lasting repercussions and might produce such changes as those in legal and social policy or even in the way that society perceives itself (1972).

The panic taking place in New York scapegoated kinky queers, strippers, and poor people. Morality crusades always require their targets (Crimp, et al. 1997).

We have seen one prohibition within this century and many, many panics. From Savanarola to Salem, sex panics are nothing new. Prohibition, which only built the desire to violate a taboo, demonstrated the general danger of outlawing vice. Early sex panics include the attack on Gnosticism in 200 AD and the Jewish purity code of circa 1000 BC. Hecklers stoned Michelangelo's bold and very nude statue of David as it was transported through the Florentine streets. When caught, one vandal confessed he'd done it because the statue was "obscenely naked" (Stone 1961,p. 360-61). The Society for the Suppression of Vice sponsored book burnings in 1935. Mayor Lindsay sponsored a series of raids on adult bookstores as he planned for a presidential run, resulting in a crackdown on vice that led to 529 arrests in 1973 (Museum of Sex 2002). As the 20th century ended, SexPanic! contended that a panic affecting public sexual culture and HIV prevention had taken hold.

Sex panics organize anxieties around stigmatized groups, from witches to communists to queers. Scapegoats personify cultural fears during moral panics. Today's panic stems from a series of sex wars over the last 25 years, from the Great Kiddy Porn Panic of 1977 to the Meese Commission Report on Pornography of 1986 (Attorney General's Commission on Pornography 1986). Child seduction scares create mass hysteria to generate support for "otherwise unacceptable" investigation and prosecutorial powers. The child seduction model follows a careful schema by which we organize and evaluate information. It assumes "sex monsters" pose such a terrible threat to women and children that we must give up our most basic rights to stop them. Anyone who rejects this assumption either naively and/or perversely denies that sexual abuse, harassment, or discrimination exist or is a "sexual monster" himself (Jenkens 1998).

The sex monster schema achieves its maximum political potency when used to invoke fears for the safety of children. Almost all politicians make use of it. Giuliani's explanation for why he withheld funds from the Brooklyn Museum of Art's 1999

exhibition "Sensation" is a textbook example. Sounding very much like Comstock, he explained: "These are displays of significant psychological problems that should take place someplace other than a museum designed for children... You should not be having public taxpayers contribute to pedophiles on parade" (Devine and Haberman 1999). In labeling his opponents deviants, the mayor utilized the full political potency of the sex monster schema to justify violating the First Amendment rights of the museum and defunding it. (Courts would later rule in favor of the museum). It was not an isolated incident.

Bathhouses, adult businesses, and spaces for open sexual expression are never far outside the ire and potential threat of the moralists and politicians. Debates about pornography, though freshly hashed out over the last twenty years, date back to early in the 20th century (and even before that into the Temperance Movement years). . Yet, by 1970, President Lyndon Johnson's Commission on Pornography found "no reliable evidence to date that exposure to explicit sexual materials plays a significant role in the causation of delinquent or criminal sexual behaviour among youth or adults" (Nobile and Nadler 1986). Still, the Meese Commission re-examined the question of pornography and Jesse Helms re-conflated homosexuality with obscenity in the 1980s and 1990s, revealing the ongoing political agenda behind "moralism." A primary source of debate during the 1980s sex wars involved topic of feminism and pornography.

The Sex Wars Revisited

The relationship between liberalism and the attack on sexual underworlds, between pornography and sexual identity, queer and otherwise, is a long and complicated story. Gay historian John D'Emilio (1992, p. 202) explains: "My sex life, according to

many, is pornographic." His essay addresses a 1980 trip through Times Square with a group of anti-pornography feminists calling themselves Women Against Pornography (WAP). "As someone gay, I knew that gay life often took shape in pornographic zones, making that space precious to me," D'Emilio wrote. Like many scholars influenced by feminism, D'Emilio could not see how WAP's campaign against pornography, which was supported by the League of New York Theatres and Producers and by Off Track Betting, had anything to do with feminism. In D'Emilio's eyes, the WAP campaign took on a different complexion:

> America has had social purity campaigns before. Purity advocates of the Victorian era had many targets, and included in their ranks feminists and antifeminists… History does not record many lasting achievements for them. Another purity advocate, Anthony Comstock, fared much better. He won passage of a comprehensive federal anti-obscenity statute that is still the law of the land. He also instigated the arrest of Victoria Woodhill and Tennessee Claflin, two champions of women's rights and proponents of free love who deplored the double standard but who, unlike more conservative feminists of the era, fought for a thoroughly revised sexual morality for both sexes. WAP would do well to reflect upon this bit of our past (1992, p. 212-3)

As addressed in the gay liberation chapter, "sex wars" over the history and meanings of pornography, sexual freedom, violence, safer sex, AIDS prevention, and public sexual culture raged throughout the 1980s and 1990s. With the AIDS epidemic, the power of the sexual backlash took full steam as discourses of sexuality shifted from sexual liberation to the sexphobia of the AIDS message that sex equals contagion to the ensuing assumption that sex is healthy and back again.

If anything, the history of sex in New York City is a conflict between sex spaces and anti-vice crusades, a dance over open sexual expression, shifting hierarchies and media hysterics, followed by panics, calls for crackdowns, cooling-down periods, reopenings, restructuring, and inevitable relocations to comply with new laws. The

Giuliani administration's effective battle against New York's sex businesses is the most recent chapter in this long struggle. XXX zoning was the cornerstone of the mayor's "quality of life" campaign to clean up, privatize, and regulate New York's public spaces. XXX zoning was part of multi-pronged attack on public sexual culture in New York, one part zoning laws, two parts zealous enforcement of the health and sanitary codes and a building moratorium on new adult businesses. For many close observers, the war on sex (Eigo 2002) resulted in drastic restrictions in sexual terrain for New Yorkers. A digression into the substance of this conflict is worthwhile.

Mickey Mouse Enters the Fray

In March 1992, Disney Corporation Chairman Michael Eisner paid a visit to the New Amsterdam Theater on 42nd Street in Manhattan's Times Square. He was looking for locations to produce Broadway versions of Disney children's films such as *Beauty and the Beast* and *The Lion King*. Eisner liked what he saw. A great deal of money could be made in the sleazy, tourist-infested neighborhood. Despite (and quite possibly because) of all the pornography, ubiquitous peep shows, and the like, families from middle America romped through the square. An estimated 1.5 million tourists per day were known to visit the area. Eisner would eventually invest $8 million of the $34 million it would take to upgrade and renovate the New Amersterdam Theater. New York City and the state assisted him with the other $26 million. But there was a significant condition for Disney's investment in 42nd Street. Eisner required that the city spend another $35 million to buy out the remaining XXX-rated theatres in exchange for Disney's investment in the city (Goldstein, 1998). Then-mayor David Dinkins accepted.

New York's next mayor, Giuliani, would be required to come up with a legal method to fulfill the city's obligation to the Disney Corporation (Moritz 1998; Pulley 1995). Building on neighborhood controversies over clusters of adult businesses,

including flare-ups with Runway 69, a strip club in a residential neighborhood in Queens, and porno store openings in Chelsea in Manhattan, Giuliani started drawing up plans. There had been a 35 percent increase in adult businesses in New York from 1984 to 1993 (Task Force on the Regulation of Adult Related Businesses [TFRSRB] 1994). And the mayor had a plan to restrict their use In order for the legislation to be upheld constitutionally, it would have to be supported by documentation of negative secondary effects as well as evidence that the businesses could relocate somewhere else accessible to their patrons (Insight Associates 1994, p. ii).

On September 10, 1994, Giuliani announced plans to rid Times Square and other areas of New York of clusters of sex-oriented adult shops, theaters, and strip clubs. The mayor's goal was to clear the way for businesses such as Disney and family-oriented tourists to come to Manhattan. Giuliani hoped to shut down nearly every business in New York that dealt with sexual materials – -strip clubs, bookstores, video stores, movie houses, and sex clubs. In order to marshal support for the proposal, the mayor would need to generate the smoking gun the Meese Commission was never able to establish: a clear link between crime and pornography (Attorney General's Commission on Pornography 1986). And if that did not work, the mayor would generate enough hysteria to erode public support for adult businesses in New York. The mayor's argument was that commercial sex establishments hurt business and public morality in the city. Civil libertarians immediately opposed the law (American Civil Liberties Union 1995).

The Mayor's XXX zoning proposal was not the only policy option on the table. Manhattan Borough President Ruth Messenger, a Giuliani critic, suggested the city could

take a different route to deal with the problem without subverting constitutional protections. Messenger explained:

> I strongly believe that adult-use establishments warrant further regulation. I also believe that the proposal now before the City Planning Commission offers false hope to troubled neighborhood residents and businesses throughout the city. It will essentially push these establishments from one neighborhood where people live and work to other neighborhoods – including our waterfront – where people live and work. I also don't think this plan will pass court challenges related to First Amendment rights. There are other options, such as enforcing and strengthening existing signage laws, implementing a registration process for owners and managers of these businesses and enforcing public nuisance laws (Anonymous, 1995).

Messenger had spent the previous two years formulating a public policy with which to address the problem of the concentrations of adult businesses in New York. On April 15, 1993 the Task Force on the Regulation of Sex-Related Businesses (TFRSRB) was formed to better consider the problem. The Task Force included those with expertise in zoning and the First Amendment, in addition to real estate. Manhattan City Council and Community Board chairpersons were also invited to particulate. After over a year of meetings, research, data collection, and community input, a dozen of the most active members of the Task Force approved the body's report and recommendations by consensus (although the report did contain a Dissenting Statement by a First Amendment expert). In August of 1994, the Manhattan Borough office released "Sex-Related Businesses in Manhattan: A Report to Manhattan Borough President Ruth W. Messenger (TFRSRB 1995, p. 2).

The report, containing a series of policy recommendations, represented a far more moderate strategy towards the problem of clusters of adult businesses than the mayor's XXX zoning policy addressed above. Beginning with a series of concepts, the Task Force argued:

- The resolution of community concerns over adult uses does not lie solely with zoning amendments,

> • Any land-use regulations proposed by the Task Force should be simple and straightforward; and
> • Additional rules and regulations for the city's business owners should be avoided. In addition, despite a concern about the impact of these businesses on residential neighborhoods, the Task Force chose not to propose rules that would restrict adult uses from residential neighborhoods only to encourage their location in commercial and manufacturing districts, because such concentration could have negative effects (TFRSRB 1995, p. 7).
> • The First Amendment and that adult uses are guaranteed the ability to disseminate sex-related materials and offer performances as part of the to freedom of expression (TFRSRB 1995, p. 47).

Based on these concepts, the Task Force developed the following policy recommendations:

> • Prevent clustering by limiting the number of adult uses per block front (TFRSRB 1995, p. 49). Messenger[MESSINGER?] proposed that no more than one adult business be located on any one street, in stark contrast to the mayor's proposal which called for the restrictions on adult businesses located at least 500 feet from a church, school, or residence (IES 1995).
> • Develop a process to disclose ownership, management and type of adult use before and establishment opens (TFRSRB 1995, p. 50).
> • Increase enforcement of signage regulations (TFRSRB 1995, p. 51).
> • Expand and augment use of existing public nuisance laws (TFRSRB 1995, p. 52-3).

The opposition to the zoning law had consistently argued there was no need for XXX zoning, if secondary harmful effects were truly the reason for the closures. They argued that if businesses bring double-parking, public urination, unruly crowds, and related problems, there are plenty of existing ordinances and laws to deal with such impacts. There was no need for an additional legal layer. Messenger's plan listed a dozen nuisance laws on the books that could be used to prevent secondary harmful effects in its Appendix C (TFRSRB 1995, p. 80-81).

The Messenger proposal failed to generate support from zoning opponents on the left who felt that any infringement on freedom of expression was too much (IES 1995), or

from advocates on the right who supported the mayor's hard line position. The messenger proposal was authored to broker a compromise between the civil libertarian point of view and the position of those who supported XXX zoning and an all-out ban on adult-use establishments. The proposal's ideological driving force was democratic spirit of compromise. Unfortunately, the Giuliani years in New York were not successful for Democrats who wished to compromise with the highly powerful and often autocratic mayor. Like her 1997 run against Giuliani, Messenger's adult business proposal failed to gain any traction.

The Messenger proposal was written during a time of a backlash against the Dinkins regime in New York, which many felt was soft on crime. And, unfortunately, Messenger herself was perceived by many, including the city's previous democratic mayor (see Koch 1999) as part of the "Al Sharpton radical left" of the New York Democratic party. A racial subtext propelled much of the debate about XXX zoning, the Times Square clean-up, and the mayor's "quality of life" campaign overall (see discussion of the Sexualized Geography of Times Square at the conclusion of this paper). XXX zoning was but a part of this campaign, which utilized an "order maintenance" approach to crime described as "broken windows" theory (Harcourt 2001). The Giuliani regime justified its aggressive "stop and frisk" police policies as a necessary component of the application of "broken windows" crime reduction theory. Critics would charge that "stop and frisk" and the aggressive crime prevention policies it justified came dangerously close to the illegal racial profiling which lead to the 1999 police shooting of unarmed African immigrant Amadou Diallo (Horowitz 1999). "Broken windows" policing, which ideologically inspired the XXX zoning law, similarly enforces "aesthetic preferences" rather than legal norms (Harcourt 2001). The theory was very popular in New York City.

On October 25, 1995, the XXX zoning law was passed. With the passage of this law, adult businesses could exist within 500 feet of each other or schools or churches. Adult use businesses were thus restricted to allowing only 40 percent of their store space to include adult entertainment; the other 60 percent of floor space would have to include other materials. And the color mix which made life in NYC a smorgasbord was highly restricted. "We changed the rules," the mayor bragged in September 1997:

> [B]y adopting the same laws that apply to drug dealers and zoning regulations, we have cut the number of sex shops drastically. We made sure that no sex shop could operate within a set number of feet from schools, churches and community centers. Basically, with the tight new regulations, it will be nearly impossible for a sex shop to open in this city. In my opinion, one is too many (quoted in Burr 1998).

According to Giuliani, either you were for the zoning law or you were for public decay. Critics would describe the mayor's approach as generating a "sex panic" (Crimp, et al. 1997), while supporters praised the initiative.

The mayor's plan would restrict all "adult establishments" to a few areas on the edges of Manhattan and the outer boroughs, industrial areas near Kennedy and LaGuardia airports. The zoning amendments were designed to "guide the future use of the City's land by encouraging the development of desirable residential, commercial and manufacturing areas with appropriate groupings of compatible and related uses and thus to promote and protect public health, safety and general welfare." The law stated that "adult establishments" represent "objectionable non-conforming uses which are detrimental to the character of the districts in which [they] are located." It defined "adult establishment[s]" as any business that has "a substantial portion of its stock-in-trade" in "materials which are characterized by an emphasis upon the depiction or description of

'specified sexual activities' or 'specified anatomical areas'"" (New York City Planning Commission 1995). "'Specified sexual activities' are: "(1) human genitals in a state of sexual stimulation or arousal; (2) actual or simulated acts of human masturbation, sexual intercourse or sodomy; or (3) fondling or other erotic touching of human genitals, public region, buttock, anus or female breast." 'Specified anatomical areas' are "(1) less than completely and opaquely concealed: (i) human genitals, pubic region, (ii) human buttock, anus, or (iii) female breast below a point immediately above the top of the areola; or (2) human male genitals in a discernibly turgid state, even if completely and opaquely concealed" (New York City Planning Commission 1995). Discernibly turgid? Activists cried fowl.

The amendments dictated that no adult businesses could be located within, "at least 500 feet from a church, a school, a Residence District." They must also be located at least 500 feet from each other and may "not exceed 10,000 square feet of floor area and cellar space" (New York City Planning Commission 1995). Critics would charge that the law was inordinately vague. A "substantial portion" of a business's "stock-in-trade" is a highly subjective legal standard which activists charged could be used to shut down businesses catering to gay clientele (IES 1995). Everything in Manhattan is within 500 feet of school, church, or a residence. If the law were enacted, not a single adult business in the city would be able to survive (unsigned review by SexPanic! 1997). Bill Dobbs, who studied the proposed legislation at length, noted that the law allowed the city "to make what was legal, illegal" (IES 1995).

A flurry of activism and community forums sprung up in response to the proposed zoning amendments. At an early event at the Lesbian and Gay Community Services

Center, lesbian activist and playwright Sarah Schulman offered an alternative to the proposal on the table: "I propose that no Catholic churches be allowed within 50 feet of a public school..." Growing up in a homophobic family, Schulman said she relied on public spaces to establish a sexual identity. If public spaces for expression were restricted, queer identities would be all that much more difficult to establish. Warner added: “Not all who visit Christopher Street visit sex shops, but all benefit from the fact that some do.” He noted that while the mayor points to porn as a quality of life issue, “he forgets that people might actually want different qualities of life” (IES 1995).

While civil libertarians claimed the law would turn 98 percent of New York into a censorship zone, real estate developers and the mayor suggested that the law provided a service by ridding the city of adult-related businesses. The battle over the zoning law was the most recent flare-up in a struggle dating back to the days of Comstock’s New York. Regulation of vice was positioned against fears of censorship and state-enforced pseudo-morality. Within a year of the impeachment of a president over a sexual transgression, the zoning law stirred debate about diversity, the public sphere, and core questions about the very nature of pluralistic democracy.

The core question that emerged from the zoning debate was a one about aesthetics. SexPanic! and other zoning opponents pointed out that neither the city’s “Adult Entertainment Study” nor the Times Square Business Improvement District (BID) “Report on the Secondary Effects of the Concentration of Adult Use Establishments in the Times Square Area” could document evidence of secondary harmful effects of adult businesses (Department of City Planning 1994; Insight Associates 1994). Like the Johnson and Meese reports previously, no harmful effects of pornography could be

documented (Attorney General's Commission on Pornography 1986; Kendrick 1996). The BID study stated that it could not draw a causal relationship between crime and adult businesses. The very report of the zoning advocates failed to make the case that continued growth could not happen without the eradication of adult businesses in Times Square. Yet Times Square's late 1990'sresurgence occurred while adult businesses increased within the neighborhood. Zoning opponents concluded from the city reports that opposition to adult-use businesses was based more on aesthetics – on taste – than on documentable secondary harmful effects.

Still, the law passed constitutional muster after numerous lengthy court battles. Many of the same interpretations of "obscene" that earlier resulted in the persecution of Margaret Sanger and created the legal precedent for outlawing queer materials in the first place, were re-established through the zoning law. As Eigo explained:

> Until a generation ago, all explicit gay writing and images were legally pornography. 30 years ago, New York City officials routinely closed down screenings of such classic gay films as Jean Genet's *Un Chant d'Amour* and Jack Smith's *Flaming Creatures*, both now regularly screened at the Museum of Modern Art. Even in the late 1990s when localities restricted sexual materials, gay books and pictures were the most vigorously repressed. Under rezoning, city building inspectors, final arbiters of code compliance, would decide what gays could read and view even in our own neighborhoods. Beyond that, gay people, who grow up without any gay institutions, had always relied on semi-public and commercial spaces to meet each other. For many, it was only in such spaces that they were free to be gay and some guys got their only safer sex information from commercial venues (2002a).

In September 1995, the New York City Planning Commission voted to support rezoning by a vote of 7-6. The year before, without opposition, it had passed a year's moratorium on all sex-related businesses. Opponents had managed to sway several commission votes. In speeches delivered on the day of the vote, many commissioners

credited gay opposition with changing their opinions. With the support of the planning commission, the bill to rezone New York easily passed City Council on October 25, 1995 (Eigo 2002). Immediately after its passage, *Hustler* publisher Larry Flynt's former lawyer, Harold Price Ferringer , filed suit over the constitutionality of the law.

More Booty, Less Rudy: Mobilizing the Sex Workers

By the spring of 1998, decisions about the future of the zoning law – long logjammed in the Court of Appeals – began to unfold. SexPanic! realized that a judge can say anything he or she would like in an empty court room. In line with this, the group decided to have activists filling the courtrooms for the major hearings. The stage was set. Not since the Supreme Court had considered the *Bowers v. Harwick* sodomy law in 1986 had such a crucial decision about sexuality been heard by the courts. The future of sexual culture in New York City was on the line. After the first of the clubs closed in 1998, former SexPanic! member Eva Pendleton (1998), one of the author's of some of SexPanic!'s first documents, wrote a first-person account of her experiences as a worker within New York's public sexual cultures. "Some of the best sex I ever had was on stage at the Harmony Burlesque Theatre," she recalled, describing her experiences as a stripper, making a living by exposing herself and her desires in public. "So it makes me sad that the city just shut down the Harmony under the new zoning law. I've never had another job with such great fringe benefits."

By this time Pendleton, like many of the founders, had left the group. Yet, others continued to get involved. Like Pendleton, there was a politics of play to the organizing and the work, but there was much more to it than that, as Melissa Hope, another dancer turned organizer, explains:

> There were definitely a core group of people who I enjoyed working with, who got the politics of play. They were there, but they were not always the most active. Or they were people for whom this might be the interesting part of that debate but they were not always the most accurate in going to hearings, writing letters, demonstrating. That was actually a lot done by a lot of the club owners, who really went to bat for that. I was surprised how much they went to bat for that. They owned those buildings and they had nothing to lose with the gentrification of the area. They really used this. Some of them were people who had gotten into this business for one reason or another, whether it was a fast buck, a good business opportunity, or a predilection of their own. But I had the sense that some of them did see it in the libertarian sense as well. They were, like most libertarians, going where the money was for them, but they had this politics of pleasure ideal… For some, it was "the state should just stay out of my underwear" sort of sentiment. For others, it was very much more cerebral than "don't tell me what I can and can't do." For others, it went much deeper. Others were very philosophical about this.

Cindra Feuer, who worked with Eva Pendleton at the Harmony Burlesque, first started working with SexPanic! in the spring of 1998. She says:

> I was looking to do activism about the shutting down of the XXX industry in New York. I was just going to do it on my own. With myself and Rachel Walsh, we were going to start organizing the women. And someone said something about SexPanic! It might have been Bill Dobbs. And it was an offshoot of ACT UP and I was working in those circles for years. It was interesting. I wanted to do organizing at the club where I was working and beyond that. And I had been in ACT UP before it and had done other organizing. At that point, it was nice to have somewhat of an infrastructure to get into – people who had worked on these issues, people who were willing to mobilize, and it wasn't confined to just the girls at the club, so I was really excited about that. And I felt like it was a perfect match for what we were doing. So there were a few people who were willing to work on this campaign, which was great. And there were literally under ten people probably.

Melissa Hope explains:

> I was working in some of the clubs. Some are still open; some are not. They don't have girls any more. But I had been working in some of the clubs. I was someone who was articulate so the club owners encouraged everyone to go to the hearings, which were actually very close to work, some of the public hearings were close to midtown and some of the demonstrations. Some of the buses were going to and from the clubs. That was later, that was 1998 when we were finally closing. I think what I was getting at here is that the owners encouraged me to speak at the hearings and others who were also articulate. And arranged press interviews even.

Feuer had a similar experience. She explained that at first she was concerned about organzing within the clubs.

> These workers are really mostly transient and really replaceable. It is hard to get them to fight this. They are really replaceable. If we organized and went on strike, there would be women to replace us. It's something I thought about because the way we were treated in the club was really bad. So I wanted to organize the workers in the club. Then when the owner found out I was organizing to keep the club open, she was really kind to me. That was a really strange switching of allegiances. Then they were like, we'll give you the day off to go and protest. There was a little bit of that. But with the people that I worked with, for most of them this was a job. And for people making the ends meet, it was the best they had at the time. For me it was both. I was not unique in that. But I may have been unique in being able to say accurately that the anti-temperence part was more important to me because I have other work.

Not only was the zoning law about freedom, it was also about jobs. Income inequality vastly contributes to mounting sex panics. Rofes (1998) explains that support for sex panics only becomes stronger with expanding income inequality as was the case during the late in 1990's. The zoning law accommodates business interests at the expense of the lives of the workers who may not have other options for work. Single parents, who make up a large percentage of those employed as exotic dancers, are left out in the cold. Although the economy is growing, there are few jobs for those without high tech skills.

Dennis Altman (1972, p. 219) explains, "As long as society is based on competitiveness and sexual repression, there will be a need to demarcate it into categories, to maintain socially induced repressions by stigmatizing heavily all those who fall outside the norm." In Giuliani's New York, the plight of exotic dancers and other sexual outsiders is not worth addressing. The attack on strip clubs would amount to an attack on an entire economic group.

While Giuliani (1998) called for work - rather than welfare - to become the center of life for all New Yorkers, the cornerstone of the crusade called for zoning changes that

would close adult businesses where women and men performed work that he found distasteful. Thus, by pushing to shut down adult-related businesses where many women and men made their living, the mayor simultaneously contributed to unemployment in New York City (Warner, 1999). Giuliani asserted in 1998 that he would like to end welfare by the year 2000. He argued that it would take about 150,000 new jobs to clear the welfare rolls of the 763,000 present recipients. This sounds like a voodoo economics redux. The best data on welfare reform in New York state reports that only 29 percent of those who have left the welfare rolls had found work.

"In my heart, I definitely felt for the women who were losing the jobs and didn't have an option. But really it felt like a puritanical crusade to get rid of any adult business," recalls Feuer. She goes on to describe her co-workers:

> These women were like mothers, the primary single breadwinners. I talked with those women and they ran the gamut, but most of them were single young mothers who didn't have other options. And I'll tell you, the reason I was there was because of the cash that you could make. I tell you there was no way that those women, if with a master's degree, could make that money that we were making.

I asked what happened to most of them. Feuer continued:

> Most of them, I don't have an idea. But I could guess that some did other dancing. They went to the outskirts where there was this allocated zone to be able to dance. Others were driven underground to more illegal sex work activity. And I don't know what happened to those mothers.

Yet, many were actively involved in campaign to save their jobs. Melissa Hope explains:

> Everyone was curious to hear what was going to happen [planning for their future and wondering if they had a job]. But for me, I was on my way to other things. But for people who were single mothers, some of whom were actually putting their kids through college. People who were putting themselves through college in the clubs, the interest was less urgent. But for people who this was major sources of income for the majority of their lives working in the clubs, this was very

> crucial to them. There were people who had lots of other things happening in their lives, musicians, writers, composers who I worked with. But there were a lot of people who were just single mothers. And they were working to keep themselves afloat. And I don't know what happened to a lot of them.

Whether is was ideal or not, without this work, Hope explained, these workers, "wouldn't have jobs. 300 women would be unemployed from one club and that's just one club. If you have 50 people on and two shifts a day, 300 women is actually an underestimate for one large club."

By 1998, as the law made its way through the final chapters of the court battle, SexPanic! organized a series of rallies. After two successful demonstrations against the zoning law, SexPanic! sought to reappropriate what had been lost: Times Square. You would be hard pressed to find a drag queen, a cruiser, or even a massage parlor in today's Times Square. For a brief moment Sex Panic! wanted to kick up some of the cobwebs within a now sleepy neighborhood. The plan was for a jazz funeral, bringing joy and unabashed sex-positive bodies back to Times Square, if only for a day. The theme of the rally would be "March from Show World to Disney World to Stop Censorship, Save Jobs, and Squash Rudy's XXX Zoning Law."

On May 13, 1998, members of the group met at the corner of Show World, a porno theatre at the heart of the lost district, which the *New York Times* described as New York's supermarket of sex. I had only joined the group eight turbulent months earlier. My fieldnotes detail the event:

> We hadn't done much outreach for this rally. When I got to the corner, only two strippers had arrived ahead of me. It looked a little bleak. Slowly but surely, the whole corner filled with strippers, club owners, and more members of SexPanic! Along with a drum corps lead by some former Lesbian Avengers, the chant "More Booty, Less Rudy, Keep New York Sexy!!!" pulsed through the sleepy streets. The chant took a rhythm of its own. The rest of the core activists arrived and we began to move. We marched west down 42nd Street to the Disney store where the

> matinee lines waited to get into *The Lion King*. People smiled, laughed, and enjoyed the point we were making. Hecklers scorned the scene. The entire matinee crowd chanted with us: "No strippers, no peace!" And for a brief moment, delight refilled a territory thought of as lost for good.

Yet, by 1999, the Supreme Court rejected Ferringer's final appeal to hear the case, although the law had already been implemented in 1998. Feuer reflected on what did and did not work in the campaign, starting with the shortcomings:

> I think that specific campaign and the tactics to save the clubs didn't work because we started too late. It was a matter of months before they closed the clubs. I think had we really been on them, we might have been able to be more effective. Although if you look at it now, these clubs are coming back.

For Feuer, what worked best was the media advocacy. "I have to say what worked best was it was so easy to get media because it was about sex. But ultimately, it didn't have to be about sex, but we billed it as about sex. So it was so easy to get media. That was a big lesson for me."

As I look back on that campaign, I think of the number of happy, funny moments that happened. On April 21, 1998, we organized a rally before one of the court hearings on the zoning law. Everyone brought their own signs. One gentlemen brought a sign which said, 'Set My People Free.' Amidst the 'More Booty! Less Rudy!!!' signs, this was rather entertaining. Toward the end of the rally, Bill Dobbs, who had played an instrumental role in bringing together the business owners, activists, and dancers, stood up with a bullhorn:

> There is something we hold very dearly in this country. It's called the freedom to choose what we want to read, not to have the mayor tell us what we can read. We all have the right to go down to Christopher Street to buy the XXX cassette of our choice and not to have the mayor take that away from us.

The crowd responded with joy, approval, and a few screams. Dobbs went on to offer a hypothetical scenario: “What are sailors on shore leave going to do when they go to Times Square and find it like a suburban shopping mall? They are going to slit their wrists.” The applause continued. But the point was real.

The Sexualized Geography of Times Square

For many involved within the advocacy against the zoning law, the struggle was also about where they found community. What's at stake here is Ferdinand Tönnies' idea of 'gemeinschaft’ and ‘gesellschaft.' Gemeinschaft refers to a notion of urban life as a village in which people live and work in their community. They know one another, care for one another, and are committed to their community. Gesellschaft, on the other hand, refers to the lack of involvement people experience in their community because of industrialization. Forced to work far from home, people lose any connection with the people of their neighborhoods.

Cruising spots, clubs, and public spaces represent an extended family and the idea that a neighborhood is a place where people can be at home. These spaces represent a small bit of gemeinschaft in a rapidly urbanized and global world. A SexPanic! flyer for a rally protesting the zoning law noted: "New Yorkers have learned to work, play, shop and party in close proximity. Sex is part of daily life. Don't let Rudy zone it out like toxic waste." Intermediate groups and associations that are a part of many lives are being lost within the rezoning. Clubs, which serve as meeting spaces for a number of groups, are being padlocked. Sociologist Philip Selznick (1992) outlines the problems that occur when these connections dissipate: "People lose the benefits of community when they are

stripped of their group attachments and left naked before an impersonal or central authority." Those charming elements of city life, which make us feel part of something, are being lost. In his "Activist Critique," Jim Eigo confessed: "Rotello's advocacy of closing spaces has interfered with my own practice of safer sex and diminished the pleasure I share with dozens of other gay men in any given year, interactions that I and they cherish, interactions that strengthen the web and fabric of gay New York City" (1997, p. 14). Giuliani's vision of New York is a place where people are left trembling. "New York is a much more repressive place than it has been in my life time," Hope explains.

Many looked at the battles over Giuliani's war on sex as a struggle for the future of the queer movement itself. Discussions about Times Square stirred a series of debates on core questions about the history and function of the Gay Liberation Movement and its role in fighting cultural oppression. The Times Square redevelopment reached a crescendo just as the Gay Liberation Movement was celebrating the 30th anniversary of Stonewall. A period of introspection followed as writers pondered the movement's losses, splits (Shepard 2001), meaning (Nichols 1999), assimilation, and commercialization.For many, the gentrification that was occurring in Times Square mirrored the commercialization which threatened to subvert the very substance of the queer movement. Radical gender activist Riki Anne Wilchins notes:

> It is arguably the case that when the message of gay liberation changed from All People Are Queer to Gay Is as Good as Straight, the movement lost its revolutionary potential, its moral and redemptive center. It ceded to the very oppressive system it formed to contest the terms of its struggle and allowed the system to dictate the terms of its resistance (1997).

Before 1994, the Gay Liberation Movement, like Times Square, maintained a unique cultural position. As Times Square's rough edges were cleaned away, sanitized like a dentist's office, activists feared that the same was in store for the countercultural impulse driving the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender Movement.

Back in 1980, John D'Emilio argued that efforts to clear up Times Square were part and parcel of an antisex movement, a new social purity campaign which threatened the queer movement (p. 212). The point was simple. As Amber Hollibaugh (2000) explains, cultural ideas of impurity and defilement are closely linked with systems of racism, classism, whore stigma, a politics of gentrification, and social exclusion. AIDS housing advocate Jennifer Flynn, who was involved with queer direct action organizing during this period speaks about the core sentiment among many at the time:

> We all believed that sex clubs should stay open, that Giuliani's crackdown on sex shops was really just a way to get rid of queers and a way to free up the land so that the rents could be jacked up. We knew that the crackdown was just another way to get the poor out of Manhattan (Flynn and Smith 2004, p. 228).

SexPanic! argued for a rejection of the politics of sexual shame and exclusion driving the arguments for the zoning law.When norms of purity are presented as a standard, sooner or later, we all lose that test (Crimp et al, 1997). As such, the group defended Times Square, with its access to New York's major bus and train stations, the Port Authority, Grand Central Station, and its historic function as a place for cross-class and cross-race contact (Benderson, 1997; Delany, 1999). New York writer Bruce Benderson described his rounds through pre-Giuliani Times Square:

> During my Times Square vigils of several years ago, I followed a fairly consisten sex itinerary that began with a happy hour drink at a hustler bar, moved to a bar that was a Manhattan hangout for the Latin Kings, took in a Blarney Stone favored by gay blacks, samples a drag club called La Fiesta, and ended up a little

> further east in the 40s at an after hours club in a building that still had the original interior staircase from the times it was a private home" (1997, p. 56).

Times Square was a place where cultures intersected – both high culture and low brow. The result was part of New York City's lore, Cole Porter songs about "Love for Sale…." Given that interracial contact can stir our greatest cultural anxieties, it was also a geography where social taboos were broken down. "It's our messy act we're out here defending. We don't want to be sanitized," Warner (1997b) suggested during the SexPanic! struggle. Instead, SexPanic! sought to defend an the urban geography built on extremes from high culture to low. "I think there is an attempt to cleanse," Rofes concurs. "I think that that is problematic. I think that it's like trying to create sex spaces now that are cleansed of barebacking and risk."

For many, the fear was that they were witnessing was the McDonaldsization of both Manhattan and the queer imagination (Goldberger 2001). To the extent that the gay critics of public overlapped with the mayor's vision of a Disnified Manhattan, he is part of a vast homogenizing process. John Fall notes:

> As a nation, the U.S. is living McLife. There's a Starbucks, a Gap and a Borders Bookstore on every corner and a corporate sponsor for everything from gay pride celebrations to football stadiums to the Creating Change conference (Nike, Sue Hyde?!). The gay community is no more immune from the homogenization and flattening of American culture than is the rest of the country. After all, we invented clones. We have McGhettos. McMuscles, McLeather and, logically McElangelo [Signorile] and company (quoted in Wockner 1997).

Signorile's advocacy of a cleaner more sterilized, less sexual, less complex GLBT culture is part of a vast flattening out of possibilities within a consumerist vision of urban life. His way of thinking, the closure of the public play spaces, was part of a larger trend. Abby Ehmann explains:

> That's not the New York City that a lot of us moved here for. It has become the New York City that new people are moving here for, which is unfortunate because now along with all the play spaces as you put it, people are expecting Manhattan to be like suburbia. They want their stores; they want their Banana Republics, their Dunkin' Donuts, and they want quiet. I'd love it if the streets were cleaner but I didn't move here for silence. I moved here for the noise and if the noise bothered me, I'd move to suburbia.

Melissa Hope continues:

> As New York caters to more and more outside money and interests, it becomes more amenable to tourists than New Yorkers. However there are more play places, they just seem to be more private and quiet and closed. Maybe that is a response to the Disneyfication of Times Square, 'cause these are not things that tourists tend to be able to find. And that is who the new Times Square is for. It's not as egalitarian. I think some people have always preferred more exclusive venues.

The result of this trend is a more class-bound sexual culture.

Simultaneous with the loss of public sexual space was the emergence of cybersex and culture, which emerged concurrently with the zoning law, especially in New York. The problem with cybersexual culture, which is not addressed, is that it's class bound. Those who do not have close, personal access to computers are excluded from the conversation. Additionally, this new place for sex does not have the smells, the intimacy, the excitement, to say nothing of the cross-class contact engendered within the more accessible public sexual cultures open to anyone with a dollar bill and a lusty dream.

The other part of the SexPanic! discussion was always about a public sphere where people meet from different contexts. With XXX zoning, the Pentium processor providing access to Internet sex became the context in which people hook up, find pleasure, and play. Many use the game metaphor for this form of social interaction. Waskuk explains: "Like all kinds of games, much of online interaction can be found to be playfully serious" (2003, p.50). Here, online chat is a meaningful expressive form of

play. "[I]nstead of embarking on attempts to impose binary play versus serious or real versus fake distinctions on the processes of online interaction, analytical attention should focus on the production of meaning" (p. 50). Different kinds of meanings are found here. After all, a distinct group of people have access to that conversation. But it's a little more class bound, less visceral. Wayne Hoffman concurs:

> Part of the strategy I remember with SexPanic! was that there was an effort by a lot of people to divide up people who were defending sexual culture, saying things to me as a white middle-class educated guy living in the West Village like, 'So what if that place closes. You know people. You will get invited to other parties. There are other places you can go. You can go to bars and pick someone up. You can have sex on the Internet; you can find someone on the phone lines, whatever.' That's really not the point. I'm not worried about me not being able to find a place to have sex. I'm pretty sure I can, but what about the people who aren't already on the guest list? I live here and I'm pretty out about it, but the whole point is that people should be able to do things spontaneously that they decide they want to do. Not have to know where to go and know the secret code and have a letter of reference. So what I kept saying at the time was, 'people keep telling you that you are giving up something but you are gaining something. You can't go to the corner and get a blowjob anymore. But not you can go online. That's not a tradeoff. That's not a fair trade and don't buy it. The solution is, I want to keep the choices I already have and add to them. Not, OK take away what I have because I'm getting something in return. That's not a trade.'
>
> I have sex online too. And I use the Internet. But it can never replace what was lost. Sometimes it's better and sometimes it's worst. Does it mean I don't have to go out in the rain? It means I'm limited in what I can do. Sometimes it works and sometimes it doesn't. I didn't want to give up the Christopher Street Bookstore but now I have no choice, its closed.

What is missing in this form of play is the context of a distinct neighborhood space. Bob Kohler recalls the first days running his bathhouse on Avenue A in the East Village of the 1970s:

> There are trees on First Avenue and Second Street that we planted because we wanted to make the neighborhood look nicer. The neighborhood loved us. We were totally accepted. And I'm talking the East Village in the early 1970s – tough. I'll never forget the first time I walked into the little bodega and the guy looked at me and said, 'in my country we kill people like you.' And I said, 'You know what

> motherfucker. You are not in your country, so get used to it.' He looked at me like, 'fucking faggot's talking back.' But he didn't say a word. But we were there. We had the funeral home next door to us where all the gang leaders were buried. So you can imagine all the people our customers had to go through when there was a gang funeral. They had to walk through them. We never, ever had a problem. We had a sun deck where people could look at the high rises. We tried to keep a little decorum up there. But good luck. It worked. That's what I'm saying I guess....I mean, motherfuckers who closed it just people so much further back and more susceptible to STDs, all kinds of shit. We could have put more restrictions, but people needed the spaces... Students could come in for four dollars a night. And homeless people. But $4.75 you got a locker and a hotel. I think the deluxe room was $12.00. Where are you going to go [for that price] and have a steam room, have a sauna?

Samuel Delany (1999) wrote a well-received essay on the thirty years of friendships and connections he found in the gay movie houses of the pre- sanitized Times Square. For Delany, the experience involved the possibility of cross-class contact. Hoffman considers this point:

> Samuel Delaney would go on about some of the relationships he'd have in these places, notably in Times Square. Yeah, I did some of that too. There are people I've known for a decade who I met through public sex. One of my best friends was a guy I met in a park in Boston. He's one of my best friends in the world. So yeah, it does happen. He's a friend I never again saw in a sex setting. He's a friend.

For others, such as Buzz Bense, the owner of Eros, a San Francisco sex club that opened on Market Street in 1993, suggested to me that public sexual spaces are places to revel in human connections and kindness:

> Blanche DuBois says in A Streetcar Named Desire, 'I am dependent upon the kindness of strangers.' I think that kind of blessing happens here. In other words, there is no obligation for me to treat you particularly well in this environment. We might never see each other again. But in that context, there can be extraordinary moments where people have heartfelt connections, where people feel like they are the recipients of random acts of kindness, where the beauty and humanity of people is evident because they are treating each other so well. To me it all relates to the spirit.

Hoffman tells a similar story:

> And sometimes there are really nice moments of random connections that are kind of wonderful. Like I remember once there was a guy I met at the Christopher Street Bookstore which is now closed after 35 years. I remember I used to go there. It was always OK. But it was two blocks from my house so it was very convenient. I had met this guy; he was in his 50s; he was visiting; and we had a great time for a couple of hours. And we're getting ready to leave and he reaches into his pocket and he pulls out a gift and its wrapped. I said, 'How do you have a gift wrapped already?' It was homemade peanut brittle. He said, "It was for a friend I was supposed to meet tonight and he blew me off so I came here. And you deserve it.' I said, 'I've never gotten a present inside a cubicle.' And we corresponded for years. So yeah, there are nice little random moments like that – moments of connection, moments of seeing community in action. Also weirdos, drunks, losers – but that's on the streets too.

Giuliani and the conservatives would like to have all space available cater to the interests of the monied classes. This narrow vision of the urban experience wipes out the eccentricities that make city life so vital. The crazy intersections of cultures, ideas, and attitudes that created modern Manhattan could only happen if people of a diverse range of economic categories were tolerated on the island. Today, this idea is threatened. Instead, spaces where communities of difference converge are targeted. Ehmann explains:

> Well, a lot of the dungeons are being targeted. They're being harassed currently, like over the past year, where the cops will show up. They publicize parties, whether they are foot fetish parties or whatever, and the cops come just to make sure that nothing illegal is going on. And it does tend to put a damper on things when the cops show up. They are not doing anything illegal, but the powers that be are letting them know that they are watching. And they've been shutting down escort services that advertise. I don't think it's a good way to spend our tax dollars. There's a lot of other worse things going. When you talk about victimless crimes, hookers on the streets are being killed or taken advantage of, but you are never going to get rid of hookers. There's reason why they call us the oldest profession.

Everyone has heard the old Orson Wells joke about Switzerland and Italy. After a long history of stable government, organization, and homogeneity, what does Switzerland have to show for its culture? The cuckoo clock. Two thousand years of political corruption, instability, and back stabbing later, Italy has Michelangelo, Dante, and Leonardo Da Vinci. Without the low, you don't get the high culture. It is hard to imagine

Cole Porter being inspired to write, "Love for Sale" without prostitutes walking the streets of Harlem. Robert Mapplethorpe, Stuart Davis, and countless other New Yorkers fed off the Broadway boogie-woogie involved in walking through a street with one foot in the gutter and the other in the sublime.

In his essay, "Paris: the Capital of the 19th Century," Walter Benjamin writes: "It is the unique provision of Baudelaires's poetry that the image of the woman and the image of death intermingle with a third: that of Paris" (1935, p. 10). The images and pulse of the city: the commerce, the prostitutes, "the seller and the sold one" become an essence of images, poetry, and aesthetics of a city, a "collective unconscious" (p. 11). In a reading of Benjamin some forty years later, Marshall Berman places a keen eye on his paradoxes:

> His heart and his sensibility draw him irresistibly toward the city's bright lights, beautiful women, fashion, luxury, its play of dazzling surfaces and radiant scenes; meanwhile his Marxist conscience wrenches him insistently away from these temptations, instructs him that this whole glittering world is decadent, hollow, vicious, spiritually empty, oppressive to the proletariat, condemned by history. He makes repeated ideological resolutions to forsake the Parisian temptation – and to forbear leading his readers into temptation – but he cannot resist one last look down the boulevard or under the arcade; he wants to be saved, but not yet. These inner contradictions, acted out on page after page, give Benjamin's work a luminous energy and poignant charm. (1982, p. 146).

Such is the pulse of the urban geography, built on extremes from high culture to low. This brings the question: What happens to culture when the low is sacrificed for the sake of order? Without the extremes, what is the city left with – a bland middle? In the essay, *Rules for the Distinction of the Normal from the Pathological*, Emile Durkheim explains that rather than being oppressive, a healthy society should tolerate enough freedom for the criminal to act in ways which may hurt it, in order to create space for the

"genius" to behave in ways that will benefit this society. Such thinking allows for new, often progressive ways of thinking and living. A society without such tolerance will inevitably stagnate (Merton, 1949, p. 136-7).

As the late "quality of life" years progressed in New York, the feeling increased that something was being sacrificed as the city became more and more amenable as a better business climate (Gopnik 2004). As nonprofit community gardens were bulldozed and parks and public spaces increasingly oriented toward regulation, social control, and profit-making, a subtle shift occurred. Civic life was sacrificed for shopping life. "Shopping spaces not only delineate a corporate landscape of power. They also discipline our bodies and minds." Whether virtual or real, stores are a "totalizing institution," Sharon Zukin observes (2004, p. 28).

Many, including SexPanic! and the burgeoning do-it-yourself consumer activist and global justice movement, suggested that New York was becoming dictated by the rules of commerce, citizenship being treated as a subtle set of shopping protocols. The struggle was against more than stores and the products they sold made in sweatshops. The struggle was against the idea of the sovereign right of the city to cater to shoppers. Thus the civic propensity to treat urban geographies as a consumer space became a "totalizing power." "Once we accept its values, we are its captives," Zukin continues (p. 28). Accepting its values meant tacitly accepting the functions of racial profiling, social inequality, and regressive social policies, including those popularized during the Giuliani years. Their aim was to clean symbols of urban decay – the homeless, people on welfare, visible dissent – from public spaces (Beauregard 2002).

"If we are homeless, young, or dark-skinned, the discipline of shopping in downtown stores or upscale malls is strictly enforced by curfews, locked doors, products chained to racks, and the refusal of clerks to serve. Prices, both immanent in visual displays and explicit on printed labels, are a less contentious means of enforcing status exclusions." writes Zukin. While we get the products we enjoy from shopping, the experience of shopping is also fraught with judgments and expectations, giving us "a sharp experience of being on the edge between freedom and inequality," (p. 29). As the public commons increasingly becomes a privatized shopping area, the debates about civil society and public space follow.

The Giuliani years witnessed a radical reorganization of urban space. Much of the struggle over XXX zoning and sex club closures involve an encroachment in the area of private space and choice reminiscent of the days of Comstock and the Temperance Movement (Wagner 1997). During those days, Comstock set his sights everything he considered obscenity. The federal law that bore his name specifically defined 'obscenity' according to criteria defined by Comstock himself. Some days he specifically tracked the movements of male patrons in private clubs, such as those targeted by Giulaini in the mid-1990s (Gilfoyle, 1992, p. 161,214; Kendrick, 1996, p. 125-68). On other days, he focused his attention on the movement of birth control advocates, such as Margaret Sanger, who sought to disseminate literature on birth control through the US mail, which fell into Comstock's definition of obscenity. "The Comstock Law and state abortion laws strove to maintain public morality by keeping medically dispensed contraception and abortion out of the hands of the poor," Luker (1996, p. 47) explains.

From Comstock to the present day, class has had everything to do with who did and did not have access to reproductive services, controls, and therefore freedom over one's body (Luker 1996. p 45-7). The lesson of the Comstock era becomes that much of the struggle over sex-related materials is a struggle to maintain elements of control over social and economic hierarchies. Much of the same can be suggested about the Giuliani era and its ongoing harassment of nightlife culture and places where people play. Abby Ehmann explains:

> I think they went into Remote one night and the guy at the door hit the panic button. And so I turned all the music off, the people stopped dancing, and the cops knew it and they were ticketing them. Everybody was getting tickets for stupid stuff like one fruit fly in one bottle of vodka. You know when you see people come in with flashlights, you know you want them to be conscientious of health code violations but it got to the point where that wasn't where it was. It was harassment. And the whole thing was the cabaret license and people being shut down for dancing or ticketed for dancing… I mean I believe the motive for going in and harassing those people was not a safe sex concern, it was a lets harass the gay bars. Because Giuliani just wanted to fuck with anybody who wasn't just like him.

Giuliani-ism, as an urban policy developed to zone out and control poor people, has had a vast impact on the geography of Manhattan. Under Giuliani's watch, cameras arose, looming over Manhattan's public and private spaces (Parenti 2003). The social cultural, political, and economic implications of the panic have yet to be assessed. What we do know is local sexual subcultures have been placed at risk as short-term morality and real estate prices homogenized the local landscape (Eigo 1999). "I loved SexPanic! SexPanic! was doomed from the get-go. It was smart and doomed to fail, because they were right," Hoffman explained.

Its never easy to fight a panic. Histically, these red scare periods cast wounds and scars across the cultural landscape. Melissa Hope, one of the organizers who struggled to keep the clubs open and later studied panics noted.

> For me historically, people look at these panics and ten years later say, 'Oh, my god. That was so stupid.' But at the time, everything gets really wrapped up in it. It's very easy to get support against something. But it's very difficult to get support for something that might be a little bit out of the mainstream or deemed undesirable by anyone. It's really hard to get support for that. New York has become, in some ways it feels like it has become more open because everyone in the world wants to come here for a visit. But in other ways, some of the things that I enjoyed before are gone.

Eric Rofes (1997) described this as scoundral time during his comments at the November 16, 1997 Creating Change conference.

> When full moral panics flare history has shown, in Lillian Hellman's words, it's "scoundrel time" and there are limited roles from which social actors can choose. There are the scoundrels who blow the whistle, point the finger, name the names. There are the resistors who take the risk, go out on the limb, take the fall, and get trampled in the mindless, outraged stampede. And there are the vast masses who find themselves locked in silence by confusion, misgivings, self-protection, ambivalence, and fear. When the panic is over and attention has shifted to other issues, when we all shake our heads and say "How did we ever let it get to that stage?," these people are complicit in the destruction. There is no neutral here.

Melissa Hope elaborates:

> I am not optimistic about ways to confront a panic. And at that time I think I was more optimistic than I am now because of the things that I have been focusing on like anti-trafficking and the New White Slave Panic, just to echo the one of a hundred years ago. It is exactly the same. It echos the one in the 1970's. And the one in the 1950's. And it really does echo it every step of the way. And ten years later nobody thinks, oh right, that was then and wasn't that a pity and maybe we were stupid. And that's it.

Some of what was lost was a feeling of lightness. It is hard to feel genial in a moment of panic. Yet, it was not easy for the group to evade the panic.

Pierced Noses, Racism, Sexism and Classism in SexPanic!

At the peak of the late 1990's crackdown, fear caught fire. Ehman explains:

> Well, to be honest I think there was a lot more fear than there was actual harassment. For every one place that got harassed, ten more places would freak out. On every night if there was something, even before there was cell phones, the word would get around. Within the whole nightlife community everyone would have heard that so and so got shut down, padlocked or picketed or that the (Nightlife) Taskforce came in and hassled someone.

And panic took over the play element. While many aspired to create a transformative queer politics that would push back the moralist attack, the group ran into its own difficulties. Certainly the group was driven by a politics of play and pleasure in activism. They were rarely part of the group's process.

"Did you hear what happened last week...?" that was what one person asked me after I attended my first SexPanic! meeting in October of 1997 after reading about the group in *Lingua Franca* the week before (Crain, 1997). The *Lingua Franca* story talked about triumph of universalizing human rights discourse preceding the limited minoritizing discourse of identity politics, yet, little of that could be found in the meeting. Apparently, some of the older ACT UP veterans showed up with an HIV prevention poster. And a number of the younger activists in the group told him the group was not just a gay male organization. Younger activists screamed; older activists walked out and said they were done; and the queer theory folks asked for some unity. Yet none was to be found. The urge to divide people into categories is just as powerful among activists as it is among their adversaries, even in pro-queer community organizing. As a "pro-queer, pro-feminist, anti-racist direct action group," SexPanic! established a broad range of goals. Within the group a wide range of anxieties unfolded about which goals would be addressed and when, if ever.

While highly combustible, the feeling in the dark corners of the gay community center where the group met to address issues was thrilling. People had great, different colored hair; they crunched numbers for how to do outreach; they talked about ways, and talked about different kinds of creative projects were involved in. The fundraisers brought a feeling of the bawdy. And the questions were inspiring. SexPanic! cultivated a context in which questions about Eros and Thanatos, about the instinct toward lack of safety and connection, sometimes became more compelling than the instinct toward care. At one of the early meetings I compared the Sirens tantalizing and deadly call to Odysseus' sailors with the possibility of risks of unprotected contact in the age of AIDS. As the meeting ended, one of the academics, someone I had been a bit intimidated by, came up to me, put his arm around my shoulder and said, 'We want you to be around. Be careful. Don't drive so fast.' It was a lovely embodiment of much of what the group had been addressing – a non-judgmental approach, care, and respect, and a push toward risk reduction over abstinence.

On December 11, 1997, I wrote a note in my field journal about the questions about the pleasure principle which the group inspired in me:

> To a certain degree, Freud's view that sexuality is at the root of all neuroses takes a more and more essential role in today's culture wars. In a strange way, we are all seeing his view of life in 19th century Vienna come full circle today in New York. Today's sexual repression and expression has become a central battleground in New York's culture wars.
>
> To the extent that modern identity is drawn along sexual lines [see H.L. Gates (1993) in Warner's *Fear of Queer Planet*] then the battle for expression/repression, the battle for legitimacy become an important point. Underlying today's essential battles between Giuliani and SexPanic! is a question of dominance over one's self determination, one's own sexual self determination to be the kind of citizen one chooses to be.

Within a week or so, members of SexPanic! would fly to San Diego for the first SexPanic! summit held in conjunction with the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force's Creating Change conference in November. Kendall Thomas was sick. He had been

scheduled to speak, but things did not work out as planned. Instead of the formidable African American legal scholar who had made a name for himself as a pioneer of critical race theory, in walked a young local activist named Tony Valenzuela, who assumed a major role. SexPanic! would never be viewed quite the same way again. Valenzuela proceeded to address the greatest "thou shalt" not in the book: unsafe sex (although he never advocated it). He spoke of the meanings he found within the intimacy of intercourse without condoms:

> Many gay men do, in fact, on their own, forgo condom use by creating personalized guidelines that specify these situations in which they feel comfortable barebacking (i.e., both men are HIV negative, both men are HIV positive, etc.). These are informed decisions where gay men address the risks they're willing to take.

Valenzuela's small bit of honesty met with an outpouring of hyperbole and moralizing. He was uniformly panned for acknowledging something that many were already doing. There is big difference between acknowledging something and advocating for it. Yet GLBT newspapers from coast to coast editorialized about the danger of Valenzuela's candor. As Valenzuela was associated with SexPanic!, Larry Kramer (1997b) wrote in the *New York Times* that "this group is an advocate of unsafe sex." *LGNY* panned the group on the very same page on which the group had placed an ad with its mission statement, which clearly states that SexPanic! is "committed to HIV prevention through safer sex, to sexual self determination for all people and democratic urban space." Many members of the group wrote letters to the *New York Times* asking for a fair hearing. One of the dozens of letters was published (although Crimp extended his letter into an essay [2002]). The *Times* also ran a weekend story on the SexPanic! debate in the Week in Review section under the byline, "Gay Culture Weighs Sense and

Sexuality," (Stolberg, 1997).. The frustration of so few published letters wore on the group. And the panic continued to turn inward.

During meetings, we debated group messages and strategies. One group of young women wanted to put a series of stickers and posters up all over town with slogans such as "Remember, we're all in this panic together" and "Heteronormativity: Don't Fall into the Trap" on top of a poster looking like the old Gap jeans ads, with the slogan, 'Fall into the Gap.' The poster would have effectively used art to frame a critique of the commodification of contemporary gay culture. One of the older gay men in the group, an ACT UP veteran, thought better of her using the SexPanic! name to advance such a message and blocked approval to put the name on the poster. Instead of being a vehicle for expression and critique, the SexPanic! floor had become a space from which activists needed to go to get approval. Tensions over gender and cohort simmered below the surface with few outlets for expression in the multi-issue group. Everyone walked away mad: the young activist felt her ideas had been blocked; the ACT UP veteran was still simmering about his old colleague being pushed out of the group earlier in the month.

As queer theory is interjected into politics, two impulses unfold. On the one hand there may emerge an identity-less politics challenging traditional politics based on social categories. Identity-less analysis rejects tendencies to build groups through exclusion. At the same time, there exists a fear that what is distinct and rich about race, class, and sexual cultures will be lost. When left unchecked, queer activism is just as susceptible to backstabbing as anything else. Walter Armstrong was quick to note that ACT UP was able to do a lot of things well, but what it was not as good at was unpacking all that was going on in the meetings. Blind spots are missed. The same old problems emerge. Queer politics, despite theoretical underpinnings, is anything but identity-less.

When those groups forming the queer battlefield seek to work together, what emerges is a new cultural anxiety. The path into the unknown is fraught with difficulties.

Lisa Duggan (1995) describes the dynamics of queer theorists and activists at an academic conference as resembling a stressful family holiday. Everyone is supposed to get along and be happy to see each other, but something is amiss. Familiar arguments with Mom and Dad emerge. You begin to pout as you regress back into teenage defensiveness. Armstrong once said he thought ACT UP meetings were like a high school popularity contest. Others have compared the model to a gay summer camp. Underneath, a hierarchy usually takes hold. All the while, resentments simmer. Secrets remain buried. This could easily describe how SexPanic! meetings began to feel.

On January 22, 1998, a small group passed out an open letter to SexPanic! They suggested that members read the letter after the meeting, think about it, and try to improve their behavior. One old SexPanic! member walked out. When I got home, I pulled out the memo, signed by some ten women and three men, only to discover decrees of "Racism, Classism, and Sexism in SexPanic!"

> We are writing out of concern about the racism and sexism in the group dynamics of Sex Panic!, forces which both obstruct action and drain the energy of members who must continually confront invisibility, dismissal and silencing. Women and people of color have been active members of SexPanic! since its conception. We believe that SexPanic!'s failure to address the power relations which erase and tokenize women and people of color constitutes the greatest threat to our success as a "direct action group with a multi-issue agenda" dedicated to sexual self-determination. We come to this work with the belief that any project dedicated to issues of sexual freedom that fails to centralize critiques of gender and race relations undermines itself....

The letter went on to discuss problems of "gay white men" dominating the group's agenda. Age-old conflicts between men and women unfolded. Tempers flared at SexPanic! meetings over the following weeks as fragmentation overwhelmed the group.

Much of the tension had been brewing for weeks and months as the novelty of the group wore off and the difficult task of organizing against the panic become more urgent.

In September, SexPanic! sponsored a rally against the purge of public sexual culture from the Christopher Street piers (Nichols 1997). Susan Wright, who was actively involved with organizing that rally, recalls her involvement with the group:

> Also I think that what happened was that SexPanic! was run by a few men, quite frankly. They didn't want to listen to the women. It really became a problem because I would try to talk to them and I was not taken seriously. I had only been involved in this for a few years and I was from a different community with different viewpoints. That viewpoint was not taken into account. I think that a lot of the rank and file were disempowered. I was so excited because it looked like anybody could come in here and join in and be a part of this. I mean, for example one of the marches I was the one who went and talked to the police and got the permits for the march. That was the one that went down Christopher Street [to the piers]. And I did all that leg-work and I still was like shoved to the side. And when I had opinions about what we should be doing (sigh) well then it kind of left you with a [feeling of] "why bother, obviously somebody has some idea of what they are doing and I have no idea what they are doing." I just kind of drifted away from it.

SexPanic! stretched queer politics to its limits. While the group advanced the notion of respect for sexual diversity in all its forms, resentments dating back to the splits which tore at Gay Liberation Front simmerred. Women wanted a more focused approacht to organizing around race; many of the men wanted to focus more explicitly on HIV/prevention and sexual freedom issues. "Many activists find the challenge to identity politics too threatening to the way they view the world," Michael Warner recalled. "The fluidity of sexual desire can be unsealing to anyone." (quoted in Bull, 1998). Occasionally, essentialist discussions developed with insults and invective hurled across the meeting rooms of the gay community center and over the Internet: "gay white men," "the pierced nose crowd," "male privilege," "racist," "sexist," etc. The group's ad hoc nature lent little structure to these discussions. And as SexPanic! began to fight itself, A siege mentality developed in which people took care of their own individual interests instead of looking at the larger picture of the future of the group. At times, SexPanic! was plagued with too many conflicting impulses. During this period, others would quietly

complain of being frustrated that SexPanic! lost its momentum to get much done. "All our nitpicking over gender, race etc has alienated more enough of the membership to bury the organization," one member would gripe. "Whats worse is the most of those on the fateful letternever even attend. Its as if its our job to meeti their expectations while they sit back and knowingly approve or disapprove." Others expressed frustration with identity politics. In addition, an ambiguity about ideology simmered below the surface. "I think we sort of assumed that we had more values in common than we really did," Jennifer Flynn reflected. While those involved with SexPanic! and its offshoot groups opposed the XXX zoning laws and Giuliani's war on sex, differences of political ideology remained. "[W]e had differences when it came to sex and gender," Flynn recalled (Flynn and Smith 2004, p. 228).

Others suggested it was more about the difficulty of actually operationalizing an anti-racist, feminist, queer direct action activist agenda. Yet, few arrived with a concrete strategy to advance this agenda beyond the conferences and newspaper articles being written. What seemed to be missing was a clear affirmitive step to take. "You have to offer an alternative," Kirk Read, another organizer involved with the SexPanic! debate, explained. "I'm so with anti this and anti that. I'm really more interested in people showing others how to do something different."

Within this context, I asked Cindra Feuer, to what extend does process count in the organizing for a better world? She replied, "That's a really interesting question, because often I find that when you are working really well together, it doesn't matter who's calling the shots and its usually an organic process." Yet, when it is not going well, tensions rise. The issues of process vs. external goal involve core questions about effective organizing. She continues:

> Here is the interesting thing is that I find that actions go really well when there is not too much concern for process. Like when you pay too much concern to the process and how the decisions get made, shit doesn't get done and people get

> upset. Feelings get hurt. I've worked in situations where I realized decisions were getting made by one person. And I just bite my tongue and I remember, bigger picture is we want to get this done. We want this action to happen. I don't care about the process as much as I do about the end product. There's been situations where I didn't like the process, so I removed myself.

And many did remove themselves from SexPanic! Within the void, a dearth of leadership threatened the group's very existence. Persistent infighting and arguments about democratic process turned many away. Others complained that many who wrote the letter to the group had stopped attending meetings. It fell to those who remained to meet the expectations of the letter-writing group, while they sat back and knowingly approved or disapproved. Another person explained, 'I went to one meeting and it was like a fight. I had to drink three more drinks than I usually do to relax after it was over." In the months after this period, SexPanic! members went their separate ways.

The academics soon left, somewhat simultaneously it appeared, once the translation of queer theory into activism stopped working as smoothly. Bill Dobbs noted that the fixation on theoretical work did not lend itself to the long-term struggle necessary for organizing. "Activism is about information and knowledge," he explained. "And the scholars who in many cases are in a great position to convey it are the least willing to put the time in on the streets necessary to create change....Their institutional affiliation is just too great" (quoted in Bull 1998). In e-mail correspondence with a couple of the academics about the issue, neither Warner nor Crimp suggested there was any one decision for everyone to leave. Bot once the media discourse shifted, the academics felt compelled to get on with their lives. The activists left behind countered that the academics left once things started to get muddy and queer theory stopped feeling as relevant to real-world political battles. "It was a lot of word play without other forms of

action," Gregg Gonsalves reflected. Community forums would never be a substitute for organizing on the ground.

Yet, the tension within the group also spoke to an ongoing conflict between theory and activism. By late 1990's, many activists have come to reject the vanguardism of academics claiming the privileged mantle of queer theory (Hall, 2003).

> This "top down" model of intellectuals refining ideas and then generously sharing them with the nonintellectuals needs further complication. It ignores the fact that important intellectual work and activist struggles over processes of change take place all of the time and among many who do not hold PhDs. "Queer" as a sophisticated and energizing concept came from activists and was appropriated by academics, not the other way around (Hall, 2003, p.80).

At its worst queer theory has become another technocracy of complicated, esoteric language and jargon within the linage from French structuralism and accessible to mainly those with university education. Still, there remains a place for its lessons and forms of engagement (Hall, 2003). For many years, the cross polination between activism and theory helped keep queer theory fresh. 'In other words, there was theoretical input into the activist movement and activist input into the theoretical development of queer theory," Douglas Crimp would later explain. "In the 1980s queer theory did not exist as such," (Quoted in Takemoto, 2003). The point of SexPanic! was to help build on many historic lessons of queer activism. "Academic queer theory draws its insights from the long history of gay organizing, not the other way around," Michael Warner explained after he left the group. "People are forgetting the political principles of the 1960s and 1970s, and we are trying to remind them of them," (quoted in Bull, 1998).

Yet, there has to be a give and take. Sedgwick's (1990) *Epistemology of the Closet* specifically discusses two ways of viewing the world – from a minoritizing

discourse - which favors identity politics- and another univsalizing discourse – which rejects identity in favor of a broad politics based in social justice. This was profoundly intriguing, yet there is also a place for identity in queer politic, a strategic essentialism which recognizes until the playing field is more equal, a politics which recognizes the need for identities is still necessary. Joshua Gamson (1998) describes this phenomena as 'the queer delimma.' Throughout the SexPanic! years, the group faced just such a delimma. The queer theorists assumed activists could still benefit from the lessons of queer theory and vice versa (Bull, 1998). Yet, this give and take rarely found a place within the fights which insued in the fall of 1997. Instead the academics often sounded like vanguardists and many of the younger activists fought over identity politics. In the dialogue's void, rigid essentialism often took hold. "One of the fundamental axioms of queer theory is that people don't conform to singular identities," Michael Warner explained. "That has important applications for AIDS activism, for example. You can't design HIV-prevention campaigns without understanding the diversity of people's sexual behavior," (quoted in Bull, 1998). Thus, while one camp advocated creating HIV prevention messages framed within discussions of sexual democracy and difference – core aspects of queer theory – another camp felt they were ignoring a mission statement which suggested the group needed to take on an anti-racist approach to advocacy. Queer theory was fine and good but Alinski like 'us vs them' identity politics is often what motivates activists who have no academy in which to return.

Others continued fighting the commercialization and commodification of queer space and the criminalization of HIV transmission (Sheveroy 2004) as a closed direct action affinity group called Fed Up Queers (Flynn and Smith 2004). Others stayed on to

fight the zoning battle in the campaign described above. Still another faction – those frozen out of postering – formed an affinity group called the Fuck the Mayor Coalition. They left with a parting shot at SexPanic! in their photocopied zine, 'Swallow Your Pride: A Hands on Tool for Do-It-Yourself Activism' distributed during the Queeruption Festival in Brooklyn. The zine opens with a discussion of how the collective met and the satisfaction they found from wheat-pasting 8" x 11" posters around the city without asking anyone for permission or trying to get their letters published in the newspapers. "[W]e all found it really rewarding to .. work with graphics and do a project that's really creative, especially those of us who've spent a lot of our activist lives doing office work for older activists at bigger organizations." Their resentment of SexPanic! was clearly articulated:

> [M]ost of us met through Sex Panic! NY. Many of us had worked with SP! since it began in the summer of 1997, but we had become increasingly displeased with the group's inability to confront racist, sexist, ageist dynamics in its meetings and projects. So we split off in January to pursue a public art campaign that was being stalled in SP! because of the fucked up shit going on in there.
>
> SexPanic! has a really cool mission statement: "SexPanic! is a pro-queer, pro-feminist, antiracist direct action group. Our multi-issue agenda aims to defend public sexual culture and safer sex in NYC from police crackdowns, public stigma and morality crusades. We are committed to HIV prevention through safer sex, to sexual self-determination for all people and democratic urban space."
>
> Despite the fact that some fucked up shit has gone on in SexPanic!, shit that's reminiscent of experiences and stories we've with tons of other groups (in which the ideas and input of women, people of color, and the youngest and oldest members of the group get continually ignored and in which the people who speak up get called 'divisive' and demoralizing'), their mission statement is a real keeper. It is a really good description of the kind of work our group has been doing too."

And they did do very good work. Members went on to form the Sylvia Rivera Law Project (Spade 2004). The life course of direct action groups is often short; some

members stay involved, others shift and morph into other projects. The struggles SexPanic! faced are not unfamiliar.

In some ways, these fights very much echo the difficulties Don Teal (1971/1995) documents from the early days of the Gay Liberation Front, as men and women in the group battled against male chauvinism as the group attempted to keep focused on the struggle against homophobia, sexism, capitalism, and colonialism. It was no simple task. Women in the group would break off to work with the women's movement; men would break off to work with the Gay Activist Alliance (Kantrowitz, 1977/1996; Kennedy, 1994).

The problem facing SexPanic! was not unfamiliar to queer organizing efforts. Years after he left New York for San Francisco, ACT UP veteran G'dali Braverman looked back on what happens when a group begins to fight itself:

> I think that within the history of all political movements there are divisions and subdivisions. I think that movements become fortified and watered down as they grow. You can look at the history of political theory. You see it over and over again, whether it's the Black Panthers or whether it's SDS or whether it's ACT UP. People do not come into a movement that are essentially of like minds. People come into a movement because they have, essentially, the same interest in the same issue. But their origins are completely different. The key is how to, how do you use that diversity without letting it dissect the organization. I think there are inevitabilities of splits and I think that they need to happen and they can be healthy. But I think also sometimes splits happen and conflicts within an organization are almost like a disease itself; the body begins fighting itself. That's what happens within organizations. Friends turn enemies and people turn against each other and divisions become blurred.

Bob Kohler, who had been with Gay Liberation Front as it went through its early 1970's heights and contortions, notes that much of the later group's work was limited. "SexPanic! did not work. You had women who came to their activism with no experience. And that's always bad. Its always rah rah..." This inexperience was combined

with tensions over gender and structure. In addition, "you had people who were rigid. And they didn't move." Kohler, who famously stays in touch with various group members and participates in as many actions as his nearly eighty-year-old body can handle, recalls being invited to a recent action by some of the members of the group who drafted the statement against sexism in SexPanic!

> They're living in Beacan [NY] now. This is a very short story. They called me once on Mother's Day. They said, 'we're going to go to the restaurants who serve veal.' I said, 'I won't do it. Number one, Beacan is a depressed community. That woman who is going into that restaurant probably has not seen the inside of a restaurant since last Mother's Day.' I said, 'This is her day. She's probably got a carnation on her. I don't want to torture her today.' I said, 'Next week? After that?' They say, 'Oh no. It has to be Mother's Day.' That's too much anger. I don't want to attack that woman. I want to attack what she's doing, but I want to do it in a much nicer way. Not nice, but not when this is all this woman has. I can't do it.'

Kohler and I continued talking about the competing interests required of human rights activism. One recipe for such activism is a jigger of conviction, another, passion, and a third is a sense of humor. We started talking about the history of camp (Newton 1972) and role of playfulness in SexPanic! "There wasn't playfulness," Kohler recalled. "We were defending the idea of play, but we didn't have it in the group." Yet the problem was not exclusive to SexPanic! While play was part of ACT UP's peak years, Kohler suggests it was missing in most of the spin-off groups. "There isn't much playfulness in any of those groups. TAG didn't have any playfulness. Any of those offshoots, it just wasn't there."

Yet this spirit seems so necessary, particularly for queer activism. "It is, absolutely," Kohler concurred. "For me, its where I have functioned best. I'm not a dress-up person. I have no problem with it. But I don't get around to it. But I want the visuals. I want the acting out." Many groups had been able to work with such sensibilities. I talked

about Vito Russo. Kohler talked about Sylvia Rivera. Some of the greats were able to do it. “We had people back in those days. We don’t have the crazies anymore. We need them....,” he said.

Kohler told a story about a friend asking him if he could get a friend of his who is a drag queen to do a benefit for his group. Kohler was hesitant. She is, “such a pain in the ass, a good friend, a pain in the ass. Probably she might but I don’t think it would be worth it,” Kohler explained. The story alluded to a larger issue. “Those are the only drag queens we have. And they’re not the fun drag queens. I mean they are funny, but they are not fun. And we don’t have them in the movement.” For Kohler, the campy, humorous drag queens have been replaced by entertainers. “They’re not fun people. People either are not angry at all or they’re too angry,” Kohler sighed.

Cindra Feuer concurs:

> Ultimately, if you are not having fun or enjoying it, just don’t do it. Yet there is definitely a role for play. It’s an integral part of any work. If you are not enjoying what you are doing, take another tactic or don’t do it. And also people won’t come back. They can’t sustain it. You can only go so far in your anger and then you really need to be getting enjoyment and fulfillment. So it’s essential.

And SexPanic! had a great deal to try to sustain. A field note of mine from May of 1998 reads:

> Monday we held a scheduling pre-demo meeting. I’m not quite sure what happened. We’ve had so many demos lately. Three in the last month. Everyone’s wiped out. One member observed, “Its something like what happened with the Lesbian Avengers. We had some great actions. But in the end nothing in the environment changed. That’s demoralizing.” Another noted that given the attrition, only five or six people coming, that, “It hasn’t been that fun around here. There are not enough of us. They poisoned the well.”

Nevertheless, the work continued well into the following year.

Finding Places to Play in the Global City

SexPanic!'s struggle was a battle to preserve public space in an era of globalization. New York city's landscape was vastly transformed during the panic. As the summer turned to fall in 1998, the city tightened the screws on its vanishing queer spaces. Anti-queer violence followed. By this time, SexPanic! had been vastly reduced to the status of an affinity group. In 1985 during the first round of bathhouse closures, Berube wrote that if the baths were closed, queers would flock to far more dangerous places, such as parks and other less legal or protected places to cruise. And, of course, these places were being heavily policed along the lines of the Giuliani administration's squeeze on public sexual culture. As such, SexPanic! did outreach to Central Park's Ramble, Prospect Park, the Chelsea piers, and other public places where queers were being harassed. The group did outreach, held “queer-ins,” and negotiated with police at parks in an effort to defend against the continuing crackdown. While crime in the city was down in the aggregate, queers were being attacked at unprecedented levels. According to the Anti-Violence Project, anti-queer violence was up 81 percent from the previous year. From coast to coast, law enforcement agencies have declared "open season" on men seeking sex with other men (Serra, 1998). And gay men were worried (Lewine, 1998).

In the fall of 1998, Bill Dobbs talked with a reporter for the New York Times about the situation in the Ramble. “The atmosphere has changed. Gay men are scared,” (quoted in Lewine, 1998). Throughout 1998 and 1999, the Ramble in Central Park, where gay men and birdwatchers had co-mingled for a generation, had become a pressure point. Bill Dobbs (1999) described how SexPanic! was responding:

> [T]hose of us in SexPanic! have been going up to the Ramble in Central Park and we’ve been listening to the gay men up there who go up there to cruise or simply to hang out because its a beautiful place and discovering that the police have been

> demanding two forms of ID, sometimes arbitrarily ejecting people from a park they have every right to use, sometimes recording names, addresses and phone numbers, and using helicopter fly overs, and so we've been doing an educational effort in their to make sure that people know there is no law that requires you to carry ID in a park and no they don't have a legitimate police purpose in recording names addresses and phone numbers.

A number of men told SexPanic! members stories about harassment from the police. "Put your hands up," an undercover cop told one gay man this winter as he flashed his light in his eye. "I haven't thrown you to the ground but I've got a gun here." The cop then took the man's ID. "Why are you doing this?" the man asked. "There is prostitution comin' from up the hill and I saw you coming from up the hill. Have a good time John," the cop taunted.

For the past year, more and more men had been coming to SexPanic! meetings with horror stories of harassment, of cops stopping them for "loitering" in the park - which is what I thought the park was there for - cops asking men for IDs, taking down their names, or telling cruisers to leave the park hours before, and for the first time in ages, arresting people for staying after the park closes at 1 a.m.

And then there are also the entrapments. "Hey, can I watch," one undercover cop asked a couple of men who were arrested this winter. "You wanna go get a groove on?" another cop asked a cruiser. Other men have been arrested in the Central Park bathroom for simply "looking gay," for responding to questions or advances. And sometimes the cops choose to get a little more involved in their work, including receiving a blowjob and then arresting the men. These reports illustrate the dangers of what happens when cops "play gay" and act out their own frustrated sexual fantasies with unsuspecting, innocent gay men paying the price for this game. Like racial profiling, special attention to known

gay cruising sights is offensive, unfair, and illegal. Yet today, busting cruisers is an easy way for cops to meet performance quotas.

Historically, the Ramble had been a paradise for lovers of botany and birds, with its diversity of dense foliage and its untrammeled solitude. Those same characteristics make it an oasis of another sort. For as long as anyone can remember, the Ramble has been a playground for gay men. For decades, hikers, birdwatchers, gays and dog-lovers worked out an informal system of respect for each other that allows the 37-acre Ramble to accommodate many different kinds of people and pursuits. Many in SexPanic! felt Giuliani was pushing for an increased police presence that threats to destroy this unique pastoral playground.

All of this happened within a specific political context of crackdowns on public sexual culture in Manhattan. The influx to the Ramble of new patrons who've been pushed out of other public sex venues has changed the space, throwing off its ecological and aesthetic balance. Cops roam the area and new lights shine, interfering with Olmstead's plan for the park.

Fall 1998 SexPanic! adopted a set of points Queer Nation had outlined in the early 1990s when a sniper shot several gay men in the Ramble. They demanded:

- more emergency call boxes in the ramble
- that call boxes function properly
- that all call boxes be well lit and painted in bright colors.

In addition, SexPanic! members did outreach to the cruisers. Many do not realize how widespread these attacks are. Without wanting to disturb anyone, we silently flyered at the park. While some ignored the literature, others came to talk with us after they read what we had to say. And we compared notes. Like the Chelsea piers, there is an informal

network of friends who go to the park. We also gave them legal advice. Most notably, suggesting they talk with cops when they stop and ask what they are doing. Words are like toothpaste, once out of your mouth, you can never get them back. Others cruisers called us seeking help after they had been harassed.

To follow up on the outreach, we also held a 'Queer In' in the park in December 1998. A group of nature lovers, queers, radical faeries, and the like met at dusk, circled, held hands and told stories about the space, recalling the amazing times there and the recent problems. After a while time, a group of cops walked up to us and asked if we knew where the demonstration was being held. "This is it," we noted before asking them why they were there. "To protect you," the cop noted. "Well, if you want to protect us, install phone boxes which do not have busy signals and which actually call the police. Please stop entrapping gay men and turn out that light in the distance." What ensued was 30-minute discussion between the lieutenant of the Central Park Police and our group. Their position was, "We only try to entrap prostitutes. We never try to entrap gay men. We've seen perverts jerking off in the woods and arrested them but not gay men. There are even times when men have pulled down their pants in front of our officers and they've had to swallow it!!" Swallow what? Everyone roared with laughter. "I have been stopped by cops for sitting here smoking a cigarette. This is our back yard," one man noted. The cops left soon afterward. What could have been a very scary situation turned very positive with strength in numbers.

As I was walking out of the park, a friend passed a flyer to two gentlemen sitting at a park bench. "At last someone is doing something about the cops," one of the guys stated to his friend. Fighting crackdowns on cruising and public space is possible when

people stand up, organize and defend their right to sexual self determination. Reflecting on the scene Dobbs (1999) would note, “[T]he police should be protecting people not harassing, hurting, and hunting down gay men. And that’s just the sort of resistance that its very hard to get in other sorts of places.”

In many respects, the struggle was about competing views of play. Many police involved did not appreciate what was going on the Ramble. “I used to play in that park," one policeman explained after a policeman after a similar sting in Michigan (quoted in Hentoff, 1991)

Simultaneous with the attack on cruising was the lynching of Matthew Shepard in the fall of 1998. Some 10,000 New Yorkers rioted in Manhattan after the police tried to stifle a political funeral for Shepard. Dobbs lead Queer Watch and SexPanic! to oppose calls for the death penalty for Shepard’s murderers. Without justice, after all, there can be no pleasure. Thus, a movement in support of pleasure inevitably overlaps with a debate about equal access and justice. Dobbs, a long-time human rights activist, argued that the death penalty is a barbaric form of punishment.

> [I]ts a cruel and unusual punishment and the way that its been applied is very uneven. But irrespective of that I don’t want an equal opportunity death penalty. I’d like a world in which we stop talking about law and order and start talking about other ways in which we enable people to lives their lives and potential (1999).

Many SexPanic! members were arrested that night. And we told stories. Would there ever be a true sexual democracy? None of us knew. We were all part of a grand story of queer life in a fin de siècle sex panic.

Sexual Stories as Resistance

Given the demise of so many of Manhattan's clubs, many in SexPanic! put considerable time thinking back to the first glimpses of public sexual spaces, their possibilities, dreams, and meanings (Crimp, 2002; Munoz, 1996). Through this process, queers reclaimed their own sex panic narratives, detailing where the sex panic began. The process allowed queer people to retrace their own sexual stories. Some of the most amazing narratives I have ever heard involved people recalling their many pasts within the context of anonymous sex. Perhaps more than any narrative, the sexual story conjures up notions of a sacred community full of rites, rituals, and meanings (Plummer, 1995).

A central component of the resistance to the panic involved people creating community by sharing stories in meetings, in jail, in bars, in burlesque shows. Notions of a search for values, for tenderness, and caring evolve within these narratives. Narratives of public sexual culture can be about teaching; they don't have to be moralizing. Stories are reality-creating machines. Stories help everyone identify with his or her community. This is perhaps why so many endeavor to tell sex positive narratives about queer life in New York City, stories about why sex creates life and how to stay safe. New York public sexual culture was under attack. The “quality of life” campaign challenged the very nature of queer life. It was up to everyone to share and remember the city's public sexual spaces, re-narrating community. John McNight notes, "In communities, people know by stories. These community stories allow people to reach back into their common history and their individual experience for knowledge about and direction for the future."

For SexPanic! the notion of defending play spaces began with a simple recognition thatan idea which cannot be explained, can rarely be defended, mobilized, or organized. Thus, if queers were not going to narrate the meanings of public sexual play, other would do it for them. That process was already happening with the retrospective proselytizing narratives advanced by the Gang of Four, which relinked stigma with queer sexuality. Just as queers had successfully fought the American Psychological Association to renounce the association between gayness and pathology in 1973, so SexPanic! fought

names-reporting and HIV criminalization laws which equated queer sexuality with criminality. Much of the process began with trying to advance a more compelling story of difference rather then stigma.

In the years after Stonewall, the Gay Liberation Front advanced a vision about the world. Guy Hocquenghem (1972/1993) recalled his first meetings of the Front Homosexual d'Action Revolutionnaire in 1971: "I arrived at a small room where there were about thirty people... Everyone told their life story, their dreams, their desires, with whom, how, and why they'd slept with the people they'd slept with. And how they'd been living."

Skip ahead a generation and SexPanic! sought to shift storylines in a debate about the meanings of public sexuality for a new generation of actors that had not benefited from the lessons of gay liberation. In an essay called “Learning History by Half-light,” Kirk Read (1998) wrote about listening to a different set of sexual stories:

> Last Tuesday night I attended a workshop by Eric Rofes on gay men's sexual culture in the 70s. I heard dozens of stories told by men who enjoyed San Francisco bathhouses and sex spaces before they were shut down in 1985. Remembering this history is essential for our elders; hearing this history is essential for our young. I caught a glimpse of the liberation that these brave pioneers envisioned. Sex was central to that liberation. Pleasure was a political act. The predominant strategy in national gay politics has been to deny this, to desexualize us, to package us as straight-seeming people who happen to be gay. If the 70s gave us hanky codes and Sylvester, why the hell do we keep settling for rainbow flags and Ellen? (1998)

If the SexPanic! debate over public sexual play was about anything, it was about a conversation among diverse cohorts about the meanings of social and cultural history. While the Gang of Four described forms of kinship outside of marriage as contagious, SexPanic! described the importance of public sexual space in terms of a democratic right to sexual-self determination. To win this debate, activists came to realize they would

need to find more creative language to describe the importance of public sexual space to queer world-making. Words are reality-making machines. The thoughtful sex-positive narrative, detailing the underpinnings of queer community under attack, offers the best means for defending queer spaces. To the extent that such narratives conjure up notions of a sacred community full of rites, rituals, and meanings, such stories, by allowing us to trace the lines of our own sexual identities, serve as resistance to a script of domination.

Many of these insights became central organizing points during the second SexPanic! summit held in Pittsburgh in 1998. Throughout the sessions, activists shared stories. Panels were organized around storytelling. Stephen Gendin and I were assigned to draft an advocacy document called "Ten Things You Can do to Make Your Community Less Sex-Hostile," which was to be posted on the SexPanic! web site. The ninth point on the list called for queers to:

> TALK UNASHAMEDLY ABOUT YOUR DESIRES AND SEXUAL PRACTICES. Sex is not secret, shameful, or destructive to society. It needn't be privatized and kept out of public discussion. Discuss sex thoughtfully but unabashedly. Feel no shame!

The wisdom of the practice dated back to the days of Gay Liberation, and continued with ACT UP, whose members would pass the time in jail by defiantly tell stories. During ACT UP/Atlanta's first demonstration, Steve Quester participated in a civil disobedience action over sodomy laws. After the bust,

those who were arrested talked about their favorite things about sex. Telling sexual stories is, after all, a community-building ritual.

Storytelling is also an essential form of play and performance. SexPanic! situated gay life within a series of competing narratives, which struggled to create meaning out of sexuality and democracy. Many involved with the sexual debates of the 1990s made

storytelling part of the organizing. Read reflects on his efforts to be less didactic in his work:

> I think storytelling is my main thing right now. I think for me that is my main method for engaging. Because when you tell a story it creates negative space for other people to tell their stories. There's always a sense of fun.

Fall 1999, Mattilda [aka Matt Bernstein Sycamore], dressed in drag, MC'd during New York's first first ever Queeruption festival, a radical queer anti-assimilationist encuerto (gatherring) which brought together a diverse group of queer activists.

> the purpose of queeruption is to come together as queers of all genders and sexualities to explore, celebrate, enjoy, learn, communicate, network and create. a free weekend of workshops, story sharing, skills sharing, as well as films, music, social events and vegan food. queeruption is about us all taking initiative: creating & participating, instead of just consuming a lifestyle sold to us (queeruption mission statement, 1999).

The group sought to build an alternative to the corporatization of Gay Pride, with a weekend of events of events in the DUMBO (Directly Under Brookly Bridge) section of Brooklyn. Using burlesque and performance and activism, the event offered a clear alternative. Group members even met speak up about the attacks on cruisers at the Ramble. One of the offshoots of Queeruption was a movement called Gay Shame, a San Francisco based movement Mattilda helped organize in San Francisco. Dressed in sequins, Mattilda lead the anti-assimilationist wing over a queer, anarcha-feminist, punk movement to steaking a clear critique with its playful pranks. In one weekend, Mattilda explains: "We rewarded the most hypocritical gays for their service to the "community," in order to expose these evil-doers who use the sham of "pride" as a cover-up for their greed and misdeeds," Mattilda wrote (undated). To do this, the group crowded the streets of the San Francisco Castro, historically the city's gay center, and blocked traffic for, "

hours of dangerous glamour." The group which was critical of services for gay homeless youth being queezed, a sympton of the gentrification which had taken hold of the neighborhood. "I think Gay Shame here is very connected to a sense of play," Read explains. "Like they did the exploitation runway during Gavin Newsom's mayoral campaign." In one event in San Francisco's historically gay and increasingly commercialized Castro district, for example, the group gave satirical awards to spaces for categories including:"Making More Queers Homeless," "Helping Right- Wingers Cope," "Best Target Marketing," "Best Gender Segregation," and "Best Racist- Ass Whites-Only Space," "Exploiting Our Youth," (Mattilda, Undated). "There was a cutest in the Castro so they did an altnernative pagent," Read explained. "We presented a radical queer extravaganza, a fun and biting critique of the reactionary gay mainstream- in the belly of the beast," Mattilda went on. "Gay Shame is committed to fighting the rabid assimilationist monster of corporate gay "pride" with a devastating mobilization of queer brilliance." Read follows, "So I think they are very connected to dressing up, play, and young hipster. And that has its gifts and limitations as well." By 2004, Mattilda published a volume of essays on the movement called, *Thats Revolting: Queer Strategies for Resisting Assimilation*, which documented much of the history of the movement, starting with Queeruption. The storytelling and play of Gay Shame is part of a longer term struggle to find meaning for a movement and culture.

This narrative turn in political activism is build on a recognition of the performative dimensions of activism. Read elaborated on the ways storytelling and performance are part of his organizing: "Now I organize a monthly open mike in a gay men's STD clinic called Magnet. The space is very Chelsea. I do it with Larry-Bob

Roberts from Holy Titclamps Boys Club, so there's always a sense of fun." Part of the pleasure is theatrical forms of thoughtful, inventive rather than dour direct action. "Like there is this racist bar across the street. Rather than do some sort of lefty tirade about the racist bar, I'll do like a Satanic ritual," Read explains. "And we'll send group energy over to the bar. And people have fun with it and they are aware of what's going on. It's not in a punishing leftist screed kind of way." These performances are connected to play and community building and joyful defiance.

Political activism is about "doing" –- marching, protesting, teaching, organizing – but it is also about "talking" – persuading, seducing, convincing, demonstrating, PowerPinting, and even *telling stories*. Narratives play an important role in political activism, constructing and maintaining individual and community identities (Fine, 1995; Vanderford, undated). These stories help actors remember and participate in who they truly are. Not only do they help players advance their cause and generate support, they buttress the troops. Further, they help players find and create meaning (Brunner, 1990). Yet these stories also overlap as performances, advancing a narrative, connecting past storylines with future strategies (Vanderford, undated).

And this performative turn certainly found its expression with SexPanic! "More Booty, Less Rudy" chants could be heard as the crowd roared its approval. It was Gay Pride day, June 27, 1999. People were shooting squirt guns. Muscle bound hustlers in thongs from Rentboy.com accompanied the car. Two lesbians were making out on the hood. There were go-go boys on our float, which featured a 1970s hot-rod, a blue squad car – dubbed "Rudy's Sex Police" – with a papier mache Rudy Giuliani puppet head and

a sign reading ‘Because we hate you.’ With its Rudy's Sex Mobile float, SexPanic! advanced its own narrative of joy and justice. Melissa Hope, who was on the float, recalls the scene:

> A friend of mine was dressed for work. This is a woman who I had met and was being arrested (theatrically on the front of sex mobile) with someone else I knew. I was there with a camera taking pictures of it. It was actually a really fun, expressive day. It felt like the one time where you could be really public about this in a very overt public, graphic way without worrying about the sort of stigma.

For many involved, the SexPanic! float functioned as a defense of pleasure in public space.

In a way, the ride down the Pride parade route in Rudy’s Sex Mobile mirrored much of the larger SexPanic! experience. For most of the day, the SexPanic! activists played with the crowd, chanted and enjoyed the social Eros of the moment, only run into regulatory barriers. Shortly after passing the Stonewall Bar on Christopher Street, the group was told to leave the parade. "The cop just said it was 'inappropriate,'" Bill Dobbs, who was also in the car, recalled. "There's nothing illegal here and you don't have a right to decide who marches," Dobbs explained. The police were not hearing it, and once again insisted the car exit the parade. "The implicit threat was if we pushed it any further we'd be arrested," Dobbs said (quoted in *The Guide*, 1999). The next day, the *New York Times* ran a front-cover story on the parade, and mentioned SexPanic!’s experience. Hope reflects on the play of the action:

> I think that it encouraged the people that were still willing to work on the issues. I think bystanders may not have understood the object of the float. I think the people on the float all had a great time. It was really hot. I think some people were probably dehydrated. It was ultimately really great in that people were really encouraged. I think it may have had an impact on the people who participated to

> help them feel like they could do this. But ultimately things still went down the tubes.
>
> But the crackdown seemed to coincide with the burlesque revival, which is fun and sexy and humorous and creative. In some ways, I see the float, which I don't think had many people more than one or two who are part of the current burlesque revival.

As the SexPanic! story unfolded, it dovetailed with a model of protest that rode ACT UP's rejection of the hair-shirt left with a joyous spirit of performance in public space. Despite the difficulties, many did have joyous experiences with organizing and participating and bringing fun into protests to fight the zoning law. Ehmann explains why fun was a useful part of the protest, the politics of play, in contrast to other models of organizing:

> Because it isn't just meet at City Hall, carry a picket sign around, and chant. It mobilizes in a totally different way. And it allows people to feel like being active and showing their displeasure with the current political situation by showing up and having a good time rather than just showing up and just yelling. Because part of the reason is that doesn't always work.

Final Act: Taking a Bust at the Disney Store

In August 1998, Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsberg rejected Ferringer's appeal in the XXX zoning law case. The following August, SexPanic! looked to organize a legal topless march through Times Square to mark the anniversary as a day of infamy. As outreach, I took the idea to the Lower East Side Collective (LESC), a convergence of activists who had done excellent work around public space issues in the city. It was suggested I contact Reverend Billy and the Church of Stop Shopping.

The next day I received a phone call from Bill Talen, a local actor and instructor at the New School for Social Research, who had created the alter ego Reverend Billy. The aim of the Church of Stop Shopping was to protest the consumerism overwhelming Manhattan, specifically to torment Disney and its flagship Times Square store. The

reverend's gospel preached that when you enter the Disney store, "consumer narcosis" overtakes you and you forget who you are. In response, Reverend Billy, dressed in minister's garb, had taken to delivering extemporaneous non-shopping sermons inside and outside the store. Gradually, he encouraged others to come with him for "shopping interventions" at the Disney store. Although nothing ever came of the proposed topless rally (I was but one of only three potential marchers), in Talen I found a wonderful fellow prankster.

The underpinning for Talen's character emerged from Jimmy Breslin's 1998 adage that Times Square used to be a place where stories happened. Our job was to start more stories. I began to participate in a number of non-shopping interventions. As with the vision of the "strip-in" and other nonviolent civil disobedience actions around the city, Talen and I hoped to up the ante on the contested space within the Disney store. The corner of 42nd Street and 7th Avenue was historically a place where people from all over the world came to commune within the city's holy, neon glimmer. One foot in the gutter and the other in the clouds, some preached; others merely sought contact (Benderson 1997; Delany 1999). But now, unless you are in the neighborhood to shop, police ask you to move along.

An affinity group from LESC, SexPanic!, Reclaim the Streets, and the Church of Stop Shopping staged a sit-in at the Disney store on November 15, 1999. Our goal was to bring attention to a series of Disney's offenses in the new Times Square. We listed reasons for the sit-in on a flyer. Among others, we posited: "We're here to protest the inauthentic... the use of entertainment as ideology… the celebration of the bland... Disney eradicates difference..." We called for an end of Disney's support for the mayor's polices

and requested that the company admit their homoerotic cartoon star, “Hercules” was gay, concluding: “Whose world do we want it to be - Disney's or ours?” (Barber 1995).

After weeks of planning, two or three activists at a time trickled into the store. Once inside, we performed a small play about the neighborhood, after which we sat down, locked arms, and blocked traffic to the cash register. We distributed lyric sheets to everyone in the store before leading the crowd in a resounding rendition of Disney's classic, "Whistle While You Work…for 15 cents an hour," in homage to Disney’s Haitian and Indonesian sweatshops. The song was the cue for Reverend Billy to begin a non-shopping sermon which further disrupted the somewhat excited shoppers and befuddled staff. Chants of “No Strippers!, No Peace!” "Put down the mouse!!!” and “Hercules is Gay!!!” filled the store before police were able to move in, arresting six of us. "It is my civil right not to live in a shopping mall," I screamed before being locked in the paddy wagon. For a moment, the sterilized private space had been transformed into a public theater, once again a place where stories begin.

Talen wrote an email to the group the day after the action. In it, he situated our play/performance in the Disney store as part of a series of reverberating stories which echoed for resistance throughout the streets of the city that day and week:

> I am so grateful for yesterday's adventure. I think that if I can just recount what happened yesterday, well, that's my new play for the St. Clement's Playhouse in February. It is such a complete story, yesterday. I created a community there. We created in miniature with our action what we want to take place on a larger scale as a result of our politics. I had this wonderful view from up there, of you the church, and behind you our supporters, and then a surprising number of people who seemed to be there to attend this theater event (as if this was a downtown performance that just happened to take place at this store) and then beyond – -the shoppers. And then in the corners of my vision were the screaming store manager and the cops, the people looking in from the street. Our violation of the order there, stopping the shopping, created this layered group, a community

> that was reflecting on the possibility of change, looking hard at our comic right-thinking. I'll never forget the thoughtful expressions within the grinning and laughing.

Bob Kohler, who was part of the action, looks back on it as part of a model for an approach to activism. “I want it to be fun, like sitting on the floor of the Disney Store and singing that song. That was a pretty terrible song about people chopping fingers off but the message got out.” Within two weeks, protestors involved with the Disney action would take flights out to Seattle to participate in some protests against the trade meetings going on there. . And the struggle to regain the commons would take on far larger dimensions and storylines.

Play, Panic, and Goodbye: Stephen Gendin’s Funeral

The last time I ever corresponded with Stephen Gendin, he responded to an email inviting people over to a pre-action meeting for the Disney action at my apartment in the fall in 1999. A year earlier, Gendin had opened up his files at his office at *POZ* and photocopied them for me. By the following spring, Gendin passed away (Lugliani 2000). Most of the original SexPanic! members were in the same room for the first time in years. Gendin had lived with HIV since his freshman year at Brown some fifteen years earlier. “Because of AIDS, he learned early that his life was going to have an unfamiliar shape,” Michael Warner noted. “Experience for him was not going to be made familiar by cliché. It would not fit standard moral wisdom.” (quoted in POZ 2000).

The themes of the struggle between Eros and Thanatos run throughout the story of play and community organizing from ACT UP to SexPanic! Gendin’s life was comprised of much of the ACT UP propensity for research, as well as its impulse toward Eros, linear

Apollo vs. destructive, ecstatic Dionysus. “Stephen loved kissing. Stephen loved fucking. Stephen loved cuddling and embracing,” his lover ‘Hush’ recalled. Yet, Stephen’s friend’s and lovers were quick to recognize the destructive dynamics that accompanied Gendin’s life work, which included his activism and his personal life. His lover Hush seroconverted while the two were together. Gendin famously embraced and wrote about Tony Valenzuela during the SexPanic! barebacking controversy.

Julie Boler, a lesbian activist and writer, recalled a mischievous streak, which belied a number of contradictions when she met Gendin. “I found him embracing his contradictions for the next six years. He picked and chose pursuits and priorities based simply on what he found real.” She continued: For Stephen, if more and different HIV meant he would die sooner, and exposure to it meant he would live more meaningfully, Stephen chose with clarity. If Ecstasy meant joy followed by days of hell, Stephen measured clear-eyed. Called reckless, impulsive and dangerous, Stephen confounded many by choosing pleasure over safety, glory over longevity (quoted in POZ 2000).

Yet Gendin was also very spiritual. In conversations, he talked about the transcendent possibility of ecstatic play. That was why he entered to seminary. At his funeral service, David Barr, Director of the Forum for Collaborative HIV Research, recalled Gendin’s energy and the ethos of ACT UP, in which Thanatos and Eros inspired a powerful combination of motivations:

> Being a part of ACT UP in New York in the late '80s was like being inside the eye of a hurricane. The storm was raging all around us, but inside that eye of activism was a place that felt safe. ACT UP was a sexy place, too. The sexual energy that ran through the room at Monday night meetings is legendary. No one personified that energy for me more than Stephen.

While SexPanic! had stopped meeting before Gendin died, his passing marked the end of a period of sex-positive, community-based prevention activism. For many, it was hard to continue without Gendin. At his funeral, his old ACT UP colleague Sean Strub said, "I have never met a man I admired more." Within the context of his death, the struggle for a more caring set of AIDS policies for both HIV prevention and treatment became that much more difficult. Recognizing that Gendin was one of the few activists who could both fight the panic over HIV prevention and offer a serious argument about the importance of HIV treatment, Strub explained, "Continued AIDS activism, in the absence of Stephen's integrity, excruciating honesty, and deep drive for meaning, at the moment, feels impossible" (quoted in Lugliani, 2000).

For long-time ACT UP meeting facilitator, Ann Northrop, "Stephen was one of the sweetest people I ever knew." What emerged from Gendin was an activism based in a joyful connection. Northrop explains:

> He embodied such joy and peace, and that is what his activism and writing came out of, a fundamental joy. And I think Stephen was about love. He had the greatest smile in the world. And every time I saw him, his face would light up with that smile, and mine would light up in response automatically. There was just no alternative when running into Stephen. And I will miss that smile and that joy...

For Northrop, this caring affect served as a strategy for future engagement:

> I think continuing on in activism is less about being angry than about finding that core of peace and joy. I don't have the slightest doubt that Stephen felt the peace of doing what he knew was right every single day. And that's what I'd like all of us to do.

This care could be part of a life of thoughtful actions and resistance, Northrop suggests: "I do the activism I do out of my own joy in doing it on a daily basis. I think it's a way to live a life, and I think that's the life Stephen lived" (quoted in POZ 2000).

Volume II

Chapter VI
Play as Community Building:
From Gardens to Global Peace and Justice

> "The road becomes a stage for a participatory ritual theatre: ritual because it is efficacious, it produces real effects by means of symbolic causes; participatory because the street party has no division between performer and audience, it is created by and for everyone, it avoids all mediation, it is experienced in the immediate moment by all, in a spirit of face-to-face subversive comradeship," John Jordan

> "[T]he spirit they share is a radical reclaiming of the commons... As our communal spaces—town squares, streets schools, farms, plants—are displaced by the ballooning marketplace, a spirit of resistance is taking hold…" Naomi Klein (2003, 220-222), "Reclaiming the Commons"

By the late 1990s, ACT UP's work dovetailed with the emergence of the global justice movement. This movement borrowed from ACT UP's work to create playful protests that honored the model of protest as carnival. At this point much of the recognition of the political possibilities of the dual yearnings for connection and justice, joy and pleasure was infused into the emerging global justice movement. Sociologist Eddie Yuen (2004) suggests the new global justice movement borrows from the successful work of queer/AIDS activism in a number of these ways. The first includes "[t]he discovery of new ways to inhabit urban space. The intersection of carnival, potlatch, and jubilee, not the semiotics of supplication, into the architecture of power" (p. XII). Sociologist Stephen Duncombe (2002b), an activist who was involved ACT UP New York actions such as 'Stop the Church' before helping organize the New York chapter of Reclaim the Streets, elaborates: "ACT UP never asked for permission to claim a street." In addition, Yuen (2004) notes, the global justice movement builds on this

joyful defiance through "[t]he use of music, dance, sexuality, and humor to decommodify pleasure and liven up resistance."

For many neighborhood activists, ACT UP offered an example of an organizing approach which was disciplined and thoughtful. Bill iPaolo, an activist in the Lower East Side of Manhattan who founded a group called Times Up! studied the way ACT UP helped translate their goals into action.

> ACT UP at the time its so efficient. They did these marches; they did direct action. For me, there was no group even close to the efficiency of how they can organize and what they can do. So I went to a lot of their rallies and demonstrations and I tried to support them in other ways, with technical stuff, but mostly I studied them.

In the years that followed, DiPaulo would borrow from the ACT UP approach for his environmental activsm – which included biking and supporting community gardens.

Just as SexPanic! struggled against the hypercontrol of public sexual space, much of the New York contribution to the global justice movement began with a struggle over public spaces—including community gardens. Organizer and radical historian L.A. Kauffman explains:

> The fight over community gardens in New York City in some ways was a very local community fight, with purely local relevance, and yet it was more than that. From 1997 to 1999, that campaign pulled a lot of new people into activism and, as far as the East Coast was concerned, was a real incubator for the kinds of creative political energies that were expressed in the Seattle WTO protests, and in the big trade summit protests from November 1999 until September of 2001. Many of us who were working on the garden fight took inspiration from ACT UP and a lot of other direct action movements that had come before us (2004).

Here, much of the battle for public space alternated with the struggle over old-growth forests on the West Coast with Earth First!:

> There were people who shuttled back and forth between the New York City community garden fight and old-growth forest blockades in remote Oregon. The

> New York City community garden fight was one of the first times that Earth First!–style blockading techniques were used in an urban context. Those tactics are often most effective for groups whose numbers are small but whose appeal is broad. And they worked really well here, putting the gardens issue onto the agenda, making the controversy something that everyone knew about, and helping transform what was a very small movement into a relatively large movement (Kauffman, 2004).

The action Kauffman refers to took place when the movement had grown a fair bit; it was a civil disobedience action with something like 50 arrests. These were people from all over the city, many of whom had never done anything like that before, sitting in the street, breaking the law to defend public space in New York City. The aim was to create joyous networks in which everyone involved communes in a celebration of difference as diversity and democracy intermingle in an image of what our world could look like. And in the process, the model of protest as play, pleasure, and carnival attracted audiences to a struggle intermediating between local and global struggles (Bogad, 2005a). Two questions from the project study guide specifically address the practical wisdom beneath such sentiment: "To what extent is the community you are seeking to create embodied in your protest tactics? Is creative protest most useful for connecting political actors with formal political channels or for creating an image of a better world in which activists hope to live?" The question produced some of the richest answers of any in this study. One of the best answers was provided by Ariane Burgess , the daughter of a community organizer from Scotland, who talked about the roots of her own history in organizing:

> And I think in terms of my work in the city, it was 1997 and it was a rent stabilization rally down at city hall. And it was the classic flatbed truck with all the speakers. And there were hundreds of people there and you were getting tired and bored. And I was thinking this is insane. We should all be dancing. We know the issues. So why don't we get together and celebrate our relationship with each other. And at the end of it, a bunch of the crowd left and Ron Hayduk was there.

> And Eric Drooker had a big drum and somebody had a bell. I think it might have been Ron. And so we started playing all this music and dancing before the police started to come. They weren't too into it. So they were trying to push us out. And I remember we walked back up to the Lower East Side and various other improvised instruments. And the police just kind of followed us along the road as we went. So then it evolved into the Lower East Side Collective.

Lower East Side Collective

For the final chapter on a study of play in community organizing, the Lower East Side Collective (LESC) is as good a place as any to start. Kauffman, who is quoted above, was part of the group, as were organizers involved with the local Reclaim the Streets chapter, the Billionaires for Bush (or Gore), United for Peace and Justice, ACT UP, SexPanic!, TIME'S UP!, and Women's Health Action Mobilization (WHAM), as well as solidarity movements with El Salvador. Group members were involved with some of ACT UP's most memorable moments, including the Stop the Church action and the Operation Ridiculous Theater of the Absurd, as well as the most conventional of local political struggles. LESC was formed in 1997. Its literature claimed:

> Since forming in 1997, the Lower East Side Collective has initiated several projects and targeted a number of issues. We're fighting for affordable housing, while defending community gardens. We're involved in local electoral campaigns for progressive candidates who answer to the people, not money or the party machine. We're making sure that everyone who works in our neighborhood gets a living wage. We don't think you should have to work on Wall Street to live in the Lower East Side. We're tired of seeing small businesses forced out by chain stores and pricey restaurants. We believe 'quality of life' means enjoying our neighborhood. *We believe politics can be fun.* [Emphasis mine]

It is not every day that struggles for the environment, housing, and the living wage are thought of in terms of an ambition that "politics can be fun." Yet, as with ACT UP, a holistic approach to smart strategic politics with clearly articulated goals was linked with an effective, enjoyable organizing model. Unlike SexPanic!, play, self-determination and support were thought to be part of the organizing process and

structure. “As groups unified within a collective we combine the benefits of autonomy with the strength of solidarity.” Through its playful process, broad critique, and respect for pleasure, the collective brought a distinctly queer perspective to its work.

Yet, if there was any one ideology that supported the underlying anticapitalist critique that buttressed the group’s work, it was a spirit of praxis, a spirit of lived theory. The term *praxis*, suggesting a merging of theory and action, harkens back to Marx’s materialism. “As individuals express their life, so they are,” Marx wrote in *The German Ideology* (quoted in Duncombe, 2003). Thus, Duncombe (2003) suggests, “All successful theory is lived theory.” A close look at LESC’s propaganda indicates as much:

> We do demos. We do street theatre and art. We do direct actions and civil disobedience. We do tabling and education forums. We do phone and fax jams. We do postering. We do parties. We do picnics. We—with healthy skepticism—do electoral campaigns. We do whatever works.

Here, LESC’s approach to organizing anticipated the global justice movement’s perhaps dynamic focus on creative expression and engagement rather than iron-clad ideological certainly (Notes From Nowhere 2003). Naomi Klein’s now famous essay, “The Vision Thing,” (2002) elaborates on this theme.

Through LESC, anarchists worked with liberals, queers organized with environmentalists, and in homage to a respect for diversity of tactics, great things have happened through the savvy deployment of multiple approaches to defending the neighborhood. “We’re proud of the diversity and cultural vibrancy of our neighborhood. We’re upset by its gentrification, commercialization, and homogenization. We’re organizing to do something about this.” The story of LESC and its affinity groups?, which addressed urban gardening, public space, as well as its offshoots, including those

involved in global justice and later antiwar activism, offer a useful narrative case study in the strengths and weaknesses of play in a global-justice organizing context.

For example, LESC'S summer 2001 project group, the Masquerade Project, sought to provide an aesthetic intervention for a global justice movement that was increasingly characterized by images of quasi-militaristic Black Bloc types. "[I]nstead of 'BOMB-WIELDING ANARCHISTS DUELING WITH THE UPHOLDERS OF LAW AND ORDER,'" one movement journalist suggested the news about the Masquerade would show a far more ambiguous "slippery image—one of queer unique bodies in carnival together and in contradiction to these strange and oppressive police officers... They would present an image of how people in the New World dressed, behaved and cared for one another" (Herbst, 2002). These, like many activist plans, were complicated by the terrorist attacks that September 11, and the project was called off. It would not be reborn for another year until the Absurd Response to An Absurd War and later the Clandestine Insurgent Rebel Clown Army, which project members, borrowing from experience with ACT UP's Operation Ridiculous, helped create. The following considers the use of play in such a creative politics, among LESC members and those who accompanied the group members in their activist endeavors in a period of rapid flux from 1997 to 2001.

As with the SexPanic! chapter, an observing participant perspective informs the narratives that support the story of the Lower East Collective and its affinity groups and related offshoots. At various times I was involved with groups involved in garden activism, public space, community, labor, street parties, and its group cohesion ministry from my first meeting with the group in March of 1999 through the summer of 2000

when the collective peacefully disbanded (although the affinity groups kept working). Work and play with this project vacillated from more than 36 hours in jail after defending a beloved community garden to dancing a spiral dance at a benefit party in an old synagogue.

I became involved with the group shortly after the organizing efforts that arose out of the October 19th, 1998 Matthew Shepard political funeral direct action failed to produce an ongoing working organization. Instead, the core organizers for the Matthew Shepard political funeral, the Fed Up Queers (FUQ), hot off their successful work creating the largest queer street disruption since Stonewall, had grown weary of infiltration from provocateurs from the International Socialist Organization (ISO) on the left and assimilationist "we're just like them" homosexuals on the right, and stopped having open meetings (Flynn and Smith, 2004). For FUQ, it was hard to tell which group was more tedious: the ISO, which at one meeting demanded that the group adapt a political ideology that rejected use of the term *queer* ("That was the last thing Matthew Shepard heard when he was alive," a particularly earnest ISO member screamed at one point), or the newcomers to activism who had been arrested for the first time during the political funeral and renounced the use of direct action. So it was understandable that the group would fold inward so they could stick with direct action.

Yet that left me, one of the other Shepard arrestees, on the outside of the new group. So, when FUQ started pulling together a coalition of groups that had been targeted by Rudy Giuliani—ranging from schoolteachers and public-space advocates to green-gardeners—I welcomed the invitation. FUQ reached out to members of LESC, ACT UP, Circus Amok, SexPanic!—all of whom had coalesced to give Giuliani a black eye over

his defense of the police officers who had shot 99 bullets into unarmed Amadou Diallo. Daily civil disobedience had taken place after the event, compelling the mayor to complain that, "Now, that's just piling on." On March 31, 1999, I attended my first meeting with the Stop the Mayor Coalition as an unaffiliated participant with others from ACT UP, the Church Ladies for Choice, Youth Education Life Line (YELL), SexPanic!, FUQ, NOW/NYC, and three members of LESC—L.A. Kauffman and David Crane, both direct action veterans, and Todd Muller, who worked with one of the lead organizers from FUQ on criminal justice issues—as well as one member of Circus Amok, New York's queer circus.

Of all the activists at the meeting, the Circus Amok representative probably had the most experience with radical play and clowning. This would be needed to meet the new coalition's aim: "to liberate New York, a city under siege from Giuliani's 'boredom police...'" The press release stated, "Community activists proclaim: New York is Our Carnival!! Lets Kick Out the Clown." Clowning would be the key ingredient in this task. "These are old clown bits, hundreds of years old, but done by gay people in flamboyant costumes," Jennifer Miller, the famously amiable, bearded leader of Circus Amok once explained to describe the subversive nature of queer theatrical performance and play that Circus Amok was reinventing. "It allows the audience almost unknowingly to embrace gay culture. You have to have a playfulness in order to be serious," (quoted in Smith, 1995). We hoped that playfulness would help us "reenergize public space which has been blandified through the mayor's reign of homogenization," as the press release boasted. Playfulness would be a necessary ingredient to take on the serious task ahead.

Little else was decided in the first meeting except that the coalition would organize a "carnival" to "Take Back New York" by bringing back what had been lost in the quality-of-life years. Play was to be a central component of the "Quality of Life" carnival/action, which would include an ice cream truck, music, and an effort by members of FUQ to cut a hole in the fence that the mayor had erected to separate City Hall from the citizenry.

After the meeting, Muller told me about the next LESC meeting and let me know I would be welcome to come. Crane and Kauffman were equally friendly. Muller thought that members of FUQ were "adrenaline junkies" because of their ongoing fixation on risky, direct action over any other forms of engagement. They seemed to mainline on risk. Jimmy McNulty, another FUQ, describes the office takeover of U.S. Trade Representative Charlene Barshefsky's office, in similar terms:

> As everybody knows, the whole fucking world is a con game. You walk in with confidence, and we walked up the stairs. You can practically walk through armed guards. Then we walked right into the metal detector. I can't even remember because it was so intense, but I'm sure it went 'beep, beep, beep, beep, beep.'

The action was later mentioned in the November 27, 1999, issue of *Time Magazine* covering the "Battle in Seattle." And the U.S.'s hard-line policy stance calling for trade sanctions against South Africa as punishment for the production of generic drugs softened after the action.

LESC members were somewhat in awe of the combination of smarts and bravery that drove FUQ members to do things that few else had the guts to do. Brooke Lehman, a former LESC member who went on to help organize the New York City Direct Action Network, would list one of the Fed Up Queer zaps as perhaps the best creative use of direct action she had ever seen:

> Well, the one that comes to mind was creative in a different way; I don't think creativity is just about colorfulness. And maybe it was ACT UP. It was either ACT UP or Healthgap. I think it was ACT UP when they took over Broadway during the Diallo protests. And came out in support of Diallo. That was one of the most creative protests because they were clearly making a statement in support of Diallo but what they were doing was pushing the envelope so that the mostly Black and Muslim leaders on the stage had to call for solidarity in return. Not that it was a tit for tat. Maybe understand that the Fed Up Queers were not the only people that were seeing a united front. So, it was pretty brilliant, especially that it was timed when all the other religious leaders were on stage.

The action was great theater and it was chock full of meanings. On one level, it suggested that the oppression around police brutality extends in many directions. And it's all wrong. It's also around homophobia. The Gay Liberation Movement started after a police raid. Yet action served as a catalyst for a wave of direct actions, including over 1,000 arrests. Longtime civil rights hero John Lewis, who had endured being beaten up at a segregated milk[LUNCH?] counter during the peak of the Civil Rights years (see Payne, 1995), suggested that the wave of direct actions around the Diallo killings fit into a long tradition of direct civil disobedience dating back to the Civl Rights years (Lewis, 1999). "And they didn't have to say a damn thing," Lehman noted. "And then all these religious figures had to talk about their queer brothers and sisters." FUQ played so fast that a former member of the Weather Underground, who had spent years in jail, once offered advice to one of the FUQ members to slow down before she got over her head (Flynn and Smith, 2004).

While risky, darker play was FUQ's forte, Todd Muller was more interested in a different kind of political game. Muller was a basketball enthusiast. He had his own Web site, which he bragged covered the ins and outs of the college game, the pro game, and the political economy of hoops. He would brag that if you plugged in the words *politics* and *basketball*, his site was the first to come up. Muller played in the neighborhood

league, where he was painfully aware that his group of scruffy anarchist buddies was unable to beat the Wall Street teams, despite their lack of talent. It was more about the power imbalance of basketball playing in a period of late capitalism in the neoliberal city. What went on in the outside world simply could not be abstracted from what took place on the basketball court and vice versa. Real life could not be separated from game playing.

An advertisement for one of LESC's "Radical Love" benefit dance parties in 1999 describes its approach to playing and organizing:

> LESC is an activist group based on the Lower East Side. We have been fighting for community gardens, defending community arts centers, disrupting City auctions, organizing immigrant workers, unfurling guerrilla billboards, jamming phones and faxes, demanding affordable housing, sponsoring poetry readings, holding fabulous parties, working for real 'quality of life' in the Lower East Side, and generally making life miserable for landlords, bureaucrats and developers since 1997.

The flyer ends with an invitation to a new sort of political ethos: "Come celebrate the neighborhood's vibrant political culture with some of its most unruly elements."

For years since the legendary Tompkins Square Park police riot in 1989, people had suggested that the battle against gentrification in the Lower East Side was lost. Yet for others, the long history and culture of activism in the Lower East Side presented an opportunity. Many—including the daughter of one of the organizers from the Motherfuckers, the Lower East Side chapter of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS)—borrowed from this history, carefully picking and choosing elements to embrace and others to reject. One observer described the Motherfuckers as "a street gang with an analysis," (Neuman 1995); Allen Ginsberg (2001) considered them pleasure advocates,

activists, and "'[p]rofessional revolutionaries' totally dedicated to social activity and community work," (p. 187-8).

LESC worked from a similar ethos. The group was a convergence of students, teachers, organizers, and newcomers who came to activism with a new, pragmatic approach, carefully picking and choosing their battles. It aspired to be an effective, playful collective of multiple affinity groups with both a strategy and an analysis. While many of the issues the group addressed had a long history of struggle on the Lower East Side—fair wages, critiques of consumerism, police accountability, etc.—the group embraced a new ethos of activism, rejecting the dourness and the culture of competing oppressions that characterized the declining old-style activism. Radical street performance, block parties, barbeques, and picnics were as much a part of the group's attitude toward community building as demonstrations. This approach offered a distinct draw. Jason Grote recalls:

> I moved to New York in 1997 and I was walking around the Lower East Side and found a flyer that LESC had put up in Blackout Books, an anarchist bookstore. And from what I heard, I was the only one who responded to the sign. It was a moving sign but the joke was, "Moving Left? Go with LESC" with a picture of a truck on it with little phone numbers that you could tear off. Supposedly, a lot of people called because they thought that it was a mover. I think it was just a convergence of things. I had wanted to get involved. I'd just moved to the city. I had gaps in my social schedule. And I was just really excited.

For long time Lower East Side activists, such as Bill DiPaulo, the group offered a distinct approch to neighborhood organizing which for many years had been overwhelmed by an intense police presence. DiPaulo explains:

> And after that [the Tompkins Square Police Riot August 6-7, 1988] it became very difficult to organize in the Lower East Side. The police were sabotaging the meetings. There was a lull of organizing coming out of that because I thought that the police were infiltrating. And I had to move out [of the neighborhood] for a little while. I felt it myself. What they would do was they would drive around

> the neighborhood and if they recognized you, they would harass you, they would let you know, 'look we know you are involved in this or that. Get out of the community.' And see if they had something on them. You couldn't really explain this to people, you couldn't explain domestic spying, because people would think you were crazy.

Yet, DiPaulo had a girlfriend who said he could move in without being on the lease.

> And so I could exist for a while and see what was going on. And thats when I discovered the Lower East Side Collective was forming. And I was like, 'how are they going to have a meeting when you can't have a meeting in the Lower East Side because every meeting is hostile whether its organized or not. People get upset. The meetings hadn't happened. For at least two years, there was no meetings because of this whole thing because of this whole thing with the park. And everybody thought somebody was getting sold out. And there was so much anger and hatred. There was no meetings going on the Lower East Side, certainly not among white people. I'm sure there were some among Hispanics or Blacks, around the gardens especially and the squats. So, it was very difficult to have a meeting. There was so much craziness.

In responce to the, "craziness" which DiPaulo describes, LESC formed a number of committees, including one specifically designed to address how activists treated each other called, "The Ministry of Love." "At that point, LESC had a number of different working groups on different issues," Grote explained. And it was an interesting combination..." LESC projects included a community and labor coalition, a police and prisons project, a public space/gardens/housing group, an environmental justice group, Reclaim the Streets, and the Ministry of Love. The Ministry of Love was born shortly after Ariane Burgess s Ariane Burgess s finished walking up to the Lower East Side from the labor rally she described earlier. "And we brought in the idea of the Ministry of Love. And that was such an important thing," Burgess recalled. Burgess s and I talked about the importance of this Ministry of Love, which did things like call new people to see how their first meeting with LESC had gone. After I received my first phone call and was welcomed at the next meeting, I was thinking this was about the most pleasant group with which I had been involved. While the structure was solid and the people were really intelligent, the meetings ran like a rambunctious sonata; it was a playful spirit in which things were getting done. Burgess continues:

> The Ministry of Love was an important part of it. We set that up because people were coming into the group continuously. LESC was really drawing a lot of people. And how to handle new people coming in and the human tendencies to get cliquish. And so it was this effort to stay open. And there was a buddy system and that came out of the Ministry of Love. And we also had the parties. If this is going to be our lives and we want the world to be different then we need to be living it, somehow in a bit toward the direction that we want. And so the Ministry of Love was a way for people to socialize outside the meeting context.

Brooke Lehman explained how this spirit of social Eros translated into the work of the project groups, hers being Reclaim the Streets: "I think there has always been an element of playfulness. Probably the most pronounced was the time I was involved with Reclaim the Streets. The best actions that I have been involved with have been ones that have been satirical." Lehman explained how this thinking fit into direct action and organizing:

> I mean, I don't think that this movement is sustainable unless people have a sense of humor. I think part of the strength of the playfulness has been to bring joy into people's experiences, but in countering the other extreme which is as alluring, but not a useful way to do mass organizing, which is to create a militant and even militaristic-seeming direct action organizing skills. I think when you are looking for energy, those are sort of the two poles that people get pulled into. And I'd much rather get pulled into the silly, creative side, even if it's regarded as cheesy and sort of less serious. I think the more serious tends to mimic what we are fighting against too much.

Lehman alludes to a point about prefigurative community organizing (Epstein, 1991), which members of LESC built on to create a thoughtful, respectful meeting culture. Elements of play were intricately connected within this. Meeting minutes were written with self-deprecating jokes and nicknames, crazy fonts, and references to parties and social gatherings as much as to political events. Grote was immediately appreciative of the humor, the pleasure of the group's meeting culture:

> Well, I think it was also a very subtle part but it was being in a room full of people who had a sense of perspective and a sense of humor about where they were at. I think there was a lot of accessible stuff that was going on and it was humor that initially brought me into LESC. There was a lot of humor at the time. Leslie had the sign, 'What Kind of Worm Would You Like to Have in Your Neighborhood—a) a warm figure, b) a real estate developer.' And of course, there are lots of reasons to have a sense of humor but at the end of the day, you attract more flies with honey than with vinegar.

Kauffman's "What Kind of Worm Do You Want in Your Neighborhood?" was designed specifically in specific reference to ACT UP's "Know Your Scumbag" sign from the Stop the Church action. "We do build on each other, you know," Ann Northrop, from ACT UP, noted when I told her about that sign.

Probably the most secretive of the LESC project groups was the Strike Team, the LESC propaganda arm, which met at Todd Muller's house. Meeting minutes from the March 22, 1999, meeting, the last before I started attending, indicate the group had been busy. "The strike team noted that someone had redecorated billboards and ads on bus shelters on Houston and Broadway with what appeared to be paint-filled eggs and a bucket of paint," the minutes reported. In addition to challenging the consumerism and homogenization taking over the neighborhood, the team was concerned about a number of international issues. "[A] previously blank billboard on Bond and Lafayette now has an anti-Iraqi war message on it." Not only was the group contributing to the culture-jamming anti-consumer ethos that was simmering throughout much of 1999, the group seemed to revel in the secretive, clandestine elements which Huizinga describes among affinity groups who play together. The minutes continued, "By the time you receive this, a group calling itself Public Works will have hung several dummies carrying shopping bags that say, 'Whose New York?' followed by a statement related to important political issues (gardens, prisons...), on scaffolding," near where the group regularly met at

Broadway and Houston. The group was ideal for a Grote, who was more interested in the arts and creative part, rather than the nuts and bolts part of organizing. Through the Strike Team, Grote was able to function as a quasi-freelance creative consultant.

Another dynamic the group built on was the sense that change was afoot. The Clinton era started to create conditions that allowed social actors to feel that social change was possible;, conditions felt mutable. So activists reconsidered their targets (Wood and Moore, 2002). Grote explains:

> It also could have been this feeling among everybody that neoliberalism was destroying the world. I didn't have the word for it but I felt in my gut that that's what was happening. And I remember Stephen (Duncombe) and Leslie (Kauffman) saying you are never going to get people marching against neoliberalism, which was so obviously disproved in Seattle. And actually people had been marching against neoliberalism in Third World countries already for years. And I think there was a sense of something happening. And also if it's important enough, you don't really worry about people's kind of dedication to the movement. I remember going to other activist meetings. I was working on the Charas campaign, and nobody was speaking on behalf of Charas and I had to sit in the room and listen for hours to people talking about how the dynamic in the room was making them feel based on their identities. It was not what you needed to get something done. There comes a certain point where you have to swallow your own ego if it's an important enough cause and say let's figure out how we are going to get this contract or this garden landmarked. I think a tangible goal is really important.

Yet part of the process was reconceptualizing the way the group would organize itself. Humor would have to be part of the process. Lehman, who left LESC to help organize the New York City Direct Action Network, explained:

> I've spent a lot of time organizing huge meetings over the past years. And when I'm picking out a facilitator, they have to have a sense of humor. You have to understand process and move the dialogue along, but if they can't get the whole room to laugh every five minutes, it's excruciating. And there are some people who are really good at keeping the mood up without having to do Sufi staring rituals. I think that is really necessary in terms of security culture and getting people to take what they are doing a little less seriously.

A number of activists, including Grote, came to LESC after years of work with groups such as WHAM! and the Lesbian Avengers, which were heavily influenced by ACT UP, and a desire to translate those skills into neighborhood organizing. LESC members consciously sought to emphasize activist work and praxis over long discussions about philosophy or ideology. Meetings were "really tightly controlled, which was necessary because there were people on the Lower East Side who could be difficult to control on a social level," Grote explained. "It's just a risk that goes into it in general. You want a certain amount of selectivity without being elitist. But at the same time you don't want people ranting about the Kennedy Assassination." In Lower East Side parlance, the group was trying to reduce the "wing-nut factor," which could weigh groups down. Yet some recoiled at the collective structure. "Self-satisfied socialists," another observer who went to one LESC meeting before getting involved with Reclaim the Streets described them.

"In LESC, there were certain rules, such as you could not talk about ideology," Grote recalled. "I think the agreement was that it was a waste of time. You could get sidetracked into a discussion with purely academic debates." The rule was designed to reduce the role of those who are more interested in debate than in direct action. The Lower East Side had a long history of such politicizing. Grote continued, "You get people who are really married to anarchism or Marxism or the lifestyle traits. And the fact is, it was immediate goals. It was a typically American way of looking at things. Theory doesn't matter, what matters is results."

DiPaolo described the focus on thought and action in the Lower East Side Collective meetings.

> I attended some of the Lower East Side Collective meetings. And sure there were wingnuts, who tried to get in. And people like Leslie Kauffman, she was so on top of them. In the beginnings of the meetings, you were almost so scared to speak that you were almost thinking in your head, what you were going to say. I

> knew that they, the people in the meetingss, knew about some of this wingnut factor. And they knew about how people were just going to make statements in the meetings. And so they structured the meetings in a certain fashion that this could not happen at all. And it was just amazing to see this structure. Now, I felt that I wasn't as college, even though I graduated from college, I was very much an organizer dealing with a lot of poor people. And there was a lot of people very well educated at these meetings. And I kindov, even though I was there helping, I was there to learn what they were doing. I guess people like Leslie Kauffman were very intimidating to me at the time. And (laughs) still are actually. The idea that you better have your idea together before you start.

Every three weeks, the LESC project groups would meet to present their work in five minutes or less. As a result LESC—and by extension Lower East Side activism in general—was infused with an immediacy that focused attention on projects, not personalities. Ideas, tactics, strategies, and themes intermingled at each meeting, forcing activists to grapple with how their issues overlapped and how they could share resources. Along the road, the group was able to articulate what protest and community building were for as much as what they were against: green space, affordable housing, a dynamic mix of cultures, living wages, and public space.

A Revitalization of Activism

While it is certainly possible to suggest that displacement has robbed the Lower East Side of its character and that all that was unique about the neighborhood is lost, globalization has also spawned a revitalized mode of activist engagement. The second of the narratives below details the struggles of activists to make sense of this process, despite the many wrenching losses. Globalization, like modernity itself, is pregnant with contradictions and new approaches to activism. As some activists have been priced out of the physical area of the Lower East Side, the culturally engaged activist community has created the notion of a "Greater Lower East Side" that stretches from Chinatown to Brooklyn, Queens, Jersey City, and anywhere activists can take trains to make community meetings.

Sites (2003) theorizes that "cities no longer produce successful movements because, in today's globalized 'space of flows,' places no longer serve as a basis for social power" (p. 101). Here, the author fails to acknowledge the expanding and complex

literature on Lower East Side activism, which addresses the challenges of globalization head-on while advancing models of successful campaigns that make use of culture and unique coalitions to create wins in areas ranging from green space to labor rights for immigrant workers (Bogad, 2003; Ness, 2002). Indeed, what has emerged in the past decade is a Lower East Side activism that has successfully linked its demands with those of the global justice movement (Duncombe, 2002; Kauffman, 2004; Thompson and Sholette, 2004). While Sites suggests that "the community mobilization in the Lower East Side represents an unsurprising failure" (p. 101), others would counter that the community organizing propelled by the Coalition for a District Alternative, the Margarita Lopez Campaign, LESC, the Community Labor Coalition, and harm-reduction programs spawned by ACT UP—which substantially decreased the rate of HIV infection among injection drug users—represent real victories. In recent years, the literature on the theoretical, aesthetic, and practical contributions of urban activism—much of it propelled by New York activists—has only increased increased (see Bordowitz, 2004; Crimp, 2002; Notes From Nowhere, 2003; Prohosch and Raymond, 2002; Solnit, 2004; Thompson and Sholette, 2004). As the narratives that follow suggest, this literature presents best-practice case studies on fighting neoliberal social and economic policies manifest on the local level.

The notion of being able to imagine a better world and then strive to create it has been a cornerstone of this organizing approach. Ron Hayduk, a member of LESC from the beginning, explains:

> The interconnections of the inside-outside strategy is where the action is at. If you want the Utopian ends, you gotta find the means that work and that's the inside-outside. You gotta start here, where the people are at. That's where the play comes in.... It's where you can engage people. You got 'em in... You gotta be willing to see where they are at. It's an experience of learning how to play. Part of the fun is the dance. You aren't going to go anywhere unless you try to imagine it.... You gotta have a positive vision of a utopian future so we can try to create it.

Of course, there are downsides and limits to such thinking (see Stites 1989). Yet it gets to the core question of play, process, and community building. When asked which she was trying to do, create community or win external changes, Lehman explained:

> I think it's both. I think that ideally, we'd be working to create both challenges to the state within state power and outside of it by creating alternatives. And this is an ideal vision of going after power from the outside and the inside. And do it with some sort of logic to it, which is not something I think we have been doing. I think there is value in having progressives in government and there is value in having people doing street pageantry. What I'm most against is people throwing things out with the bath water constantly. When they find out something wasn't the be-all and end-all, they want to throw out whatever they have been involved in or the little others have been involved in. I'm looking for the ways for those different strategies to work together as long as they not in opposition—which is calling each other out and disrespecting each other. I think there is room for lots of different styles.

Hayduk, on the other hand, suggests that a little utopian thinking still has a useful place in community organizing and creating wins:

> If the Civil Rights folks had listened to those who said, 'You can't overthrow Jim Crow,' history would be far different. Same thing with Apartheid. If they didn't imagine another world, they would have given up to the naysayers.... If they hadn't imagined a positive alternative vision and believed it and worked for it and made trouble for it, the world would be a different place. It's the bridging of the inside/outside strategy. If you hadn't heard of Ella Baker you wouldn't have heard of MLK. All those local activists made it happen, bridging the local to the global. Janet Abu-Lughod said globalization is the big problem and the Lower East Side is lost and we're defeated. LESC started from a perspective that globalization exists. And low and behold, they won some things—the gardens, the community labor coalition, the squats—despite the naysayers. If people had believed the naysayers—Sites (2003) and Abu-Lughod (1994)—you couldn't have had those wins.

Moving forward, it is useful to consider some of the issues LESC members "made trouble for," won, and lost.

"Charas, Other Public Lands Auctioned by NYC"

This was the subject head for the email from gardens@cybergal.com (aka L.A. Kauffman) via the NY Transfer News Collective on July 23, 1998. The email was authored by one of the members of the LESC public space group working to defend public spaces in New York. The group was particularly concerned about the *El Diario* news story from July 21, "City sells 'CHARAS/El Bohio' Cultural Center." Charas was a

central part of the East Village of Manhattan, which stretches north from East Houston Street and eastward from Broadway toward 14th Street. Since the late 1970s, this area has also been referred to as "Alphabet City," due to its lettered avenues (Mele 2000, xi-ii). One description of the neighborhood always seems to remain constant: the East Village has become a model case of urban gentrification. Charas/El Bohio was a former public school building that functioned as a community center on 9th Street between Avenues B and C. Between its founding in 1979 and its takeover by the city of New York in January 2002, Charas offered affordable classes, studio space, tutoring services, after-school activities, a recycle-a-bike program, and meeting space for community groups (Charas, undated)

Charas's origins can be found in the squatter movement of the 1970s and 1980s. Charas/El Bohio began when directors Armando Perez and Chino Garcia moved their group, Charas, into the then-abandoned school building in 1979. At the time, the building was in disrepair and functioning as a "shooting gallery" for heroin users. Charas rechristened the building "El Bohio" (the hut) and renovated the building with sweat equity. By 1982, their efforts were so successful that Community Board 3 recommended Charas be given a lease on the property. The New York Department of City Planning, the City Planning Commission, and the City Council all upheld this request. But in 1998, the building was sold to real estate developer Greg Singer for $1.71 million (Moynihan, 1999).

"Dear Garden Defenders," the email from the Cybergal, from July 23, 1998, began:

> With the City land auction behind us...
>
> We do not yet know who bought the building that houses CHARAS/El Bohio Community and Cultural Center; whoever it was has very deep pockets, for they paid $3.15 million for the space. Needless to say, as soon as we do find out who the culprit is, I'll be sending you their phone and fax numbers so that you all can do what you do so well.
>
> The directors and supporters of CHARAS have vowed not to give up: They are pursuing a lawsuit to block the sale, and some in the community are already talking openly about a grassroots occupation of the building.

> At least three of the Lower East Side parcels were purchased by garden-friendly bidders—the auctioned portion of the Sam & Sadie Koenig Andencksgarten on East 7th Street; the lot at 251 E. 7th St; and the "Villa Vitin" garden on East 5th near Avenue D. The purchasers all intend to keep this land as open space, though it is not yet clear whether it will be PUBLIC open space...
>
> The Giuliani Administration did succeed in selling off CHARAS and some 250 other pieces of public land—but only with enormous difficulty, and at a high public relations cost. ALL the coverage of the auction and accompanying protests was sympathetic to our side. The TV coverage was especially good, with NY1 and Channel 11 as stand-outs, casting the issue as community use versus luxury development and presenting our call for a moratorium on the sale of public land pending the development of a democratic plan for open space, low-income housing, and cultural facilities.

Cybergal noted that as always, part of the neighborhood struggle was to help push the counterpublic message into the public sphere of citywide political debate.

Once LESC members found out the name and fax information for the developer, "the culprit," they began a working group devoted entirely to what would amount to an eight-year campaign against developer Greg Singer and those who sought to support the sale. Charas supporters sent faxes, placed personal calls to prospective buyers, heckled those who came to look at the space, tied the space up in a four-year legal battle, and borrowed from a wide range of historic tactics and pranks to make life untenable for those who considered renting or renovating the space. Lehman recalls the group's use of some of zaplike swarming techniques that Vito Russo and other post-GAA gay-liberation activists used to intervene in the filming of *Cruising* back in the summer of 1979 (see Marcus, 1992). Here, she explains, LESC targeted the filming of a production by soon-to-be Charas supporters:

> In response to the Charas auction when they came out against the actors union, the filmmakers union, and they were just throwing glitter. In the East Village there was a movie shoot. They were throwing glitter balls. And it would

> completely dismantle anything they were doing cause the glitter deflects off all their lighting. And they basically did that until the theater union came out in support of Charas. They did that because so many of the actors have gotten their start in community theater supported by Charas. I thought it was a really good successful action.

Gardens, Crickets, and a Different Approach

"There was another group that was involved, which was the Lower East Side Collective, which played a really crucial role in it," Lower East Side squatter Michael Shenker explained. "And they were very, very effective." He went on to describe Kauffman and the Mighty Email Army she was cultivating: "And one of the architects of that group kind of brought in what you are describing, which is a joyous aspect. But there wasn't a lot of that in the gardens." Shenker recalled one of the most notorious of the first garden direct actions, which combined playful opposition with a tangible target. "Its first manifestations were with the crickets and Charas," Shenker explained.

The cricket action Shenker is referring to took place July 20, the same day Charas was sold. In a monumental statement that they were not going to sit by and watch the corners and edges, bits and pieces of their neighborhood auctioned off, LESC borrowed a page from ACT UP's book. An ACT UP veteran and Church Lady, Steve Quester, explained why he admired what the garden activists were doing during this period:

> Well, first of all because they plant gardens. But also because all these carrots and snap peas got arrested blocking the streets. And as you just pointed out, tomatoes lobbied Elliot Spitzer. There were a couple of tens of thousands of crickets released in some hearings…. Of course we need carrots getting arrested blocking traffic. How else is change going to happen?

How else is social change ever going to happen but with the use of creative direct action?

Tim Becker, one of the volunteers for the cricket action, recalls:

> Yeah, with the crickets. I met that guy who writes plays—Jason Grote—I had never met him before. They were having some meetings at Charas and talking nonstop. And Leslie Kauffman was there and David Crane. So those meetings were going on and then Leslie pulled me into this back room and whispers. 'We're planning something with crickets. Do you want to be part of it? I said yeah, so she invited me. I went to a couple of planning meetings.

Grote describes the theme and context for the action:

> A bunch of gardens had been auctioned out before and it caught everybody off guard. Nobody was expecting it. But the next time around people were like, we have to prevent this somehow and bring attention to it. I think nobody really knew about this. And I think urban environmentalism and environmental racism were ideas people were talking about. So there was this idea of creating a media stunt at an auction. I think they were going to do it at One Police Plaza so there would be little bit of intimidation and this idea that anybody who decided to disrupt this auction would be punished extra in the heart of the beast. One of the people in this organization had this idea of doing this crazy stunt that would get media attention, would be somehow newsworthy. The idea was that we would release 10,000 crickets—which would wreak havoc during this auction.

Yet the point of the actions was to shift storylines. Rudy Giuliani sought to advance his "rotten apple" thesis from a cover story in a national newsmagazine that suggested New York was a city in decline before he entered office. This storyline positioned the mayor as the city's advocate for regeneration from decay (Beauregard, 2002). Thus, hyperdevelopment was the best antidote. Those who opposed it were "dangerous anarchists," "reds," "jerks, idiots, morons," as the mayor was prone to describe them in press conferences and on his radio show (Kifner, 1999; Lederman, 2001). As the SexPanic! chapter outlined, as far as the mayor was concerned, either you were for the redevelopment program or you were for decay. Garden advocates, on the other hand, sought to advance a different story line, based on the idea that neighborhoods have consciences. Healthy neighborhoods need homes, gardens, and public spaces. Part of the effort was to demonstrate that garden supporters had neighborhood interests in mind when they did what they did. They were not violent nihilists. As Grote explains:

> The idea was in keeping with Jiminy Cricket, who was Pinocchio's conscience. This would be the conscience of the city. And the idea was that it would be an act that was funny and bizarre and really disruptive but also not necessarily harmful, but like an act of sabotage that wouldn't really leave any lasting damage. And we also wanted something that was sort of silly. The part of it—also the narrative that was happening even before September 11—was that people who do civil disobedience are dangerous. We were going to do something silly just to say obviously we're not violent. And if I think back even the judge thought it was funny.

As Steve Quester implies above, there was also a theatrical point to the silliness of the presentation style of the garden advocates (Goffman 1959). Here the gardeners made use of one part humor, one part radical ridicule (see Bogad, 2005b). "It was pervaded with silliness so that its ridicule would break down the idea if authority was being deadly serious, you could kind of paint a smile on it. It's more complex than many think," Grote explains. Here ridicule and disruption become the primary tools for opponents with little else with which to compete with the Greg Singers of the world, who earn money from real estate and make donations to politicians, such as Giuliani, who in turn auction off city-owned land to them without competitive bidding, as was the case with the Charas sale taking place the day of the cricket action. "There is no way to really win under those circumstances, so ridicule becomes like the only take," Grote explains. "One thing about power is, they do not know how to be funny. You look at Rush Limbaugh and Fox news, it's totally lame. You don't even have to be political to think that. It's funny," Grote continued. And lots of people agreed. Al Franken's (1996) book *Rush Limbaugh Is a Big Fat Idiot,* ridiculing Limbaugh, had been a national bestseller just a couple of years earlier.

The cricket action built on the new activist repertoires made available with the Internet. Grote explains:

> This is kind of in the early days of the Internet, when you felt like you could order anything, not early early, but when everyone was first starting to get it. You could pretty much order anything from a pet supplier. We ordered 10,000 crickets. They were kept in storage. And a few people kind of feel bad for the crickets and I can understand that, cause they were not kept under the greatest conditions. So the person who was organizing this tried it out early, she made an envelope with air holes and swept it through the metal detector early and she tried to take one through security and it worked. So, then we all went in. And the idea was we were going to go incognito.

Becker remembers the sight of all his scruffy Lower East Side buddies dressed to play the part of developers and intervene at the auction:

> Then the morning of the auction, everyone I knew from the Lower East Side was out waiting to get into the auction. And it was the only time that I have ever seen Seth Tobocman in a suit, before, after or since. And it was obviously a borrowed suit because the pants legs were at least 40 percent too short. And he had stolen the tie. (Starts laughing.) It was some polyester number that he had gotten from somebody and it looked really bad. And I said to myself, the police are going to watch the TV in the back and they are going to know that something is going on. This guy is not a developer. It doesn't say money to me. If you call this guy money, it doesn't work. (Laughs.) Seth in a cheap suit. And then the women I knew, well. When you go midtown people have the corporate look. The clothes say, I can hang with the rest of them. Well, the neighborhood girls were this mismatched, half power, half mismatched. (Laughs again.) I don't know who we were fooling but it was early enough that the police were not on their toes. It was just like a little fly, a gnat buzzing around. It looked more like the people who showed up for the free teas rather than the people who show up for the free tea. But the police let us in to the police auction. Ten people have crickets in brief cases. The people who put together the idea of the crickets somehow knew that crickets are like a skeleton. They don't show up under x-ray. You can get them in. You just walk in. There are people who do a lot more of the planning than me. I just show up. But they had it already planned out. And the idea around it was Jiminy Cricket. He had a saying. I have no idea what it was? (Laughs again.) As far as that demo went, I wasn't in on the talking points. Ok, Jiminy Cricket was the symbol for something (Pinocchio's conscience).

Like the Strike Team's Todd Muller, Tim Becker's self-deprecating humor made working with him a great deal of fun. As we were talking Becker conceded, "Well, how bad do we want it? We're like in the belly of the beast—right at Police Plaza." Thus, the

police could just take those arrested straight downstairs without them even seeing the light of day. You don't even have to leave the building.

Grote, who confesses he was "completely terrified," had similar forebodings when he arrived and he kept his eyes on the exits during the entire period of the action, but especially as he was arriving that morning:

> We got together at someone's apartment at like six in the morning. And we were going to go down together. It was terrifying. We were all really scared. Yeah, I made it there like only an hour late. I did make it there before everyone left. We were in this auction hall and I was in the bathroom when someone else took this spot. And I ended up with like the worst spot. I wanted the one with a view of the escape route. So the plan was we were going to sneak in, in suits, and go incognito. But of course, nobody else was dressed in business clothes. There were a lot of people that wanted to buy real estate that were from like Russia or Korea that were wearing t-shirts and jeans and polo shirts. And so we were kind of out of place. And no real real estate developers go to these little tiny auctions. We went in and weren't totally sticking out.

Thus, dressed as real estate developers who had been shopping at the Salvation Army and Sears, Becker recalls the garden defenders, "fanned out throughout the audience" and the auction began:

> [I]t went on for a while and then there was a symbol when we were actually going to unleash them. And all during that time, there were two ideas that were going on: release the crickets and have false bidding. You had like Michael and Seth and they had their action. They didn't do the cricket action. They were doing false bidding. So you had developers bidding like a million two. And you had Seth going a million four. And (laughs) Michael going a million six. And developers coming in at a million eight. And Seth going "Two Million!" And it went into the stratosphere. Even the real developers were looking around like, 'What's going on here?' We're talking about little patches in the Lower East Side. Maybe five hundred thousand? But not two million. And so that got out of control really fast. The guy with the gavel was just beating on it and couldn't figure out what was going on. And so at some point they made a ruling that said that you had to show that you were good for part of the check. You couldn't just start bidding. It was all very civil back then. But all the guys were outbidded.

While the Situationists and cultural jammers are quick to praise the disruption of the mechanisms of everyday life (de Certeau 1984; Thompson and Sholette 2004; Vaneigem 1967/2003), the process can often be excruciating for those involved, especially before the action takes place. Cindra Feuer, who worked with SexPanic! and later with ACT UP to disrupt the Republican National Convention (RNC), describes the anxiety followed by release which is part of what Huizinga describes as play. "I don't really think of it as fun. For example, the RNC naked action, that was really nerve wracking. It's horribly nerve wracking. It's not fun. It's fun when it's over and you can say, 'Wow, that was great.'"

Grote, a sensitive soul, was not of the ACT UP "I do not care if I upset you" ilk:

> And so I'm sitting there and I'm waiting. We had one lot that after it was auctioned, it was a garden, that was when we would unleash the crickets. And I'm looking around scouring the area and I'm looking at the escape routes. The young women who was sitting next to me was dressed really artsy. And she was Latina so in my head I'm thinking she is probably on our side. She is probably a garden person or a Charas person. But of course what I didn't realize was regardless of her politics, I was about to dump a thousand bugs right under her feet and she was going to have a visceral reaction. I should have leaned over and clued her in but I didn't. Somebody screamed to call attention to it. That was our cue and I started dumping them. Later when I talked to her, she told me she screamed herself cause she had done it and no one had noticed so she called attention to it. That was our cue. I was one of ten people then trying to dump this bag of crickets out. I don't know how they counted them. Then there were a certain number of crickets that were left that we released into nature as a sort of penance for this. Maybe they were supposed to be reptile food. But it was sort of like one of those old dishwasher commercials where you drop the dishwasher into this little bowl of dishwater and all the oil kind of evacuates to the side away from the soap. That's sort of how it was with me. The arty woman next to me saw the bugs, screamed immediately, jumped on the chair, and then immediately there was like three feet between me and everyone else.

And so the action started. Becker recalls:

> And then at one point, the crickets were released and there was just pandemonium. It was just like a Sunday-morning cartoon. People were jumping up on chairs. You know, we're talking about crickets here as if it was a subway

> rat or something. But it was just crickets. But everyone was up on chairs and pandemonium was ensuing. People were yelling and the guy was beating on the gavel. Yeah, I had a thousand. Well, the woman next to me said 'Ooooo!!!!'

Both Becker and Grote eyed the exits and tried to get out. Grote, ever aware of the possibilities of leaving a trail, tried to do away with fingerprints. He explains:

> And so instead of just leaving immediately, I was worrying about fingerprinting or something and I was trying to stuff the envelope back into my bag. And then I'm pushing my way through the crowd and one guy; you are always going to find one guy who is enthusiastic about siding with authority, said, 'him, him, him.' And then I ran and all of a sudden I was eye level with this big barrel chest with a badge hanging off of it. And I just immediately just put out my arms like you got me. There was nothing I could do. And they caught like one other person.

Becker remembers:

> And we were all supposed to head for the exit and get the hell out of there. Well, it was just crazy and everyone was just rushing to the exit and trying to get the hell out. I got all the way to the X-ray machine. I mean I could see the promised land—the pavement. I could see it, and all of a sudden this arm came and grabbed my arm. And I was sitting there in a suit with a really old briefcase. And that's when I met Jason. But there was screaming and screaming. And I remember Margarita Lopez came up to me and said, 'What did you do?' I said, I released some crickets. And she looked at me like I was out of my mind.
>
> Both Becker and Grote were sent downstairs. Grote remembers:
>
> I ended up spending the night in jail. They put us through the system, which now is pretty routine. At that time it was like a special punishment. I made friends that night. I met a lot of people for the first time. I felt I was in good hands. Ron Kuby's office was representing us.

I asked Becker about the crickets. I had heard some activists who said they felt guilty about what happened to the crickets. He recalls:

> I don't know what happened to them. I was trying to get out of there. And when I got arrested I got put in a closet briefly with Jason, briefly. I don't have any idea. We were put in a small room in the cleaning closet. And crickets were coming out of Jason's pocket. I felt like I was getting arrested with one of the Three Stooges here. (Laughs.) He has things coming out of his pocket. How can I plead innocent now? It was like we were useless crooks; they were crawling out of his cuffs and his pants legs.

Before being moved to the Tombs, New York's central booking area where Becker and Grote spent the night, the two were locked in a cell at One Police Plaza. "They just had a cell," Becker explains. "They didn't use them any more. They were from the old days. Then they took us over to the Tombs. Then I had plenty of time." Becker continues:

> Well, you have to explain why you've been arrested to working-class people. I got it down, I'd saying, 'Well, we got arrested for trying to save some neighborhood gardens.' I didn't say anything about the crickets. It didn't really translate. They were timed. Didn't get much sleep. The lights were on. The floor was hard. I wasn't into it. It's fun telling the story now. But at the time, I'd rather have been at home in my bed.

Grote experienced a few uncomfortable moments there with the general population. He recalls:

> And of course it was a night full of encountering just all sorts of characters. It was a really interesting time cause it was not the adversarial relationship between cops and activists. Previously, New York City had a pretty good reputation for cordiality. I mean there was the Tompkins Square Riot, but back in the early 1980s they had the big antinuclear marches and the cops were kind of a model of cooperation with that. But now obviously that was different. But a lot of what happened was we were going through the system, even though we sat in the holding cell forever. There was this weird fingerprint machine and nobody could figure out how to work it. And I suspect a lot of the arresting officers were trying to milk it for overtime. I don't know. But we were just there forever. And finally at the end, we found out we were going to Tombs for the rest of the night. And so we wound up going in there. We kind of all got split up from each other. And I was with another guy who had gotten arrested with me. And we got the big talk. A guy, a cop, was like 'I really support what you are doing but be warned that there is a lot of really tough types that you are going to be in the holding cell with.' Which I think was kind of a scare tactic. But then we got in there and it wasn't rough types at all. It was a bunch of young black and Latino guys who had gotten busted for smoking pot on park benches and quality-of-life stuff. And so there was a little bit of posturing but it wasn't Rikers Island...
>
> As with every jail experience, storytelling was the primary way of passing the time.

LESC members met Grote and Becker when they got out. And Grote recalls the release dimension of the play experience that Huizina describes taking place:

> But then the next day we got out. We were kind of greeted by people. I felt a little like we'd accomplished something. I called up a couple of LESC people, Vicki and Rachel. I couldn't get into my apartment. All my personal possessions were locked up as evidence. I had cash on me and they cut me a check for that. I was walking around, my shoes were flopping, I had no belt, I had no keys. And I called them up and said, 'Can I stay with you guys?' They were very sympathetic. It was kind of a great bonding experience. It was kind of an example of the traumatic experience as play.

As Becker and Grote spent the night in jail, the city's newspapers were writing sympathetic descriptions of the action. "As the crickets hopped about, hundreds of onlookers scrambled to avoid the swarms," the report by Cauvin of the *Daily News* began. Most of the LESC storyline found its way into the press reports. "We're hoping he gets the idea and his nose stops growing," the *Daily News* reported Wendy Madison, a supporter, saying of Mayor Giuliani. "She was referring to Jiminy Cricket, which acted as the conscience of Pinocchio in the famous children's story," Cauvin continued. "Ten people left a larger group protesting outside Police Headquarters ... carried the insects in manila envelopes with mesh air holes... The arrested activists were Timothy Becker, 39; Dennis Griggs, 52; Francine Luck, 55; Clayton Patterson, 49, and Jason Spiegel." (Grote later changed his name from Spiegel to Grote.) "Auction Disrupted, but Charas Is Sold," Anderson (1998) of *The Villager* reported. "Cricket Invaders Turn an Auction into 'Madness,'" Waldman (1998) wrote for *The New York Times*. "Activists Bugged by City Land Auction," was the headline for Cauvin's report (1998). *El Diario* put the action on its cover (1998), while *Newsday* and others reported the cricket action and the Charas auction simultaneously (Associated Press, 1998; Vega, 1998). Yet the activist message

was clear: this was not about the Giuliani rotten-apple narrative; the reports clearly advanced the story that the community was losing something precious. “Community group: 0, Real estate interests: 1,” announced an *El Diario* editorial from July 23.

The Cybergalnoted that the garden public-space struggle was taking the shape of a burgeoning social movement:

> Most encouraging of all, this movement is clearly growing in both size and strength. Five months ago, the City land auctions weren’t even an issue; public awareness has increased enormously in a short time, and more and more people are coming forward to fight not just for community gardens but for democratic control over public land. (The Email Army, for instance, has now grown to nearly 250 hard-fighting members.)
>
> Remember, too, that 18 Lower East Side gardens have now been saved as public community space. This is as many gardens in one neighborhood as have been saved in the rest of the entire city—a testament to the enduring political fact that action gets results.
>
> We’re going to have to fight another auction in three months’ time, and we’re going to have to keep pushing if we want any more gardens saved. But for the moment, take heart in what this movement has accomplished so far—and go spend some time in the gardens!

Reclaiming the Commons

While play was a central part of the LESC struggle to save the gardens, others, such as Ariane Burgess , wanted more of it. She explains:

> For me even Lower East Side Collective wasn’t playful enough for me. I was kind of looking for something. Reclaim the Streets (NY) was kind of an offshoot of the Reclaim the Streets that grew up in Southern England. And that had to do with motorways that were being built on land that was pristine forests. So these huge rave parties would happen. A few people here were inspired to try to create an aspect of that here. It was a beautiful idea.

Before moving forward with a description of the New York Reclaim the Streets Group (RTS), it is useful to take some time considering the genesis of the original Reclaim the Streets group. Faced with an assault on public spaces that resembled the struggle taking

place in New York, the group sought to break down the lines between art and life and introduce "creativity, imagination, play and pleasure" into the activism, writes John Jordan (1998).

The English RTS was famous for its deployment of a playful, even whimsical pose. Sometimes it dealt with specific issues, but at others it sounded more like the liner notes for a psychedelic music collection; few activist groups take the time to write about the possibilities of "an explanation" for our "collective daydream." While the literature more resembled poetry than political propaganda, this was part of their aim; it was part of "the ideology of the playful revolution that informs much of RTS elsewhere" (Smithsimon, 1999). I spoke with Jordan about his experience with Reclaim the Streets. I asked him how he got started with activism. He replied:

> Beyond the state of emergency of the crisis, beyond realizing that... it was really via the arts, and really through the trajectory of what would be called socially engaged arts practice—through people like Joseph Beuys, and Gran Fury, and the majority of it began in the art world. And I got a foot in the activist world, feminism, ecology. And I had a notion of social sculpture and/or the expanded context of art, which was really an amalgam of ideas of Marxism, anarchism, Rudolf Steiner, believing everyone had the potential to be artists, the artist's work was to bring out everyone's potential to transform the society. And that was the work of social sculpture—they planted 7,000 trees. It was through stuff like that I become political actually. Before that I was influenced by shamanistic practice, spirituality, and ritual. Some of it was kind of New Age stuff but I never covered myself in crystal. (Laughs.)

From there, Jordan worked with a group called Platform for ten years. "We did projects and actions throughout London, all of it works on how to actually build a democratic, sustainable city." That was in the late 1980s.

Jordan's background was more in the arts than in community organizing or practice. "I came to direct action very late," he says. "My background was very much

performance art, or what is essentially called live art here." As with the ACT UP members who became involved with the garden movement in New York, Jordan became increasingly radicalized as his involvement in ecology increased. Between reading about Earth First! on the West Coast of the United States and witnessing privatization of public services and spaces at home, Jordan was stumbling onto the conditions that would ferment in social movement action. "I sent a postcard to the Earth First! address. And I never got a reply. This was pre-Internet. Then it took another two or three years. And I got involved in the anti-roads movement," Jordan paused. "That was the beginning of my involvement with direct action."

The Anti-Roads Movement

Jordan was able to witness a social movement that created art out of everyday experience, out of direct action, which was in turn inspired by the thinking of Dada, the Surrealists, and the Situationists. Jordan read them all. "And thinking about ways to make the art invisible. Of course, the joy of getting involved in the direct action was seeing the extreme creativity, especially in the M11 campaign, and that's when I got involved with RTS."

The M11 Campaign The campaign that galvanized the anti-roads movement in England was M11. Very much like the garden struggle in New York City, the M11 Campaign involved the destruction of a piece of public space. Jordan explains:

> There had been a plan to build this road that began in the early 1900s. There had been the Twyford campaign, very rural campaign, but it really brought a lot of publicity. And from that came an urban campaign, the M11. The road was going to wipe out entire neighborhoods and houses, for six minutes. It was going to speed up traffic by like six minutes, but actually the road was designed so long

> ago that actually by the time it was built, all the predictions about traffic were wrong anyway. This had generated a local community campaign for years. It was a quite traditional campaign. Yet others started to come up and it became this extraordinarily creative campaign. To me the question was always how to have space to connect the transformation of politics and the poetics and imaginary space of the arts. And then I went to this space and it was like, oh my god, this was happening. None of these people were calling themselves artists.
>
> And for me, it was an absolute moment made of up stories and beautiful acts. The whole campaign began with an absolutely beautiful act. There was a tree on the common, and it was a 350-year-old chestnut tree. And we were told it wasn't going to be knocked down. And of course, as it turns out it was going to be knocked down. And the parks department boarded it up. One day we decided to have a tree-enclosing ceremony. And we opened up the space. And all these kids were went down and pulled the boards off and reoccupied the tree. And they actually built a tree house. This was a first here. And of course this had been happening on the West Coast of America with Earth First! but it had never happened here. And the papers wrote about the tree house. And lots of people wrote letters. When the postman arrived with letters, they had marked the address to the 'tree house.' And the postman [treated] 'tree house' as an official address. And lawyers on hand realized that once the place had a letter box and an address, then it become an official dwelling place and could therefore be categorized as a squat. Then the whole process of evicting it would have to go through court. So there was a beautiful combination of collective creativity, with group creativity, with people writing letters, lawyer creativity. We then created this model of tree house that grew throughout several years. I really got involved as we got into the way of machinery; people got into the way of the cranes. For me it was actually very performative. For months and months and months, the arts and crafts and performances really held off the construction of the road. And it cost them hundreds and hundred of thousands of more pounds then they would have spent before the tree was actually bulldozed.

Claremont Road

The following campaign for the group involved a struggle against the encroachment of the state into 45 houses, from which a whole neighborhood had been evicted. In *All That Is Solid Melts into Air*, Marshall Berman (1982) writes about watching his entire neighborhood in the Bronx being razed. The chapter that is not included in this monumental story is what might have happened if the neighborhood members had imagined ways to stay, imagined ways to defy the bulldozers. Yet this is what the citizens of Claremont Road did when they squatted 45 houses there. Jordan

(1998) first wrote about the necessity of the imagination, the imperative to play with creating different realities, which blurred the line between art and urban possibilities. Jordan recalls:

> They claimed use of 45 houses to build this road. They sent people letters saying you have to sell your house. Most all of the houses were empty except one by a lady who had lived there all her life. She was actually an actress and she said, 'I am not leaving. I have never lived anywhere else. Fuck it. I'm not leaving.' It was pretty much her and several hundred activists living in the street. In blocking off the road to traffic, they transformed it into this extraordinary zone of play and creativity... It was just an extraordinary laboratory of techniques of resistance—from lockdowns, to tunnels in the country. Basically, there were several tunnels. There was a tunnel that went under people's houses and another that actually went through the side walls of people's houses without going out onto the street. They also broke down the kind of isolation of the individual living unit.

Lesley J. Wood, a Canadian activist who for many years was part of New York City's Direct Action Network, witnessed the Claremont Road blockade.

> I went to England in 1993-94. And it was right before Reclaim the Streets. But it was around the Criminal Justice Bill. And so it was a great time to be there. The Criminal Justice Bill was a bill that prohibited any protest that disrupted economic activity. Number two, it prohibited any gathering of people on public property that would involved listening to music with repetitive beats. It was the anti-raver bill. It was against ravers in general. What it did was, it brought together ravers and club kids with political activists. They were both against the same bill. There was a road blockade in the far East End of London. A whole row of houses had been taken over in order to protest this new highway going through a poor area. And some of the original residents stayed in their homes on Claremont Road. It was a place which was friggin' magical. They had nets strung over the trees and across the houses. And there'd be people climbing over your heads all the time. And things like music, raves on weekends, and jam sessions.
>
> I don't want to always say temporary autonomous zone, but it felt like a temporary autonomous zone for about a year. And it was there that a lot of seeds that became RTS were really formed. At the same time Critical Mass had arrived in the UK. And so there was an increase in thinking, like gee, protest can be a lot more fun.
>
> And right at the end of my time there I was involved with Anarchy in the UK, which was this anarchist gathering that brought like 7,000 people around. It was just a massive, massive anarchist gathering. It gave a lot of momentum to this political moment that was happening.

RTS NYC

This notion of bringing art into a struggle for public space was not new. But with this spirit, "reclaiming of the commons" was spreading (Klein, 2003, p. 220-222). The work, the cultural resistance of London's RTS group inspired the formation of New York's group (Duncombe, 2002; 2002a). Much of this reclaiming has involved theatrical, dynamic modes of engagement (Hudema, 2004). As public spaces are cordoned off and displaced by market demands, Klein was witnessing "a spirit of resistance…taking hold…" Yet instead of waiting for anticapitalist revolution, citizens, "are acting right now, where they live, where they study, where they work, where they farm" (Klein, 2003, p. 220-222).

Much of this new resistance involved a recognition of the political possibilities of play and pleasure. The ethos of an unrepentant, unapologetic pursuit of pleasure and justice is reminiscent of the life of and career of American anarchist Emma Goldman. Much of Goldman's philosophy was based on a broad faith in personal freedom. The famous adage, "If I can't dance, it's not my revolution," was coined by Goldman after she was taken aside at a dance by a young revolutionary who told her that revolutionaries should not be seen dancing (Highleyman, 2004b). For Goldman, joy and justice intermingled, neither able to exist without the other. Skipping a generation, Goldman's adage on dance and revolution provides the underpinnings for queer theory, anarcha-feminism, and the street-party style of protest of Reclaim the Streets and the global justice "movement of movements" to recreate a far more colorful public sphere (Duncombe, 2002; Jordan, 1998). The lesson that pleasure, sex, joy, and creativity overlap influenced the formation of RTS NYC in countless ways.

The first RTS action in the United States took place on Telegraph Avenue in Berkeley, right off the People's Park, where the Free Speech Movement dovetailed with the Antiwar Movement in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The inspiration for New York's chapter of RTS was born when a young philosophy student named Louis read an article about the group and was inspired enough to invite people to come talk about the idea. A group of Lower East Side activists, scruffies, anarchists, a DJ, a few first-timers, as well as LESC's Stephen Duncombe gathered at Blackout Books on Avenue A for the first meeting (Duncombe 2002a). Todd Muller and Duncombe volunteered, posted LESC propaganda, and recruited new members at Blackout Books. Like the self-photocopied zines and manifestos clogging the collective bookshop where the group held its first meeting, New York's RTS chapter was inspired by a do-it-yourself (DiY) philosophy. "An RTS action is like a potluck dinner," Duncombe (2002a) writes. "RTS secures the space and provides the music (and post-protest legal support), but what happens at the action depends upon what people bring with them and what they do once they are there."

While the DIY ethos informed the group's practice, its motivation was built on a similar source as that which inspired SexPanic!: Giuliani's "Quality of Life" campaign. An undated RTS communiqué written during this period states, "Mayor Giuliani's Quality of Life Campaign hinges on his definition of 'quality of life.'" It continued:

> Community gardens bulldozed throughout the five boroughs; community centers auctioned off to profit-driven developers; aggressive police intrusion into peaceful assemblies; thousands of cyclists and pedestrians hit every year; parks rigged with police video cameras; rents soaring (which profits whom?); sanitized chain stores and remote corporations reshaping every neighborhood in their own image; airwaves treated as corporate products; public schools still understaffed, underfinanced, deteriorating; a near record number of public suits filed regarding the city's abuse of the Freedom of Information Act.
>
> The Mayor carries a "No Dancing" sign and hangs it wherever he goes. Corporations buy "You can dance if you pay" signs and hang them wherever they

> go. Fundamental democratic ideals are being squeezed. If there is no place to freely assemble there is no free assembly. If there is no place to freely express, there is no free expression.
>
> Reclaim the Streets is at once a unifying symbolic action and a movement to reclaim public space and reinvigorate inner-city public life. Our definition of "quality of life" does not mean conventional, homogenized, capitalized life, working 80 hours a week to pay the rent. Why must New Yorkers aspire to the least common denominator? We want real, eclectic democracy, not the brand of that's being tossed our way.
>
> We demand great feasts of public space. We demand our freedom to express. We demand our freedom to express. We demand clean air—as if the basis for democracy were not the ability to breathe! We demand places we can afford to live. We demand leadership that embraces and cultivates the vitality of diverse ethnic communities of all socio-economic means. We demand leadership that prioritizes and answers the individual, the family, and the community, not just the CEO, the police force, the front page, the next campaign.
>
> We don't have much time. As the powers that be know all too well, reversing what is already done is much more difficult than preventing things from going any further. Reclaim the Streets! Let the vibrations of our dancing feet rumble like subway trains.

"The time is ripe for reclaiming the streets," the communiqué concluded. Like the gardens struggle and SexPanic! RTS was concerned with the blandification steamroller paving over spaces; communities of difference converge with a politics of gray sameness. "The Mayor's homogenizing 'Quality of Life' campaign is fast privatizing scarce public space, squeezing the pockets of diverse communities, and stealing our freedom to express," the flyer said. "It is time to take to the streets. Get our ooom-pah-boom back." In homage to Emma Goldman, the broadside's final line reminded everyone of this anarchafeminist adage: "After all, if we can't dance, it's not a revolution."

I first heard about RTS when Katherine Walsh, the founder of Bluestockings who had worked with SexPanic! and had given us the amazing papier-mâché creepy Rudy face for Rudy's Sex Mobile, gave me a small green flyer telling me where to meet for the first action in the summer of 1998. It was during an anti-queer-violence rally in Brooklyn.

That summer and throughout the fall, the attack on communities of difference had included more and more attacks on social and sexual outsiders. All the while, Housing Works had to sue the city of New York to gain the same access to the City Hall steps the Yankees were getting every year they won the World Series (Ferrell 2001). And Matthew Shepard was killed in Wyoming for daring to publicly acknowledge his queer difference. The NYPD had, of course, tried to shut down the unsanctioned convergence of Housing Works, Fed Up Queers, and SexPanic! members, as well as thousands of rank-and-file queers who met to grieve for Shepardthat October. And riots followed (Feinberg, 2002).

Yet the month started off with the October 4 RTS action. I came with Bob Kohler, Chris Farrell, and a couple of other members of SexPanic! We had been working on organizing to save a different public space, the Christopher Street Piers, where queers and homeless youth had converged for as long as anyone could remember. And now they were being squeezed out of the space by the new hyperdevelopment of New York City. The flyer Walsh gave me instructed us to meet at the Cube sculpture at Astor Place in the East Village. Members of FUQ were there. But the scene and the people were different.

William Etundi, who had grown up in the Bay Area, where he was politicized by both antinuke and queer activism, was participating in his first action in New York City. He recalls:

> I came to New York to escape everything I'd seen before. And immediately started getting involved with whatever I could find. My first action that mattered was the first Reclaim the Streets party. It was 1998 at Astor Place. I remember being at Sixth Street having a wild time and getting a card that said, 'STREET PARTY PROTEST. It's not a revolution if I can't dance to it,' blah, blah, blah. It was just exactly the mix of party culture, fun culture, and protest culture. This sounds exactly like what I would want to be involved in. I went to the thing and it was a transformative thing, absafuckinglutely. I can really trace a lot of what I've been doing to that day. I can remember at the Astor cube, there were like 200,

> maybe 300 people, there was this spontaneous moment of running. Myself and my close friend and roommate, Gabino, at the time we didn't know anybody, right at the front. We didn't know what to expect. We were just right there, just ready to take the streets. And being there taking the streets, and being there holding the streets, the fire spitters. It was just exactly what I felt like so much of my life had pointed to, being a party person, a politically conscious person, it just made so much sense. It was fun. People wanted to come out and join us. It just defined my sense of…

Etundi and I talked about what the action felt like to each of us. I remember the feeling that I was part of a culture that I hadn't seen or known before in the streets. Every night in New York there are thousands of people out dancing in clubs closed away from the public. But I had never seen that crowd in the light of day in the streets. It was also incredibly audacious to think a group could stop the everyday flow of traffic, the commerce of capitalism, with a simple action.

Jason Grote recalled that first RTS action, the feeling at the action and the ones that followed, as some of his favorite moments in direct action and Lower East Side creative community building:

> Just out of a pure personal feeling, my favorites were the early Reclaim the Street actions back when the police didn't know how to handle it or if they should be stopping it. It seemed so harmless at first. I remember the first couple at Astor Place and on Avenue A. It almost seemed as if the cops were amused by it. But the threat wasn't. After a while they started using the terrorist or anarchist Black Bloc hysteria....
>
> But when you look at those early protests (in 1998-99). And they saw what they were seeing with their own eyes. They saw a bunch of people dancing and laughing about it. And I think it took a lot of propaganda to get them to be militarized and panicked about it. And there was this tremendous feeling. Aside from the question of the effectiveness, the interesting thing about play as a political force and these kind of micro-level revolutions is, there is something incredibly immediate about dancing on a city street with blocked-off traffic and music, and taking it back.

Etundi reflected on the underlying ethos of the action:

> Well, it was also extraordinarily simple. There's a lot of organizing that goes into those events. But I think the idea of making protest enticing and fun is the core value of what Reclaim the Streets was both locally and internationally. Making it attractive, making it interesting, making it intriguing, making it exciting, I think that was a real sea change in the way people see movement-building. I know ACT UP and some others did a lot of work before that…

There is grainy black-and-white film of the early RTS London actions. The narrator explains that he had always loved cities. But now they were dying. We were killing them. As with ACT UP, there was life vs. death in this activism, a push for a generative ethos that could support the convergence of communities of difference, the cross-pollination that created oxygen for urban gardens and communities to thrive in the concrete jungle. For ACT UP, that generativity involved a notion that sex and pleasure could overwhelm the Thanatos of the AIDS virus; for RTS and environmental public space activists, the notion was that social Eros among dancing bodies could combat Moloch, the god of materialism strangling, polluting, and overdeveloping cities.

The Loss of the Chico Mendez Mural Garden

Michael Shenker reflected on some of the early garden struggles during that fall of 1998. "We interfaced very effectively with the Lower East Side Collective, with Leslie Kauffman." While the cricket action had given the movement some momentum, it was still fighting the capital that moves New York City: real estate. That fall Kauffman designed her "What Kind of a Worm Would You Like in Your Neighborhood" poster about the developer Donald Cahokia for LESC. "[S]he was very creative and very dedicated, and [she made] fine posters too, great posters; and they really did get those posters up," Shenker reflected. But the struggle over techniques and philosophies created tensions. Nonetheless, the need for a gardens activism remained compelling. "The first

campaign was to save Chico Mendez Garden," Shenker recalled. "It was a beautiful garden. The campaign got everybody warmed up. But I liked the ones when we actually won. Chico Mendez was a great sacrifice."

The garden had been the centerpiece of Tim Becker's social life.

> I came to New York 'cause I'm an artist. I've been in the Lower East Side the whole time. There was always a huge social element in getting involved in Lower East Side craziness. I didn't have tons of friends when I got here. I'm only in New York ten years. And how I started to meet people was through the art world. But also I started going to garden meetings in Chico Mendez Garden. It was on 11th Street between A and B. And it was right on the eve of the storm clouds on the horizon that the city was going to start taking gardens. It was one of those early meetings and all these people from the Lower East Side were getting it together.

Becker describes the feeling in the space.

> I was a member of the Chico Mendez Garden before it was bulldozed in the Christmas slaughter of 1998. It was a really nice vibe in the garden. It was mostly a lot of artists. It was called Chico Mendez Mural Garden. There were murals around the edge of the garden. Jeff Wright, he was really the matradi [maitre'd?] of that garden. And he was the MC. He invited people to play and bands and stand-up comedians. He was running *Cover Magazine* at the time. He would bring everyone over. And all these bands would be coming over and they'd be taking photos for their covers there. There was food too. And so that was a hub. And another artist had done these rock gardens. It was an off-the-charts garden. It was great.

As Becker notes, storm clouds started brewing that summer and fall:

> Well, they started having some emergency meetings. They were getting word from Françoise, the little French lady who just passed who was plugged into what was happening in City Hall. They tried to put the word out to the neighborhood. Felicia Young a little bit too with Earth Celebrations.

And the movement to save the garden started gaining momentum. Members of groups such as TIME'S UP! as well as RTS started showing up. Becker explains:

> So then all of a sudden a lot of the people from the neighborhood who were not 100 percent gardeners but who were activists, they got wind that Chico Mendez Garden was the hub. So Bill DiPaulo from TIME'S UP, he showed up with this

> English dude. He showed up with these big tripods; in England they were using them in the middle of the streets. And you'd put a person on top. So he built two tripods. And then we fortified the fence with furniture and futons and stuff that was around the neighborhood. And it became this sort of organic sculpture and it got weirder and weirder and wilder and wilder. And at one point there was a rooster flag. And a chair. There was like, pictures of the Pope. Anything that people had found from the streets, they would put on the barricade from the fence. So, it became this really wild decoration, like something that you see down in the Caribbean or something. And it got thicker and thicker. Gotta keep Capoccia back. [Cappoccia was the developer who planned to develop the land at Chico Mendez.
>
> The resistance was able to keep Cappocia back for most of the fall of 1998.

Becker recalls:

> Well, I guess the siege probably lasted about two months there—all through the fall. And that's where I first met your friend Leslie [Kauffman]. She was doing Lower East Side stuff then. TIME'S UP was helping and then the Shenkeristas came in too. Michael and a guy named Rooftop Rob and of course Seth Tobocman, they all started showing up and lending their expertise. And they started teaching classes about lockdowns and nonviolent civil disobedience.
>
> Art and creativity and cultural resistance were vital tools in the movement to

defend the space. Becker, an artist himself, explains:

> Well, besides all the art stuff going on, we stepped up all of the arts evenings just to have people in the garden. There was a lot of bands playing and a lot of performance going on. And then we started meeting every weekday morning from 7 to 9 in the garden. And we would have coffee. We figured if there were going to be developers snooping around, that would be the time—at the beginning of the day. Before we all went to work and did our thing, we would come to the garden for two hours. And MaryAnn Gold showed up with cookies. And we would hang there. And then we had Rooftop Rob sleeping in the garden. And then we started a bike patrol. This was real high tech. (Laughs.) My grandmother is rolling over in her grave now. You're doing what? You're a grown man. And Hugo, he was a real lefty from Columbia, apparently he was in the Shining Path. So Hugo, he was even older than me. He was doing bike patrol too. Well, we were trying to see whether the police were staging anything. Before they demolish the neighborhood, they would get a staging area. They would set up the bulldozers; they would set up the paddy wagons; they would do all that kind of stuff.

Play was a central part of the creativity of the resistance. The structure used to blockade the bulldozers functioned like an open-ended, highly democratic art project, not unlike the Chinese Democracy Wall movement (see Dietrich, 1986, p. 247-54). And of course Becker recalls the RTS tripods, which the group had used to block traffic during the first RTS action, and children, who made most frequent use of the garden. Here the defense was in the name of a community space for those who would have little else but concrete and highly dense urban space if the garden were destroyed. Becker continues:

> It was a lot of fun building the tripods. That was really fun cause I remember someone saying this was like a bunch of kids playing in a garden. Kids were climbing up and down like they were on a jungle gym...
>
> And there were also parades around the neighborhood to let the neighborhood know what was going on. And there were three boys who lived next to the garden, three Latino guys, young, like eight, six and four. And they hung out in the garden all the time. And a few politicians even came to speak at the garden, including one who won by like 120 votes with our support...
>
> And the wall grew and all that went on until Christmas week. Capoccia shows up in some crappy green suit and that was the end. He got the jump on that.

Unlike other garden-defense actions that would follow, only a few garden activists were there the day Capoccia's bulldozers arrived. Most of the supporters were out of town. "And we all watched them bulldoze it," Becker recalls. It was a hard moment for everyone involved to watch the place where they had been for coffee every morning before work for the past three months disappear in only a few minutes. Becker remembered the space as a vital hub of his artistic and social network:

> It was a good time getting to know everyone in the neighborhood. You know, Chico would come by, the guy who does all the murals in the neighborhood. He had a mural in the garden, a lot of young artists. People came out of the woodwork. There was performance art. Penny Arcade, she was there a lot.
>
> The only person who got arrested that day was, god bless him, a friend of Michael Shenker's, he sat down in front of the fence as they took all the sculptures away. It looked like the Goodwill and Salvation Army all put together. But that was it.

> To see a part of my neighborhood taken away. It was such a big part of my social life. I was there every Friday night. 'Cause Jeff had started the Molotov Cocktail Hour. It was every Friday till whenever. Artists would show up. And you could kind of, it was a good way to network and connect. You had people who were writing plays who were connecting with people who did sets and stuff. And it was really perfect...
>
> It was such a big loss. It was such a casual place to go and connect with other people.

If You Lose One Garden, Build More Gardens!

For many gardener supporters, Chico Mendez was a profound wake-up call. Garden activists realized they would need to do a great deal more reaching out to other stakeholders. Becker recalls that after the loss of Chico Mendez:

> Well, everyone started getting organized about getting their information out to the city that the gardens were threatened. But everyone realized that a lot of dominos would fall if we did not get a lot of people involved, a lot more than just the TIME'S UP! people and the Shenkeristas and artists from Chico Mendez. They had to get all the gardeners from throughout the city. We started doing that and we started sending out information to all the gardeners throughout the city to let them know what was coming down.

But they realized a more coherent response was necessary. Michael Shenker, a longtime Lower East Side squatter and garden activist, recalls four tactics used in the garden struggle in NYC: direct action, a judicial strategy, fundraising, and a legislative approach—"a real snake pit," he explained. Direct action combined with a joyous approach played out through tactics including a "sing-out" disrupting a public hearing, as well as an ecstatic theatrical model of organizing that compelled countless actors to participate in the story themselves. The aim was to convey their messages and engage an audience without being excessively didactic. Thus groups made use of a range of crafty approaches, which engaged audiences in playful ways, lulling audiences with stories that

seduced rather than hammered. This theatrical mode of civil disobedience had a way of disarming people and shifting the terms of debate.

More Gardens Coalition organizer Aresh Javadi explained this successful approach to tackling the looming crisis facing the gardeners:

> Theater has always been a method, where going back to Iran, where troops, singers, and theater people would come and do the performance of Hussein, where he is martyred. But when they did that they came from village to village to village; they would tell the real stories behind what was going on through theater that was also interactive. So the whole village would be singing and dancing with it backwards and forwards. So you were absolutely ingrained in it. There was no one person to see and the other person act. It opens you to all sorts of possibilities.
>
> Again, when you see a plant or a vegetable, you automatically come back to a world of childhood, cartoons, something that is not like the, 'there is a protest and they are against us.' Rather the reaction is, 'That's so magical. That's so amazing on top of concrete.' It brings you a recognition of why it is that people care so much about green space when you can't actually take them to the garden. Did you see this over here—what it meant to this woman, to this grandfather, this granddaughter, how much it's improved their health, their life? You can do that by having a flower dancing with a giant tomato and then there is the action of someone trying to take that away from people and people are willing to step up and move that. It allows people to really engage and question their own intents. It's a very, very powerful thing that I will say again, Bread and Puppet and other groups have utilized. But Bread and Puppet tend to be a little bit darker. We are just like, this is fun, it's loving, and you are going to see how passionate we are about that.

Ariane Burgess s put on her own play about the gardens, which she held on the streets downtown. She explains:

> I remember that a bunch of us did the garden play. And a lot of us started doing that. Harry wrote a Noh play and called it, *Cherry Tree*. A Noh play is a Japanese play. He adapted it to make it about the community gardens. So we all dressed up and put white paint on our faces and went to different places and performed it.

Theater was part of getting the message out to people that the gardens were in trouble. It made for good pictures, Becker recalls.

> Well, Aresh and his band of merry men, they started puppet shows in front of, it wasn't City Hall, but it was right next to it. At 8:30 in the morning, while all the government people were coming to work, they did this puppet show. And it was some cardboard thing that they had unfolded seventeen times and it had all the garden care information. And they would enact these scenes. I remember helping them do some of the cutouts of cardboard characters. And I did one of Reverend Billy. And they would enact this puppet play for people going to work. And Aresh was sort of a genius in that way. He had a soft touch. He didn't yell and scream at people.

The other vital ingredient of the More Gardens coalition was how inviting it was. What many appreciated about More Gardens was that once one walked in, they were welcomed and plugged into the movement. The barrier to participation was nil. If someone showed up and wanted to do something, they were welcomed in with a simple "hello, what can you do," and a suggestion to go give it a try. With other groups, there was a higher threshold to participation. That low-threshold approach was very inviting. "That's an incredibly empowering thing," Shenker explained. "Even if you can only do it for twenty minutes a week. The barriers were reduced to the point that anybody could participate and lots of people did. It felt very empowering." The point was to help people feel part of something to which they could actually contribute. "People need to have that feeling," Shenker continued. "It's rooted in us as a species. A lack of empowerment means you might die in the forest. Our survival is contingent upon it."

Thus part of the low-threshold, playful activism of More Gardens was creating moments in which many were invited to be involved. "Aresh was the great master of that. He really brought that spirit way into the garden movement," Shenker concluded. He was not the only one to make that observation. Becker explains.

> I just felt that intuitively with him (Aresh). He was doing what he was doing. And that's why he split off and did his own thing. He knew how photogenic it was. He knew how people who identified with it were the actual gardeners. Because there

> was a huge problem between the noisy activists and the people who were the actual gardeners. And the gardeners, who were numbered in the thousands, who were actually using all the gardens in the boroughs, there were tons of them. And then there were the 75 really rowdy activists. But the gardeners were like, "too loud for me." Aresh was a good bridge that way. He knew people on their way to work would stop in their suits and their briefcases. And the power dresses. And people who had 15 minutes would say, I'm gonna see what they are talking about. And they would watch the play and get some idea of what we were talking about with the gardens. And it sunk into them in a nonthreatening way. Regular people started getting interested in the gardens.

JKtheCat, another longtime member of the More Gardens coalition, recalls the first time she met Aresh:

> I met him when he was compost man at Earth Celebrations. I met this strange and delightful creative. He was dancing with this woman. And he had unlimited energy. It turned out to be his mother and she looked like his peer. And she had unlimited energy too. Every time I'd see him at Wetlands, I'd say, 'Hey, compost man.' And he always invited me to get involved.

Becker recalls what Aresh brought to the Garden struggle:

> More Gardens. Yeah, I hooked up with them. They got onto the scene a little bit later than the Lower East Side Collective garden group. But Aresh, he's a total genius. He saw that that wasn't enough. He saw that the regular gardeners should have their group. And he should take the more energetic group.

Shenker elaborates on the ways the larger strategy fit together:

> But really the fundraising, the judicial, and the direct action components of that front worked synergistically. And it's always important, when you are dealing with a guy like Giuliani, because they left him with a face-saving way out of a dilemma. And there was that exact quote, which he said at the end of the struggle. 'It's a win-win situation.' Those were his words for it when he actually received one of his major defeats. The way we did it was with a lot of great civil disobediences. We took over City Hall. And sixty-, seventy-year-old people were doing it. Gardeners from all over the city were getting involved. The very first civil disobedience where we did our CD training was a sing-out. … I think it was Rector Street, where it was one of these things where it was going through these moribund administrative committees. And this guy has a little placard which says he stands for the mayor and he sits there and they are going through the necessary steps in the legal process of disposing of property. There was this wonderful woman named Lisa, who went to Casa, and she wrote the More Gardens songbook. And it had things like 'The Battle Hymn of the Republic,' and we

> rewrote the thing to be a garden song. We went into the hearings and we distributed the songbook. And people at key moments would just sing for long periods of time, which brought the hearings to a halt in a very, very unthreatening way. And it kind of got people's feet wet to challenging authority. And it began to give them that feeling of collective empowerment through that collective challenging of authority and also was spiritually inspiring by joining together in song. And we began to say, 'Aha, if this works here then we can make it work there in such and such a way.' And it wasn't such a stretch to ask people to go into City Hall and not leave. And City Hall has great acoustics. There was a hearing at the legislative wing and people took over the lobby. There were like forty or fifty people arrested in that.

Becker recalled the day:

> And then we went to City Hall, many times. One time, Michael (Shenker) had this idea that we should go to City Hall and we should sing. So, we got about thirty people and we practiced. And we got this twenty-part harmony going that people could join. It's really loud if you have twenty people. So we went to City Hall and they were having just a full body of the City Council. And we of course sat up in the balcony. And they were down there doing some planning. And we started singing. They have pretty good acoustics in there. And so all of a sudden they hear this really beautiful harmony coming from the balcony. And the council meeting stopped. And they all got out of their seats and they looked up to the balcony. It was as if the Martians were landing. They had no idea what was going on. They had probably had protests of many descriptions. It's usually someone yelling or throwing something. They had never been mesmerized by some harmonic, beautiful song. They didn't know what to do. They just stared there with their mouths open. And then of course security came and bum-rushed us out the door.

Becker described the songs: "It was an oooom. People were singing higher and lower. You stay with one harmony and then someone else stays with something else and it just becomes very powerful and forceful."

Aresh recalled, "The other aspect was that even during the civil disobedience, we would have hats and colorful things. The police sometimes didn't even know what to do with the puppets. And they would be like, "We can't arrest a flower. (Laughs.) That's not a person that we can arrest." This playful spirit functioned as a response to emerging social control of public space where people protested. JK explains:

> It's very disarming. When you're dressed like that, you're not perceived in the same way. You kind of get to people through the other side of their brain. And you get to the officials 'cause you've got a trail of children with you. Children pulling a wheelbarrow full of flowers. They have kids too; they can't bear to treat you like you are dangerous.... Well, look what Aresh did in the Bronx. There was a local community group that would not give us any credibility or meet with us. And after two years they became allies. It's consistency and open-heartedness and a refusal to play a game of back-biting.

For activists such as JK and others in the garden/public-space movement, playful and creative protest and community building serve as refreshing alternatives to traditional models of organizing and politics. JK, for example, simply will not work with "no" groups, those who are merely opposed to things without offering life-affirming alternatives. "I can't stand that dreary stuff. It doesn't work," JK explains. "It turns people off. If you are standing in the line and you are protesting fur, which I do, and you are just screaming at the people going by, they're not going to listen to you." Becker concurs:

> I have friends who are immigrants who have come here. And they have said to me, what are you beefing about? You've got a job. You've got a life. What are you beefing about? I grew up in Communist China. It's a little bit hard to sell that—the microphone and yelling at the power structure. You seem a little spoiled that way.

One of the primary days on the activist calendar in which activists bring their message to the streets with a shrill rather than a soft touch is the yearly Fur-Free Friday, the first shopping day after Thanksgiving each year (also known as Buy Nothing Day). These activists lock themselves in front of retail outlets and scold shoppers for shopping. This frame of action is in direct contrast to the politics of play that were emerging during this period. William Etundi explains:

> The politics of play is all about creating a political movement that is enticing, engaging, intriguing, fun, engaging. I mean, there's been and there still is so much political action that is opposed to everything. It's sitting down and saying no; it's alienating people; it's pushing not only what you are fighting against away but anybody who's doing it. Like the self-righteous, "we're right and everyone else needs to change to what we're doing." And there's no invitation. And locking down in front of a store. Not to make fun of any one group. But the fur protests that happen on Buy Nothing Day, the day after Thanksgiving, outside of Macy's are a perfect example of something that is actually destructive to its own movement. They stand out there and they scream at people on the street, the consumers, and show them bloody pictures with the fur. And I really believe people buy fur coats just to spite those self-righteous kids screaming in the bullpen and not being effective at all.

JK recalls a similar experience;

> I met this cop on the front lines. His name was Valenzuela. And when people would forget the chants he would feed us the lines. He was very cool. And I asked him why he was talking to us. And he took off his cap and in it was a picture of the Dalai Lama. He was so cool. And he said, 'Why are you screaming and yelling?' He said, ' Why don't you just hold up silent pictures?' I said, ' I feel the same way. This yelling and knowing more than the person in the street is divisive and it doesn't work.' Or sitting in a meeting where people are jockeying for a chance to show off and set the agenda. That doesn't work, right?

Interviewees suggest that the problem with such a politics is it assumes one knows more than someone else. The process replaces dialogue with monologue. "Yelling and screaming with a microphone and marching," Becker explains. "People burn out on that. They feel like that alienates the regular joe."

In contrast, the politics of play involves the affirmative. It is a stark contrast with a politics that fails to invite social actors to build a better world, a stronger alternative proposal. Etundi explains:

> Don't do this. Don't do this. They scream at people. It's self-righteous. It's shrill. It's not exciting or intriguing at all. It's the exact opposite of what More Gardens does, of what Critical Mass does, what RTS actions did and what I hope all of my actions do.

Becker notes, “But if you are getting your message across in a creative way, everyone responds to that.”

As with AIDS activism, the garden struggle is about life and community. Aresh explains how he planted those seeds within his campaigns:

> To me it was just like, how can we be a ‘yes’ group. Yes, we agreed that this needs to be approved. We never said, ‘No, you suck.’ We said, ‘Yes, you can do the right thing, like the flowers, like the fruits, like the yeses that have been created and brought forth in visuals and even in food. This is what we’re visioning and this is what we want—a celebration, a bringing together of the spirits, and having the politicians just follow what was right. And putting facts out. When we did a banner hang or put puppets up in a tree, we would say: 10,000 vacant lots, Why Destroy the Garden Plots?

Like ACT UP, More Gardens, LESC and the other garden activist groups focused on articulating what it was they wanted rather than merely saying what they were against. Burgess explains:

> What I aim to do is to articulate vision and live the world in a way that I want to as much as I can. If I go to that, ‘NO, No, NO!!!’ Then that’s the way I’m living my life. And that’s the feeling in my body, that resistance. And I don’t want to do that. I really don’t think that that’s helped me. I don’t think that that’s going to get us anywhere. If we spend our time going against the system and the machine with our fists in the air, that’s what we are doing. But as we go on over here with planting the gardens, growing our food, and being aware of how much waste we create, instead of waiting for the government to regulate how much recycling we need to use, we can start making those choices ourselves. And if people do it, I have on my email these days—the quote, ‘When the people lead, the government will follow.’ That’s what it’s got to be.

For Aresh, the point is to make the goal of the action as clear and simple as possible:

> The visuals enhanced the words. We didn’t try and overstate it or get wordy, saying, ‘Oh well, housing vs. the sunflower. Do you want a house or do you want homeless children? We said, there it is: 10,000 vacant lots and they are being given away to rich developers, while the community gardens that could be there next to real housing are being bulldozed. We were not against real housing. Why

> not have these two balanced? And keep both of them. We want both—real housing as well as real green spaces. I think any time anyone builds over a piece of land, he or she should automatically be adding community gardens with your money for the community. The point is opening up spaces that are communal and cultural. To me those are the steps that need to be pushed forward.

The More Gardens strategy was always to advance images of healthier communities. "Sustainable, healthier communities. From the Romans to the Greeks to the Persians to the Chinese—they've always had spaces where people can gather and be part of nature," Aresh explained. "And realize that we are nature—no matter how much steel and concrete break us away from that." With this in mind, Aresh helped organize activist after activist coming into the garden struggle. Joe Tuba, a musician, recalls Aresh's influence:

> In Winter 1998, I started going to Casa Del Soul. On Sundays, they would have these puppet-making workshops. And we would go there every week and Aresh would be there and he would guide us through this puppet making. We were a bit clueless about what to make and he would go like, 'A giant spade. Make a giant spade.' And I had no idea what the fuck this spade was going to be used for. I feel like later on I started seeing this shit cropping up in the newspapers.

In the wake of the loss of Chico Mendez Garden, the garden movement underwent a period of creative escalation. Here, absurdist defiance became intricately entwined with the playful garden struggle—both in the courts and in New York City Hall, as well as in the streets. For Becker, there were many odd, funny moments:

> I can see certain moments with crystal clarity and with others its blurs. There was stuff happening every week. There was More Gardens. The people from Casa Del Soul up in the Bronx were coming down. Bueno was for some reason dressed as an Indian chief, getting arrested at the tip[top?] of City Hall. And they arrested him and Harry Bubbins. They put him in the squad car. And Bueno, even though he was handcuffed, got out and was running down Chambers or something as a handcuffed Indian. And the police were chasing him. It's like going down a rabbit hole. It just gets wilder and wilder. (Laughs).

Throughout this period, activists dressed as parts of gardens and converged on City Hall. They interrupted hearings with songs; they released crickets; they lobbied the state attorney general dressed as tomatoes. And at one point, a garden activist wearing a giant sunflower outfit climbed a tree in City Hall Park and refused to leave until the gardens were saved. “Matthew Power climbing a tree in front of City Hall. That was like a big moment,” Joe Tuba remembered.

If there is one iconic moment when activists and the general public alike seemed to sense that the garden movement had come of age, it was the moment when 24-year-old Matthew Power brought his defiant love of the gardens to the city’s most public of public commons, City Hall Park. And he would not leave. “They took him out with a boat, some boat on top of a truck, and they dropped him into the truck,” Shenker recalled. The scene was a very strange effort to pull him out of the tree. “This is a real war; it’s just like Chiapas. We’re going to see Giuliani out of office,” insisted Power, still wearing his sunflower headdress before the police took him away (Hall, quoted in Ferguson, 1999). In interview after interview about the garden movement, this story comes up. There was something about the smiling garden creature, the defiant sunflower, comparing his struggle for gardens with the Zapatista struggle. Here, the theater of delight of the garden movement made it to prime time. The police didn’t know what to do. Can I arrest a flower? Can I arrest a tomato? Joe Tuba recalls that few other garden activists ever got the coverage that Matthew Power got. Combined with the puppet shows and the songs and the other theater, the garden model succeeding in creating a new model for disruptive protest.

Becker recalls the day the gardeners rode to city hall dressed a giant caterpillar:

> I helped them build the tomato on the bicycle. That was put together as well at Charas before the Caterpillar. More Gardens got more and more ambitious with their creations on wheels campaign. First they had the tomato. And it was two bicycles and welded together. And it was a huge monster tomato. And I remember riding that from Aresh's house to City Hall one day. And it was the most fun I've had in my life. You know, we were going down Allen Street. And of course the thing was held together by wires. It could move but it was a little shaky. You had to look out and see. It was hard to drive. But people's jaws were dropping. They couldn't believe at tomato was going down Allen Street. It was big. Two bikes, as big as your couch and eight feet high. People saw it and they loved it and they couldn't believe it.

Throughout this period, More Gardens brought many different forms of puppet theater to the public conversation. At another point, the group brought a dragonfly whose wings went up and down when the bikers inside pedaled. One of the most popular themes of the monthly Critical Mass bike rides was the ride that called for activists to create a garden within the streets of New York City. For Becker and the rest of More Gardens, this call offered a challenge to the imagination was worth taking head on:

> They did different things. They did a dragonfly that when you peddled it, the wings went up and down. They just got more and more elaborate. And people would kick in. All the artists and people who had good ideas would come over and bring ideas and tools. They would say to Aresh, I know what we'll do. We'll make the wing move.
>
> It reached its peak with the Caterpillar. That was made of six bikes welded together. And papier-mâché. It had two big plastic eyes you could look out of. One night it went on a TIME'S UP! Critical Mass ride. And the whole ride was waving. This was back in the fun days of Critical Mass before it became like a layer of Dante's Hell. We were waiting at Union Square before the Caterpillar came down 14th Street. And everyone was waving and clapping. And then we headed down Broadway. And the caterpillar goes through a movie shoot. And the people are like yelling and screaming because they want the authentic look of New York. They want the cars and the taxicabs. But they don't want the 25-foot caterpillar. They are not shooting a horror flick. We went right through the movie set. It was hilarious. And the caterpillar didn't make it too far before the police arrested it.

Reclaim the Streets and Create a Garden

Throughout the peak months of the garden struggle in early 1999, activists tried to think of more and more creative ways of highlighting the call to "Reclaim the Streets and Create a Garden." After all, another auction was around the corner. With the garden struggle, Giuliani had a harder and harder time demonizing his opponents. Instead, he was drawing criticism. San Francisco Mayor Willie Brown, who was not known as a preservationist, is said to have called Giuliani to ask what he was doing and to remind him that gardens help community members. "Giuliani created a problem for himself there," Shenker recalls of the days before the 1999 garden auction. "He set himself up by trying to bite off more than he could chew, by trying to take 400-some gardens at once. Before that they were effectively taking a few gardens from small numbers of gardeners."

The New York RTS group, which by this point was functioning as a project of LESC, started to plan a solidarity action to draw attention to the plight of the gardens. The RTS broadside for the garden action situated the garden struggle with a larger story about the need for a public commons to be part of a healthy democracy:

> The American public, like the Florida panther, faced extinction largely because the American Government tends not to respect its space. The sustenance of a well-informed citizenry—which most would agree is essential for the sustenance of democracy—is impossible without a forum in which citizens are both enabled and encouraged to freely exchange their ideas and more accurately articulate their wants and needs.
>
> Rarely, however, the government has been using all its power to actively discourage citizens from participating in the democratic process. In New York City, community gardens are being bulldozed by the dozen, community centers are being auctioned off to profit-hungry developers, and obscure ordinances prohibiting the posting of information on city-owned property are being enforced at a seemingly unprecedented rate. The airwaves continue to be dominated by the same self-interested corporations who manufacture the world to conform to their own personal agenda, and increasingly attempts made by responsible journalists to counter the trend by using the airwaves as a platform for public debate and comment are being crushed with a growing intensity.

> All of this has left the public aimless, disorganized, and thoroughly unprepared to make the decisions that will determine the fate of our communities, our nation, our world.
>
> Of course, that's precisely what the people who currently make these decisions want. For a disorganized public is a docile public, a public unwilling to send up the countless violations that the government—at the city, state, and national levels—has committed against it.

Without a civil society intermediating between the market and the government, American democracy is thought to crumble. De Tocqueville wrote about this limitation, this possible peril in *Democracy in America*. For RTS and the members of the garden struggle, it was a lesson worth heeding. Faced with a democracy in peril, RTS sought to create new ways activists could play with power.

The action was to take place shortly before the next garden auction. William Etundi attended his first RTS action shortly before the auction. He recalls:

> I wanted to get involved and months later ran into someone from the action at a party. This little underground club on Monday night. She says, there's gonna be another meeting next week at the Hub. And I'm like, I've been wanting to be involved. I'll check it out, absolutely. A lot of people will say, 'Yeah, yeah, I want to be involved.' And then nothing happens—culture of the city. We get there. The meeting is big—like sixty or seventy people. It's like a couple of weeks before the action. A lot of the groundwork has already been done. But they need a couple of key roles filled; one includes climbing on the tripod. Definite arrest, definite physical risk. Louis, the gymnast, climbed the last one. (Laughs.) No one else was willing to do this. So I volunteered. It was my first meeting, my first real political action activist meeting in New York City, and I was like, 'I'll climb the tripod.' And that was it.

Action speaks louder than words. Etundi's quiet gesture would make him a bit of a hero for the group. And in the years after this, he would become more and more of a hero in global justice/cultural resistance political circles and networks.

Like many, Ariane Burgess recalls the garden demo as her favorite RTS action:

> My favorite action was the Reclaim the Streets Garden Action. It was about the garden struggle. And what was so beautiful about that struggle was that a lot of

> people were doing different actions. It was an amazing form of organizing because there was no one big issue but everyone knew that it was an issue to get behind. And so there were people getting behind different things here and there. And Reclaim the Streets thought, okay, we're going to do a Reclaim the Streets with a theme of the gardens. And so we decided to do it on Avenue A. And it was amazing because people really dressed up for it. They really took over the street. We planted the grass. It was an incredible operation.
>
> You know Brooke and [name garbled] and I were responsible for the main production of that. And I feel that we worked really well together, planning everything out, deciding where we were going to meet, deciding how we were going to get there. Who was going to be bringing in different music and different elements. And I think the advantage was that we were in a more local community and the other ones we did were in Times Square and Wall Street. A lot of people dressed up for it. It was very powerful. And it was part of the leading-up to the larger auction action, which was incredible.

Garden activists, RTS members, and the burgeoning Hungry March Band all met in a community garden in the East Village the day of the action. Someone gave me a bass drum and the action began with a parade out of the space into the streets. As we arrived at Avenue A, activists started dancing. The tripod team jumped out of a sidewalk cafe where they were sitting, stalling, ordering food until they got a signal, and they threw Etundi up into the tripod. Aresh brought out heaps of grass and placed them all over the street, and for a small hour or so the group really had reclaimed the street and turned it into a garden.

It was Joe Tuba's first street action with Hungry March Band. "It was great. I remember I went in and I was playing and I was used to playing in the orchestra in school. And now I could just fart around and be a jackass and it was great," he recalled. "And I just basically had no idea what was going on around me." While the political theme of the action was a draw, the hook for Tuba was the participatory pleasure of the action. "The reason it grabbed me in the first place was like, hey, this is really fun and

exciting and crazy and stupid and you don't have to have some pedigree like in Marxist theory to do it or understand it," he explained. "It's just very personal and immediate."

For many involved, the concept of reclaiming the street and creating a garden seemed to effectively convey the kind of community they hoped to create. Jason Grote explains:

> I think definitely that one of the very exciting things was not so much putting out this idea that you could have a different world, which is important too, but the fact of actually doing it. And then there was the other sort of thing of memes. Reclaim the Streets starting in London and moving to New York and popping up in all these different cities. That was really exciting too. It must have had some impact, because universally all these governments all over the world were threatened by this sort of thing. I think in this sort of ontological way, I was really baffled when I first got involved as to why Giuliani would be opposed to community gardens, first of all why anybody would and then thinking from this libertarian perspective. It's not people seeking money for their program as much as doing it on their own. Who wouldn't agree with this? And then I started realizing that stuff like this is a real threat to any entrenched power. And real genuine play, not hyper-regulated consumerist play.

As a form of highly authentic, unregulated play, those RTS and gardens actions took on an often highly subversive character.

In addition, the networks in which RTS was involved were engaged in articulating a critique of neoliberalism. Joe Tuba recalls:

> There was this conference in Toronto. This was a good two or three years before Seattle. A couple of thousand people showed up and really fucked with it. They stole all their food. It totally grabbed my attention. MAI[?] sounded so awful. And I felt like I had no idea how to get involved with stuff like that. Then stuff like RTS started happening and More Gardens. I felt like More Gardens was the local manifestation of the kind of stuff RTS was talking about.

Here, critiques of neoliberalism overlapped with a local struggle against the kind of politics of sameness that involved bulldozing gardens and supporting a better business climate for urban economic growth (Logan and Moloch, 1987). "It's a kind of a

neocolonial thing," Tuba observed. "If Starbucks wants to move into the neighborhood, they are part of something that is determining that this lot where this garden is has to go. It is this kind of colonialism."

Yet instead of advancing an explicit dialectical analysis, which most people understood to be happening in their guts, RTS offered an alternative. "It was just very refreshing that the approach to it was, let's go have a big weird fucking party," Tuba explained. It's a choose-life moment. It is a moment of a community saying, 'I can do what I want.' We spend so much time in activism saying what we are against, but here we were saying what we wanted. "That was really important for me," Tuba concurred. "That was like one part, and the other part was like, god it was such a fucking turn-off to see people walking in lines with fucking picket signs. It's like, nobody wants that. It's really counterproductive and boring." The play of the RTS action would be a necessary counterbalance for another auction that spring.

The Auction

One of the core elements of the community garden movement in New York City is the aim to make streets and neighborhoods healthy places for joy and connection. I came into the gardens direct action movement in March of 1999, during the organizing to stop the auction of 114 community gardens. My field notes from May 2, 1999, are on the civil disobedience training at the Charas/El Bohio Community Center, which at the time was locked in a protracted legal battle with the city. L.A. Kauffman facilitated the meeting. After introductions, everyone was asked if they had been arrested. Many had

not. Some talked about the Matthew Shepard political funeral from the previous October.

Kauffman spoke:

> The mayor has been after gardens for years. Stop this and future auctions. Stand up and say no! He's already planning another auction. Bottom line. CD works where other more traditional models have not worked. We have written letters, lobbied, called people, etc.... Check in with your body.

Aresh recalls the weeks before the auction.

> During the organizing to save the 114 gardens, we had moments where we were in the gardens that were like a week away from being destroyed or given away to some developer. And the children came and took the puppets and automatically told the story. They would tell the story of the garden. And they would say, 'So why do you think we shouldn't have housing right there?' And the other kids would say, 'Look at that house across the street. That's not for us.' And I had nothing to do with that scene. Yet, these kids represent a future of why New York is going to be such an amazing space. The end result of this organizing was a compromise, which helped preserve the community gardens in New York City.

Shenker also describes the political context:

> Well, they're not stupid. But then they tried all of them and he [Giuliani] thought if he demonized the gardeners, called them communists, he could succeed. And so he tried to take everything all at once in a big handover to real estate. And basically, it was like a thousand different groups got involved with it. One of the groups that I was particularly involved with was More Gardens. I'm a founding member of More Gardens. More Gardens' original members were: Harry Bubbins, Michael Shenker, Rafael Bueno, and Emily Nobell Maxwell. And really what motivated the formation of More Gardens was that on that list of 400 gardens was Cherry Tree Garden. That was the garden next to Casa Del Soul. It's always a great motivator to movements when they are directly impacted by the outrage which was occurring.

The civil disobedience was scheduled for May 5, the day of the auction training for everyone who wanted to buy the land. The auction was to take place the following day. Ariane Burgess and others from More Gardens performed their play, called *Cherry Tree*, for the lost garden. "[We] performed it on the corner of Chambers and Washington," Burgess recalled. "There was a groundswell of people coming. And 64 were going to get arrested outside." The training was took place at the Borough of

Manhattan Community College. And the streets were filled with bodies of those committed to being arrested. City Council member Steve Debrienza and future Council Speaker Christine Quinn were standing chitchatting with all the activists sitting in the streets. “Sit down Christine,” someone asked her. “Not today,” she smiled. “We’re here to make sure you are treated okay.”

Many members of LESC were included in the group of arrestables. That night was the first time I met Burgess, while we were waiting to be being booked at the precinct. Burgess was with everyone, but she was leaning over with her cuffs behind her back, silent, with her white paint still on her face. She recalls:

> I was staying in character. We did the play and some of us walked down to the West Side Highway and sat down there. I had a big bunch of peonies in my hair. I think I was quiet like that because my cuffs were too tight and my character was someone who had walked away from the world because he was fed up with what was going on so he got involved with this garden. And he had a special relationship with this tree. And then throughout the course of this play, they learn they can come out into the world and support people and protect the gardens and be more present for it. It’s fun to do things like that.

We were let out in a relatively short period of time, maybe five hours. On the way out of jail, a short person dressed as a caterpillar approached, congratulated me, and asked that I sign up for future mailings. That was the first time I met Aresh.

“And then we did the auction, with like 80 arrests [at the pre-auction action], and I think we’d already won by that point,” Shenker recalled. “And that was to drive home the point that you’d better make sure that we’ve won.”

“That was probably the peak of the movement because it involved real gardeners, not just activists,” Tim Becker recalled. “They were doing a seminar on buying city property for developers.... There were so many people arrested that they put people on city buses. I was out blocking the street. But a lot of people went inside. And yelled and

screamed." One person I knew who worked at a prestigious school on the Upper West Side was developing a big fart bomb with sulfur. The plan was to be smelly. But it wasn't even necessary. "And the developers freaked and ran out," Becker remembered. "They went out down the back door and they were hailing cabs down the West Side Highway, getting out of there." By the end of the night, some sixty to seventy garden activists were arrested for committing civil disobedience to prevent the planned auction of some 114 community gardens. That was the end of that. The auction was canceled.

"Gardeners plant selves in the street," the *Daily News* reported the next day, noting that sixty-two activists had been arrested the night before (Rein, 1999). After countless acts of civil disobedience, including the unleashing of crickets at a garden auction, street parties, pageants, and community actions, gardeners were able to celebrate a victory. On May 6, Bette Midler and a group of garden supporters paid over $4.2 million ($1.2 by Midler alone) to put the gardens in a public land trust. This action saved 114 gardens from redevelopment (Barry, 1999).

Shenker reflected on this moment:

> So direct action has done its job. And the state's got a dilemma. Holy mackerel, people express popular support and look what power they have. We don't want that to get out. So can we confuse them? But we also have the fundraising and judicial strategies. So on a parallel track we have Elliot Spitzer, the state attorney general, come to the rescue. And all the various City Council people are lining up. Lawsuits are filed in Brooklyn. And this is happening simultaneously to all the direct action. Meanwhile, the angels from heaven come, we have the Trust for Public Land and Better Midler arriving. And this is a great way to get rid of the horizontal concept of power and say here's our savior Bette Midler. Aren't we grateful that she showed up. And I talked to people a matter of months later and they said, 'Oh, Bette Midler saved the gardens.' But that was part of the strategy, which was fundraising with the Trust for Public Land, the New York Restoration Project, that there would be opportunities for funding institutions to come in. And basically Bueno cooked this whole thing up. And we discussed this strategy before the whole thing. So Elliot Spitzer and these people who had standing

> brought suit to stay the bulldozing through the courts. And all these things worked in synergy. And my job was to do the direct action component.

Thus, what had started off as a rather playful organizing campaign helped lay the groundwork for a large success. Yet success only emerged with a larger strategy of mobilization, fundraising, legal advocacy, communication, and direct action. Looking back, I asked Becker about where play fit into the larger campaign:

> I think it was just tailored to the moment of the gardens. For much more serious issues—the labor movement, the antiwar movement, I think there is much more at stake. Then you have to have a much more intense level of activism. For something like community gardens, it was great to have people riding down the street dressed as tomatoes. It was just the right level of protest.

Return of the Hair Shirts, Revenge of the Blue Meanies

In the weeks after the victory, Kauffman designed a poster that proclaimed, "WE WON," with the words superimposed over two the image of two flowers. Text followed:

> After a two-year direct action campaign of protest and education, we stopped the Giuliani administration's plan to destroy our community gardens. The auction was canceled and the 114 gardens slated for sale will be permanently preserved. There are 600 other gardens that remain unprotected. Join us in this ongoing battle—we fight to win! Lower East Side Collective.

LESC members wheatpasted the poster all over the Lower East Side. And immediately the group received criticism about "taking credit" for the gardens success. Many stopped even thinking about the action. Members of LESC chalked the complaint up to more of the incessant backstabbing or grasping defeat out the jaws of victory that the left had made a habit of doing. The point of the LESC poster was to inform people that there was still a great deal of work to do to save the rest of the gardens.

Further, members of LESC had the next action to plan for: the June 18 Group of Eight (G8) street party that RTS was planning. The idea would be to throw a street party in the heart of the finance capital of the world. The transparent democracy of dancing, gyrating bodies would counter the secrecy of the G8 model. “Don’t let the G8 Control Your Fate!” was to be the slogan of the day. An RTS London action happened hours earlier. The windows of McDonald’s were smashed, and the action basically dissolved into a riot. In response, the police adopted a zero-tolerance policy for the New York action. They shut down the street party before it even began, arresting most of the organizers; all told, thirty-seven people were arrested.

Yet even if the police had not been there, strange phenomena emerged. Many activists tried to get the hundreds of regular people to take the streets themselves. A small handful easily could have clogged up the curvilinear streets of the Wall Street area. The RTS core philosophy was, after all, that the true action of social movements happens when people step off the sidewalk. “[W]hen you come to challenge the powers that be, inevitably you find yourself on the curbstone of indifference, wondering, ‘should I play it safe and stay on the sidewalks, or should I go into the street?’” claimed RTS London (quoted in Duncombe, 2002a). Yet, unlike the past RTS actions, few people actually stepped off the sidewalk. “I think that’s an internal limitation—a fear of authority that has been drummed into us from a very young age,” explained Ariane Burgess , who took part in the action. Wilhelm Reich (1970) suggested these internal checks often result in people feeling too inhibited, too alienated from their own bodies to participate in gestures of personal freedom or actively participate in social movements that might actually create happier conditions for their lives.

Midway through his interview, Jason Grote suggested that the "hair-shirt left" never quite disappeared from the scene even as play was becoming more and more a part of a new organizing ethos. In the same way that people still maintained the internal checks that inhibit the forms of personal freedom Burgess s was talking about, the reactionary, dour side of community organizing never disappeared.

Shortly after the June 18 action, Stephen Duncombe sent out a press release announcing the number of arrests and providing follow-up information for the action. The press release stated: "The protest party was organized by Reclaim the Streets/New York City, a local chapter of the international protest group Reclaim the Streets." Like Kaufmann's "WE WON" poster, the press release provoked a small but vocal constituency of local activists. "Finding this press release to be full of the very same combination of misinformation and self-promotion that marked the LESC garden group's 'WE WON' poster, Bill Brown issued the following short response. In it Brown noted, 'The protest party was organized by RTS NYC, AMONG OTHERS, including [only laziness, or a total lack of interest in anyone else but your own group, prevents you from filling this in].' The egocentrism of certain activists is appalling," (notbored, 1999). Within the next few weeks, LESC was asked to stop volunteering, posting outreach information, or doing outreach for the group through the Blackout Bookstore on Avenue A.

Members of LESC did their best to shrug off the conflict over the June 18 action press materials and the difficulties with the action itself. "Your first two actions, you had home-field advantage," the ever amiable Todd Muller explained, offering his sports analogy for the first two RTS actions that had taken place on Sundays in the quieter

confines of the Lower East Side. “June 18 was your first away game.” Many members of RTS would travel for the rest of the summer. Some would work on the SexPanic! Rudy’s Sex Mobile float for the Pride parade the last weekend of June 1999, and garden activists would continue to struggle to secure a winning settlement for the rest of the lost community gardens later that summer.

Buy Nothing Day 1999

By the end of the summer, RTS started meeting again after a break. The first meeting was held sometime in August. By the end of that meeting, plans and a date for the next action had already been established. The action would take place the Friday after Thanksgiving on the biggest shopping day of the year, the day known both as Fur-Free Friday and International Buy Nothing Day. A couple of people in the group had also been hearing about an action planned to coincide with World Trade Organization (WTO) meetings that were scheduled to happen the week after in Seattle. Buy Nothing Day could be a Seattle solidarity action.

For many involved, the challenge was to bring a spirit of DIY color back to the public sphere and public space, which felt increasingly threatened. Two weeks before the RTS Buy Nothing Day Action, LESC members worked with SexPanic!, RTS, and the Church of Stop Shopping to organize the Times Square Disney bust action described at the end of the SexPanic! chapter. Liberatory play was a central part of the action. Yet, while those involved sought to bring a spirit of free, uninhibited play and ritual to a place that felt increasingly restricted and colorless, Grote was also working through creating that feeling for himself. He explains:

> I think the best moments include the arrest with Reverend Billy. That was exciting in a specific way, and getting arrested in the Disney Store was a lot more frightening than getting arrested at One Police Plaza. It was as if a much more significant taboo were being broken. I felt like we'd grown up thinking that if you are principled enough you want to go to the places of government and disobey. I think that a lot of Americans grow up thinking that that's right. That's the legacy of what Martin Luther King did. That's what you are supposed to do. But I think we also grow up with a certain socialization, thinking you don't go to a store in the mall and do rebellion that isn't scripted. You do the teenage mall rat thing, and even though you may have confrontations with security, it is still part of the script. Whereas doing something that was in defiance or resistance to a really powerful hegemonic thing… You go to the Disney Store, you quietly browse. You buy something, you don't buy something, what you *don't* do is make noise. What you don't do is get in the way of the cash register. You don't repurpose the kitschy crap for anything other than what it is there for. And I think that in a way was almost more scary. And I didn't realize it at the time. While at the time, I thought about it as the cops being scary, but when the cops came in it was a bit of a relief. It wasn't the cops I was scared of at all. I was scared of violating this taboo. It was a powerful, almost in a Freudian way, like violating an incest taboo. It's this thing that you don't ever question. It was surprisingly terrifying even though I could say Disney was bullshit.

Doing invisible theater in a line of people who like a product is a tough kind of play to put on. Grote and the others (including myself) were trying to perform there. Yet play and performance in such an inhibiting space is a real challenge. Bill Talen, the actor who plays Reverend Billy, has said that there are times in such a space when he starts to speak and no one hears him; no one is listening—they just go on shopping. But the disruption does eventually happen. And here the "really frightening" feeling Grote talks about becomes "really exciting as well." Like the beta endorphin release in sports or in SM leather play (Mains, 1984/2002), the energy released produces a profound high for those involved. This is dark or risky play at its purest. Echoing Reich (1970), who suggests bodily inhibition is a key source of repressive politics, Grote suggests the presence of such a disruptive element is also a threat to those who seek to maintain a status quo:

> It's interesting as the years have passed and I have thought more about the identifications. I wrote about this guy who was an employee who was kind of a really effeminate guy who was really affronted who kicked me. And I think now with Wal-Mart and the Republican Party, there are a lot more people who are a lot more identified with corporate parties. And it's a little bit more sinister than when you are in high school and someone makes fun of your favorite band. It's like your feelings are hurt. You feel like it's an indictment of you personally. Some people in that line wanted to get out and others were personally affronted, like an attack on Disney was an attack on them.

Yet the core question in such a scenario is whether play can offer a counterbalance within what was increasingly feeling like a tragic comedy. Within such a political context, a quality-of-life crusade pushing for increasing controls, was play an effective response? Grote suggests:

> I think it was a moment of resistance and collectively saying on[?]. There were two things going on. There was this corporatized form of play with its unspoken rules that you have to obey, but then within it, if you are willing to buy your fun, you can enjoy. You have this police regulation of fun and you have this MTV version of fun, which is not spontaneous, and it's not personal. There was a movement like ours that was really based in play and liberation and dancing and humor and laughter and things like this. I think there are historic moments, where that sort of thing arises.

Reclaiming Public Space with Stories

Two weeks after the Disney action, Reclaim the Streets held a roving street party in Times Square on the busiest shopping day of the year, November 26. The action began in Union Square, where marshals led over one thousand people on an impromptu subway run, away from cops at 14th Street, up to 44th and Broadway. Joe Tuba recalls:

> The Buy Nothing Day Action, that was great... Just 'cause it was so much fun. It was so bad, like in a Black exploitation film kind of way. 'Cause it was like we're going to go fuck up and take over Times Square. It was like damn, that's so great. That's so good. That's so exciting.

Once the crowds flowed out of the 42nd Street subway station, activists set up a sound system and placed a tripod on the corner of 44th and Broadway, stopping traffic with

dancing bodies. Yet these thing never go as planned. First the sound system stopped. "The sound system always crapped out," Tuba recalled, laughing. "Every time. That's OK with me, because I play tuba." But the group was able to hold 43rd and Times Square for about 15 minutes. "I don't think we can even say that we held it that long," Tuba says.

The intent of the action was to involve the thousands of unsuspecting shoppers already cluttering the streets. Once confronted with the street party, in one grand culture-jamming moment, many joined in, thinking they had stumbled onto the production of a music video at nearby MTV. Sometimes magic-realist narratives, like all stories, become reality-creating machines. By the end of the day, forty-five activists were brutally arrested for dancing, rather than shopping, in the New York City streets. "I was hanging back a lot cause I had one of those neon orange signs with pointed arrows. So I was hanging back a little bit," Tuba recalls. After the arrests, he and others led the remaining activists downtown. "Later I used the arrow to direct everyone to the precinct, where everyone [arrested] went." (laughs).

A group of some fifty of us followed the arrestees to the police station, playing drums, dancing, and playing as we waited for the arrestees to be released. "That was fun, too. Yeah, that was a lot of fun too," Tuba recalls. "I have a lot of really great kind of memories of really fun kind of weird experiences outside of central booking downtown.". Many others recalled that moment of storytelling and dancing and aerobics and running around the police precinct and the solidarity with those inside as one of their best RTS moments.

The Times Square action action would anticipate the following week's WTO uprising in Seattle; indeed, many RTS activists left jail for flights to the West Coast the

following day. What had started as a movement about the quality of life in one small town had become part of an international resistance effort. As everyone sat around telling stories, Aresh stood to tell the story of a garden which had not been saved during the garden settlement and the Midler deal. The name of the garden was Esperanza.

The Struggle for Esperanza

In the fall of 1999, JKtheCat recalls, she received a phone call:

> So, we, like many people, were under the impression that the gardens were saved when the auction was canceled in 1999. My friend calls me and tells me about a small little garden on 7th Street that was going to be bulldozed. I said I don't know what's going on. I thought this issue was resolved. I went for a walk. I saw Aresh. And he asked me to draw him a coqui. And so I did and it pulled me in.

JK was not the only person pulled into that campaign by Aresh or More Gardens. The coqui, a Puerto Rican tree frog, was the organizing symbol for the campaign. Few campaigns brought the divergent activists communities together like the campaign to save La Esperanza Garden on East 7th street in the Lower East Side.

Many recall the battle for Esperanza as the best experience they ever had with creative activism. Aresh recalls:

> That was a case where we really were able to work with the community that was being threatened by gentrification in 2000. It has the dynamic of this huge corporate developer, Donald Capoccia, buying the administration and coming after community-minded groups of people of Puerto Rican origins who had built a community, a block group, co-op housing, and green spaces around them that they were sharing with the community.

Throughout the campaign, which began in 1999, La Esperanza—the 22-year old garden named for hope—had come to symbolize the tensions between privatization at the center of globalization and the civic need for public spaces open to all. Despite its history as a community center for picnics and parties and a refuge for children, in August 1999 Giuliani's office sold La Esperanza to developer Donald Capoccia—a man who had just

happened to donate some $50,000 to the mayor's electoral campaigns and acquired the garden site from the city without a fair bidding process. Giuliani claimed that Capoccia planned to construct "low-income housing" on the site, and that garden supporters were "not living in the real world." In reality, the 79 apartments Capoccia slated to build were "80/20 housing"—80% market-rate, luxury apartments, with a token 20% set aside for low-income tenants.

In the months after the Bette Midler garden settlement of May 1999, Giuliani changed tactics. In a new strategy, the city began selling off individual gardens, perhaps one or a small group at a time, but not enough to draw city-wide attention along the lines of the May auction. All the while, the general public believed all the city gardens had been saved. Yet the city continued to put more Lower East Side community gardens up for auction. In December 2000, developers ripped the wall off the back of the Esperanza garden, preparing to bulldoze. The scene was a vivid reminder of how Capoccia had bulldozed the Chico Menendez Garden two days after Christmas back in 1998. Activists, community members, and friends of Esperanza were determined to prevent the same thing from happening again.

Garden advocates sought an injunction to save Esperanza after its sale. Little came of it. Alicia Torres was the original gardener who had planted the seeds of Esperanza back in 1977. JK remembers:

> It was created mostly by an elderly lady named Alicia Torres and her son Taito, and it was open to the children of the neighborhood. They grew up there, and their own children would play and chase each other and fight and do homework and blow out birthday candles there, and eat hot dogs and other junk food, and the adults would celebrate every holiday major or minor, and there was a gorgeous jungle rooster who lived in the garden and would hide from all the people. He is brown, red, yellow, and black, and lovely beyond description. Esperanza was always being used. People would bring Alicia plants that were dying and she

> would nurse them back to health. The place was known at first for its sunflowers, later for roses, including a 20 year old rosebush.

In 1999, Torres received a letter from Capoccia stating that construction would begin on the land in a week. Having traversed every legal and policy channel they knew of, activists sought alternate solutions for their struggle against the bulldozers. Aresh explains:

> And then garden activists created a magical creature – the coqui, which meant so much to their own community and the larger Puerto Rican community in the world. And then to allow the gardeners, the local residents, the artists, and activists, as well as thousands of people from all over the world, being able to connect and to share to understand this magic and to come and sleep and stay inside this giant frog – it was just so fantastic.

In Puerto Rican folklore, the coqui has long been known to successfully vanquish larger adversaries. Esperanza could use the same sort of mythology. JK explains how activists mobilized this story:

> The story of the coqui is that there was a horrific monster in the woods. And all the other animals were terrified. And they were shivering and running away and the coqui encounters the lightning bug and the dragon fly and the mouse and they said, 'Whats going on? Don't you hear this roaring sound coming out of the forest? Its terrible.' And the coqui said, 'All right everybody calm down. I'll take care of it.' The little tiny frog hopped into the darkness. And the roaring continued. But suddenly you heard an enormous frog sound. It sounded like it was coming from an animal about ten feet high. And the monster, who could not see in the dark, figured he must be even larger than he was and he left. And the little tiny coqui hopped right out. And he told all these trembling animals that they could go back to bed. It was safe. So the coqui makes an enormous noise but is very small. More Gardens made an enormous noise but we were very small. And we kept growing.

Garden activists built a giant steel and canvas version of the coqui for the garden. "And the kids on the block helped make it, put the wire mesh under it," JK recalled. "Eric cut out the two eye balls, and put in these big plexiglass globes which were the eyes. And

they were the windows." The ten foot tall frog faced the street, drawing crowds of sympathizers to the cause of the garden, and serving as an exemplar of public and community art. JK remembers the day it was completed:

> The day that we inaugurated it, we had all these kids come in and they made puppets together. They enacted that story I just told you. They had the big pea costume. There were all these creatures running around and making noises. The adults would come over. In the morning we had breakfasts donated by Angelicas and Kate's Joint. And we would have the most amazing gourmet food – croissants, espresso.

People from all over the city came to see the coqui and help support the garden. "With the big frog, I went down there and checked that out," Tim Becker recalled. The practical applications of the space were infinite. He explains how "the frog," as he describes it, helped garden activists build on the lessons of their past losses:

> They were fortifying Esperanza and that was on the hit list. What happened was the bulldozers and the police slipped into Chico Mendez before anyone could be in the garden. So the idea was to not let that happen again. So Aresh, the mad scientist that he is, said we'll build this big home there. And we'll live there before anything can happen. So, they made the papier-mâché frog, or coqui, and people started living in there and having a good time.

Activists could spend the night inside the structure, equipped with telephone lines, a heater, and materials to lock themselves down to the coqui if bulldozers were to roll in early in the morning. Michael Shenker recalled the moment. "[I]t was so beautiful. The coqui was just so magnificent. People's involvement and the winter and the fire pit over there and the solidarity with the Torres family, their willingness just to say "do it."

Play was always part of the spirit of the garden. Thus, defending the space with play was vitally important. But the roots of the support for the garden included an underlying philosophy—"deep ecology"—which suggested a close between gardeners

and their community that translated into a joyous feeling of connection. For JK and many others, Aresh brought that playful spirit to the campaign:

> The power of his personality and his playful spirit was so compelling. It's like my friend John Seed, a rainforest activist, says, 'We have to be so charming and so beautiful that people want to do it. They want to join us. That's how we are going to turn it around.' This deep ecology is a way of being in the world with an understanding that we are a part of the web of life. That we are not here as some kind of horrible force or viruses from an alien race. And we're not here as guardians and caretakers to be the dominant species. We're here, zillion year old stuff like everything else. And this is a philosophy. It goes beyond the intellect. When you go to the green world, you realize there is a spirit and a global consciousness and we can connect to it. We can realize that the planet is a living, breathing being, who is incredibly wise, ancient, and conscious.

At its peak, people from all over the city supported the garden. Playful Eros was an intrinsic part of the campaign. JK continues:

> It turned into quite a scene. It was a dating scheme. People would take their lovers into the coqui. They were actually booking the coqui weeks in advance. There was lots of blankets. There was room for two people. There was a phone. A heater. It was quite comfortable accommodations.

Tim Becker concurred when I asked him about what happened in the coqui at night. "Don't come a knocking when the van's rocking. That's what I heard." JK remembers another moment at the coqui slumber party:

> One night I slept in the coqui and I was drifting off and I heard this scrambling noise outside. I looked around and it was Aresh scrambling like the skin on the coqui. And so he pops in and makes his bed next to me and the two of us. And we hear this noise outside and it's this drunk guy. And he says, 'Hey frog. How're you doing?' And we say, 'Fine.' And he says, 'What you got a woman in there.' And so it was like that. (Laughs).

The space created room for a lot of community building. "They had a lot of fire circles too," Becker remembers. At the time, one of the garden organizers said the warmest place in New York City that winter was the outside fire in Esperanza Garden. JK remembered how the space functioned as a sort of public commons. "Every night there

was a fire. People would come from every walk of life, every philosophy, every economic strata, and different countries. And they'd come and they'd pontificate and they'd philosophize. It was very playful, very fun." And, Becker continues, "they were having cookouts there and people were getting to know each other." In addition, a great deal of theater took place there. "I helped them build the tomato on the bicycle. That was put together as well at Charas, before the caterpiller."

At the same time, urban activists and neighborhood members were developing a relationship with the earth. Aresh explains what happens when he sees children hang out in community gardens: "I teach a lot of kids. And I know for a fact that kids who have grown plants have attention spans magnified [beyond] what children who only watch TV and commercials have," he says. "And knowing they can put their hands in dirt, play with worms, and be themselves. And you must play this game, wear this lipstick and these clothes. You are not worrying about clothes."

I remember on December 31, 1999 being in Esperanza with the tomato. Some guys were doing a play. And Bill from TIMES UP! said to Reverend Billy, "I am a tomato! I am a tomato!" And there was a moment when he seemed genuine. It was also a moment of saying, "this is another way of looking at the world for just a minute." For many, there was a poetry to some of the organizing—the I am you and you are me, Whitmanesque view of what democracy can be. It's also a story about democracy. "We're forever altered whenever anything changes on the planet," JK explains. "When a garden is sucked off the earth, we feel it." And many did feel it the day Esperanza was bulldozed.

On the day of the eviction – February 14, 2000 – New York Attorney General Elliot Spitzer was filing papers calling for an injunction barring the destruction of all gardens that morning. No injunction could go into effect until 2 p.m. that afternoon at the earliest, but if activists could stall the police and bulldozers all morning, there was a chance the garden could be saved. Some activists locked themselves to the surrounding fence with bicycle locks around their necks, while another group locked themselves to a 45-foot high steel tower of a sunflower and tripods. Five activists locked themselves inside the coqui.

Police swarmed the front of the garden while a bulldozer loomed in the distance at the back. The activists were locked inside. The police moved in, tearing down the fence in front of the garden, sawing off the chain of an activist who had locked herself to it. While protestors were being arrested, Giuliani redeployed the usual debate that the city has to decide between housing or gardens. Garden activist spokespeople retorted that with thousands of vacant lots and dilapidated buildings to rebuild in the five boroughs, there is room for both gardens and housing. The More Gardens Coalition, which organized the Esperanza resistance campaign, successfully constructed a multicultural coalition, mobilizing activists from all over the city. Yet this was not enough to match the deep pockets of New York's real estate industry and their influence on the city's political culture. Nevertheless, the direct action compelled the city to make a policy change in how it handles community gardens – which resulted in a Temporary Restraining Order on bulldozing gardens and eventually a settlement to make half the gardens permanent. Aresh recalls:

> In terms of Esperanza, we regrettably lost the space and the coqui was destroyed. A lot of people said, 'Get the frog out of there. You can save it. The garden is

> gone.' And I was like, 'This is not about a little art piece. It's about the bigger picture. The coqui is the garden. The garden is that. And the people who are there who are going to be hurt are part of this frog. And no matter what, this is inseparable.' Its semi-permeable. It's an art that has the life and heart of the seeds that surround it.
>
> So what became of that destruction was, to me, like, as the frog was destroyed, there were seeds that were exploding and flying all over the city. And we have little froglets that, as JK so wonderfully puts it, have grown by hearing it, who said, 'I was not part of it but I want to make sure that does not happen again. I want to make sure that there is something of this creativity and greenery and there is something coming from it.'

"Of all of the sacrifices, ones that we've lost, one that I thought we kind of transcended our defeat was Esperanza," Michael Shenker recalls. The *Times* quoted Shenker quoting Sophocles as he was arrested during that action: "Giuliania fooliani, the furies will be following you for the rest of your days." Play was even part of the jail experience, which the police did not appreciate. When Shenker, Becker, and this author were in jail after the Esperanza stand-off with [Brad Will and Tim Doody] we had a little "oooom" moment. And the cops let us know that being in jail is not about having fun.

"Community gardens, they are precious to me," JK explained as she looked back on her work on that campaign. "They are so important in the hope of the community." For her and many other, Esperanza was a catalyst to act. The caring spirit of the space continued. JK notes:

> I think that's what really got me. A lot of people to this day identify themselves with More Gardens because of their emotional connection to Esperanza. That's what really got me. I was so enchanted that I started acting locally, at least for a little while. And you can see the results of your actions when you act locally. It's very empowering.

In the summer of 2001, members or More Gardens worked with those defending Charas and others spaces to push the notion of a public referendum around the garden

issue. JK recalls the referenda process as part of an ongoing DiY struggle to save space using whatever tools one had. This meant "sing or make a puppet or draw a coqui or climb a sunflower – you could do that." But it also meant taking a step into New York City politics. She recalls:

> We got a copy of the summer events calendars. So we took out all these petitions to all these concerts and the philharmonic and the gay pride parade and got our signatures (for the ballot line). And when it came time to deliver the signatures, we had a couple of councilmen standing on the steps of City Hall. We had Norm Seigel. And we were dressed as peas and butterflies and caterpillars and tomatoes. And the steps of City Hall looked pretty damned good. We were not allowed inside City Hall because of some old mayor who will remain nameless. But it was so much fun, especially in that repressive moment to do politics in that playful way.

Part of the richness of organizing around the referendum was bringing a sense of pleasure to the dour sense of what New York City politics can be. "And then there is always the big 'you are not going to get credibility if you go on New York One [a local television] with a big bird head,'" JK explained. Yet the group persevered.

By 2002, there was a legal settlement to resolve the garden dispute. The Attorney General's Temporary Restraining Order prevented further bulldozing in the final two years of the Giuliani administration from Febuary 2000 after Esperanza until after he left office in 2001.. Another 200 gardens were made permanent park space in the fall of 2002 in a settlement between the Spitzer and the new mayor, Michael Bloomberg. Many have argued that the legal settlement that came out of the Esperanza campaign was a success. The Attorney General even noted that the reason he imposed the temporary restraining order was because "a giant tomato told me to."

While the Spitzer/Bloomberg settlement represented real progress, some 150 other community gardens[?] remained vulnerable. (Earth Celebrations, 2004;

Mikalbrown, 2002; More Gardens, undated; Spitzer, 2002, 2002a). All these actions seemed to compel neighborhood members to participate in a process of creating change. Faced with a gentrification and globalization process that was homogenizing and privatizing public spaces at an astounding rate, garden activists dug in to defend their neighborhoods through a wide range of tactics. Their campaign involved a savvy use of research along with an engaging model of protest, which bridged a praxis divide between a theoretical demand for public space and a real world struggle over land use in a global city. As William Etundi recalled:

> Around Esperanza, that was a campaign that was quite clearly lost; the garden was destroyed. But that really gelled a whole lot of people around a specific thing, a lot of specific connections between people. It was an emotional everything. It was challenging. It was growth. It was building connections, networks. It really catalyzed different sectors of people around one thing.

The Last Street Party

While Esperanza was one of the great campaigns in the history of Lower East Side activism, it was also a tough act to follow. In the months after the Battle of Seattle, members of RTS organized a squad to go down to Washington, DC to protest at the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank meetings in April 2000. The group members dressed like "loan sharks" wearing baby blue tuxedos and sang their own version of "Mack the Knife" comparing IMF lending policies to loan sharks: "the shark has pretty teeth dear."

Many new activists came into the group and, by extension, a new politics arose through their participation in these actions. Matthew Roth, who had just moved to New York at the time, plugged into RTS NYC during those actions. "I think I saw you in a shark suit," he explained when I asked him how he got involved as an organizer. "I saw

these beautiful people in these powder blue suits with shark wigs. It was A16, the IMF protests in Washington, DC." He continues:

> I had been working at *The Nation* magazine as a researcher, intern, and fact-checker. And then this guy wrote an article that was going into the issue right before the April 16th big anti-IMF/WTO thing. It was a small article about RTS in London [see Ghazvinian, 2000]. And I fact-checked it. And I was like, wow, what is this? Everything about it struck me as just fantastic. It was a bunch of heretics. It was a bunch of revelers and celebrators. And it struck me as like, having lived in New York for only six or seven months, as exactly what I wanted to do in the streets of New York. I wanted to tear them up and plant trees in them. And I got really excited about it. And the author came in and said, 'Oh, but there's a Reclaim the Streets New York. You should find them. They are going to be down at the A16 rally.'

Andrew Boyd (2000), the founder of the Billionaires for Bush (or Gore) plugged into RTS New York after the Seattle protests. He recalls:

> Five months later [after the WTO protests in November, 1999], my friend Lois and I drove from New York to DC, the back of her pickup crammed with shark costumes for a Reclaim the Streets (RTS) action. RTS began in London's early-'90s underground rave scene when ravers and performance artists came out of the warehouses for political actions that were part protest, part party. Exciting and easy to reproduce, these "festivals of resistance" quickly went global. As part of RTS's "flying squad," Lois and I were dressed as corporate loan sharks, wearing plastic jaws, fins cut from file folders, and gray tuxedos borrowed from a South Bronx community center. With about 100 other sharks we moved from blockade to blockade, bringing cheer to those linking arms, and joining human chains at flash points along the perimeter when, for example, a bus of delegates tried to push its way through to the meetings. All the while our costumes made the visual statement that the IMF and World Bank operate much like predatory lenders on a global scale, their loans to poor countries coming with cruel strings attached.

Having read about the group, "I had the idea in my head and I went down there and didn't really know anybody," Roth explained. "I went down with a couple of the interns from *The Nation*, saw the shark suits, saw the powder blue, people having a lot more fun than anybody else out there, really eating it up." Roth's experience with RTS

was very much about witnessing a counterpublic narrative, *The Nation* story about the group, and feeling inspired to join the group after this experience.

Yet RTS was by no stretch of the imagination the only group bringing a playful spirit to the IMF/World Bank actions. John Sellers of the Ruckus Society, which helped make the Seattle protests so special only months prior, describes the humorous approach his group took to dealing with the intense security which protestors knew they would encounter at A16:

> During A16 in Washington, one thing we did that was super effective and really funny… that we'd seen in Seattle was a phalanx of storm troopers walking around and they looked like something out of Star Wars, battalions of them marching the streets and stuff, and I swore to myself that I wouldn't be caught again without a giant sound system that could blare the Death Star theme (from Star Wars). And so we had this powerful backpack system for April 16th and I remember marching up to the big barricade where the big tremendous standoff was and DC's brass and even some National uard guys were like ten feet above us looking down and all these cops with their gas masks on and their whole storm trooper look. And we walked out and CNN was there and we started blaring that Death Star theme. Daaan Dann Da Na Ta DDDDAaaa Dan da na. It was incredible. All the cops took their masks off in a couple of minutes. You could see that the brass must have been having a major conversation cause the CNN guys were just cracking up and lovin' it. If you use pop culture... if globalization is so good, why are there storm troopers out there in the streets having to defend it from the public?

Much of the struggle over the meaning and effect of the IMF would take place within the context of public sphere discourse, news reports, the Internet, and newspaper articles. In the weeks after the protests, many in RTS New York discussed the public face of the group and its impact on discussions about the IMF. As with the Seattle protests – which helped inform a whole cohort about the WTO, an institution they had heard little about – the aim of RTS with the IMF protests was to introduce a critique into discussion of another little known institution. By the end the debate about the IMF, Nobel laureate

Joseph Stiglitz (2002), a former chief economist of the World Bank, would take the activists' side of the argument.

After returning home from the action, on April 17, William Etundi posted an email message with the subject head "A16 SUCCESS!" that specifically talked about the linkage between the RTS actions and the larger story of IMF policies moving from a counter-public into a broader public sphere of discussion, debate, and news coverage:

> Everyone who participated in and supported the events in Washington this weekend (and continuing) should be proud. Not only did we create a major disruption and delay in the meetings, we also successfully pushed the issue on to front pages and into social consciousness of people all around the nation. In fact because of our mass response our opposition is receiving more of the nation's attention than the imperialist organizations themselves, creating a powerful public awareness that will prove to be the first step in truly smashing the World Bank and IMF (and WTO.)

The email specifically discussed the ways RTS' playful model of protest helped advance this counter-public message. "Reclaim The Streets NYC's role in the events came off amazingly. We created festivity and disruption all over the city by dancing, singing and liberating space. Ain't no party like an RTS party." It followed with a specific example of press coverage of the event. "There is a fairly good article in the *New York Times*... 'Financial Leaders Meet as Protests Clog Washington,' by John Kifner with David E. Sanger."

RTS members also dissected the coverage of the action in the movement media, including the Independent Media Center (IMC or Indymedia), which allow anyone to post reports of actions. On April 18, under the subject head "RTS mention at Indymedia (?)," XjwalkX observed:

> I was reading through the articles on the Indymedia site and came across this paragraph with this somewhat confusing account of an incident that bears a slight resemblance to the van blockade three or four of us sharks took part in (the one we were told was full of World Bank accountants), but seems to differ from what I saw on several points, esp. the pepper spray and length of time – did this happen and I didn't notice? In any case, we rocked that town.
>
> Excerpt: "Also on Sunday several members of Reclaim the Streets of New York City, claimed 15th Street and Pennsylvania Avenue, preventing a tourist bus from moving forward. Tourists appeared a bit amused by the incident, snapping pictures of demonstrators and waving to them. Within 15 minutes some 30 police on foot and horseback appeared along with officers dressed in body armor, who forcibly removed the five protesters lying on the street in front of the bus. Police arriving on the scene wielded long batons, striking several individuals to the ground, using pepper spray to remove the individuals. There were no arrests at that incident.
>
> full text:
> http://www.indymedia.org/display.php3?article_id=1064

Later in the day, under the subject head "Re; RTS mention at Indymedia (?)," Ariane

Burgess also commented on the coverage of the RTS action on the IMC website:

> Thank you for bringing this to wider attention. Interesting how even our own independent media can be misleading, of course the use of video can help to prevent this.
>
> I was there and the account is definitely inaccurate. The minivan that was surrounded by people was not full of tourists, it was being escorted by a police car and the 2 vehicles were attempting to enter into the police-secured White House grounds at E Street and 15th. People surrounded the minivan and the police car. The police officer on the passenger side got out of the car and holding his extra long night stick horizontally in both hands had began aggressively shoving it into people. I saw no lying on the ground but I did see one person block the minivan with his body and bicycle. The circle of people around the van were so strong that the van and its escort were unable to move through. A mounted unit was brought in and used to break the crowd. This was one of the strongest blocks that I witnessed and there were many shark fins and tuxs present.
>
> In all my circling of the IMF building that the various blocks and flying squad RTS rocked!
>
> http://dc.indymedia.org/newswire/display/2148

The IMC newswire also included photos from the RTS street theatre under the headline, “Massive corn die-in at Monsanto.” On April 20th, chuckyeo, who helped organize the RTS action, posted a comment on the photos on the newswire offering a narrative of the event:

> [A]fter the rts ny shark flying squad, and others, had prevented several buses and vans from entering the gates to the white house to be shuttled to the wb-imf meetings, rts moved on to the nearby ronald reagan trade center, the reputed hdq. of the dreaded monsanto co. the building appeared to be a dreay, cheerless, almost gloomy, depressing ugly structure. approx. 80 rts sharks formed two chorus lines, at the building’s entrance, and danced and sang the song..."the twelve days of christmas monsanto gave to me"

The RTS members ate pieces of genetically altered corn, sang “The Twelve Gifts of Monsanto” to the tune of "The Twelve Days of Christmas," and slowly every member of the group fell to the ground in theatrical death – an homage to ACT UP’s signature “die-in.” Group members sang the following lyrics:

> On the first day of Christmas Monsanto gave to me
> A greenwash campaign
>
> On the second day of Christmas Monsanto gave to me
> New super weeds
> and a greenwash campaign
>
> On the third day of Christmas Monsanto gave to me
> Gene altered seeds
> New super weeds
> And a greenwash campaign
>
> On the fourth day of Christmas Monsanto gave to me
> Firefly tobacco
> Gene altered seeds
> New super weeds
> And a greenwash campaign

On the fifth day of Christmas Monsanto gave to me
Dead butterflies
Firefly tobacco
Gene altered seeds
New super weeds
And a greenwash campaign

On the sixth day of Christmas Monsanto gave to me
Seed piracy lawsuits
Dead butterflies
Firefly tobacco
Gene altered seeds
New super weeds
And a greenwash campaign

On the seventh day of Christmas Monsanto gave to me
Ad campaign lies
Seed piracy lawsuits
Dead butterflies
Firefly tobacco
Gene altered seeds
New super weeds
And a greenwash campaign

On the eighth day of Christmas Monsanto gave to me
Hormone injected cattle
Ad campaign lies
Seed piracy lawsuits
Dead butterflies
Firefly tobacco
Gene altered seeds
New super weeds
And a greenwash campaign

On the ninth day of Christmas Monsanto gave to me
Deaths from Agent Orange
Hormone injected cattle
Ad campaign lies
Seed piracy lawsuits
Dead butterflies
Firefly tobacco
Gene altered seeds
New super weeds
And a greenwash campaign

On the tenth day of Christmas Monsanto gave to me
Salmon gene tomatoes
Deaths from Agent Orange
Hormone injected cattle
Ad campaign lies
Seed piracy lawsuits
Dead butterflies
Firefly tobacco
Gene altered seeds
New super weeds
And a greenwash campaign

On the eleventh day of Christmas Monsanto gave to me
Biotech potatoes
Salmon gene tomatoes
Deaths from Agent Orange
Hormone injected cattle
Ad campaign lies
Seed piracy lawsuits
Dead butterflies
Firefly tobacco
Gene altered seeds
New super weeds
And a greenwash campaign

On the twelveth day of Christmas Monsanto gave to me
PCBs in rivers
Biotech potatoes
Salmon gene tomatoes
Deaths from Agent Orange
Hormone injected cattle
Ad campaign lies
Seed piracy lawsuits
Dead butterflies
Firefly tobacco
Gene altered seeds
New super weeds
And a greenwash campaign

Organizing for the IMF action was a great deal of work. In the two weeks after that action, members of RTS planned yet another action in conjunction with May Day activities scheduled for May 1. RTS London had planned a guerilla gardening action for

May Day 2000, so RTS NYC followed suit, organizing its own gardening action for the same day (see Duncombe, 2000). When that day came, police – who pre-emptively arrested a group of anarchists wearing bandanas over their faces under the aegis of a 1945 mask law (Bogad, 2003) – followed the group's march from Union Square through the financial center, across the Brooklyn Bridge, and over to a public space under the bridge where activists had hung a banner reading "Free the Land" and cleaned up the space so as to create a garden. Many had a great time with the action. But the heady feeling of the springtime gave way to a a much darker feeling the following summer and fall.

The Politics of Protest and Party

After the garden action, many committed themselves to coming back to work in their own neighborhood. There, the group faced a dilemma which is at the center of the politics of play. Around the world, RTS has been able to get hundreds of people to their actions. Yet the tension remains between those who participate because they like the street party and those who hope to link the party aspect with larger political organizing (What Ever Happened to, undated).

Summer 2000 was a difficult time for Lower East Side activism. LESC stopped meeting that summer. Many were more interested in just attending affinity group meeting or working on global justice issues, without the overarching collective structure. After a while, LESC meetings felt like just another additional meeting to attend. Some suggested that the group had become the Fleetwood Mac of Lower East Side activism. So many members had connected intimately that many did not feel comfortable together any more Some of us described it as 'the Fleetwood Mac syndrome' for the 1970's band which

made their best records after the group formed into two marriages which later split apart. A similar fate befell the Fed Up Queers, which also stopped meeting during the same period. Regardless of the cause, what was lost for RTS NYC was the connection between street party protest and a ministry of love, a labor group, and a public space group. Few recognized this as a limitation at the time. But in retrospect, it was. Without a holistic organizing campaign, the politics of play is far less effective for creating change.

That summer, RTS felt a pull from various directions and several long time members left the group. Brooke Lehman recalls:

> When I left Reclaim the Streets, I was a bit frustrated – a feeling I've since gotten over – but I had an idea of where it was going and I was not into that idea. There was a moment when Reclaim the Streets kind of lost its politics for a while.

Some in the leadership of RTS had always felt that it was through its connection with LESC that the group was able to stay connected with politics. To a degree, that was reduced with the demise of LESC.

During the summer a small group of RTS members tried to go to the South Bronx to organize an action which addressed issues of environmental racism. Yet the group was unable to generate support from the general body of the meeting, and the idea was shot down. William Etundi recalls:

> That was a pivotal moment for RTS. Actually that was my last involvement in RTS. I don't fault the group for that. But I think it was an incredible learning moment for me and I hope it was a learning moment for the group. It wasn't a matter of fault. Like you, myself and Amanda had this idea of partnering with groups in the South Bronx to work on a local issue in the community, to bring the Reclaim the Streets group out of the Lower East Side, out of our comfort zone to work on something more tangible and more meaningful and really build alliances across boroughs and across different cultural stratas of people. And it would have taken a lot more energy than we were used to putting into actions 'cause building coalitions to do actions takes a lot of energy, more energy than RTS was used to putting out. And it wasn't ready to do that. Instead it did really the most safe action it could have. And I'm not sure if there was a way that South Bronx action

> could have really worked well, 'cause I don't think that either sphere was at a place to make that go. And I go back and forth with thinking, do those things need to go?

While members of the group were unable to make connections with those in Bronx, the failure to outline a strategy to do so illumenated a a limitation for the group. Etundi reflects on the point:

> Those were challenging moments then. And there are challenging moments when you wonder how much of this is fun and how much of this is trying to create change because sometimes it does feel like a social club. And it's a slippery slope. Is this just a group of buddies acting silly in the streets or is this a group that is really dedicated to making things happen? I think that is something within this sphere of making politics interesting of keeping checking yourself on.

Lehmann recalls an RTS action from the fall of 2000:

> For me, RTS was always about educating people and bringing them into politics through the pageantry and the dancing. The last RTS [action] that I went to was just somewhere in the East Village and it was very small. But it had no political content other than the right to party in the streets, which is political in and of itself, but it kind of lost it. It was the tiny little one that was on seventh street or something.

The theme of that action was "Reclaim the streets for a world without cars." The aim of the action was to build on the old RTC NYC broadside that stated:

> We reprove the street as a place where cars are free to pollute air, congest the city, and ultimately upset [AND?] divide entire communities. As our friends in the UK say, "the privitization of public space in the form of the car continues the erosion of neighborhood and community that defines our metropolis.

Yet the message was not effectively communicated. Lehman continues:

> [T]here were no flyers, no nothing. I wasn't in Reclaim the Streets in the summer, but I came to it and was like, what is this about? And I didn't think that anybody had put any energy into letting me know what it was about. That was when I was like, I don't know.

Anthropologist David Graeber (undated) recalled seeing flyers and talking with an RTS member who said they had been left up at Union Square. Others recalled the action with fondness. Kelly Moore, a long term LESC member and bike activist, participated in the bike ride that later turned into the street party. After the event she wrote:

> I have two notebooks at home, one called "I Love Bikes" and the other "I Hate Cars." In the bike notebook I write about all of the joyful moments I have on my bike, the ecstasy of seeing the world in a slower motion than most people ever see it, all of the different kinds of people and bikes I see, all the amazing things people can carry on their bikes, and the look of contentment on the faces of bicyclists. On the day of the RTS/Critical Mass action, I wrote in my notebook: "Could human experience get any better than this? Playful, festive, beautiful, expressive, and diverse. I was dressed as a yellow and red sunflower. No one would call me a "sunny" sort of person; how grateful I was to be able to express that side of me. Every kind of person was there, showing off what life could be like – IS like – when people stop abiding by rules that say: be one kind of person, you are what you buy, disconnect from nature, art belongs in museums, faster is better, shut yourself off from strangers (Shepard and Moore, 2002).

The action reminded Moore that there are moments when joining with others to say yes to possibility and justice are profoundly important choices. Moore, who had had her fair share of struggles against injustice during her formative years in Tuscan [Tuscany? Tucson?], felt that her participation was part of a larger commitment to speaking out. Throughout the ride, she reflected on a clinic defense action at Planned Parenthood in Tucson. “When they [the anti-abortionists] pushed us back and back toward the clinic, they pinched and hit people. The cops did nothing. Later a cop asked me ‘why men were out there’ and whether we were a ‘gay group.’” Somehow, that streak of hatred and homophobia changed Moore. “Nothing's been the same ever since,” she says. After leaving Tucson, she challenged herself to live up to that larger lesson. She recalls that she brought some of righteous indignation to the RTS action:

> I decided that day that the best life I could have would be to make sure that I joined others in public and private places to celebrate life, to defy those who hate,

> and those who want to divide us. And that's what I was doing in New York on September 29.

Here, the hunger for caring connection was projected as a counterbalance, a challenge to change systems of domination.

Police filled the streets around the proposed meeting site for the September dance party at St. Mark's Church in the Bowery. Some suggested the party should be canceled so as not to interfere with Critical Mass. RTS was already high on the police radar, and activists did not want the same to happen with Critical Mass. Yet the cavalcade of riders careened into the dance party in progress and there were no arrests at the party (although police had arrested riders). Befuddled police officers, who had tried to surround those organizing the street party, stood watching as activists simply moved the party site. Activists trickled away from St. Marks Church to meet down the street. Part of the success of the action was the agility of the collective body of dancers and riders. Moore explains:

> The real power of the Sept. 29 action was that we were not the things that interfered with the movement of the automobiles that destroy the earth and speed people away from each other, we were not one bloc of "protestors," but people on foot, bikes, skates, and skateboards who moved together as a big amoeba made up of dazzling light, humor, and joy.

Yet while many enjoyed the party, others remained skeptical of the utility of such actions. Some said it was not worth the effort. Others felt it was too much work for too little reward. And others felt ambivalent about the politics, especially after the Fall 2000 election results. The police confiscated the RTS sound system at the end of the night. It would be the last 'old school' RTS street party for a long time.

Group Process within a Politics of Pleasure

At its best, the politics of pleasure, of making politics intriguing and enticing, involves a social Eros between mingling minds. Another dynamic of the politics of play is an ambiguity about means and ends. Describing the meetings of the original English RTS, John Jordan explains:

> It was never really thinking about the process. RTS meetings were the most macho, boring, dull, unembodied, unpleasurable experiences ever. They really were. The culture, here, the radical culture here is way less trained in issues of racism and sexism. There wasn't a way out of it. There wasn't that culture of training and awareness that is much greater in the States. You have the tools more than we had at the time. The meetings were really dreadful.

But many had similar experiences with RTS NYC. Amanda Hickman reflected on the irony of a group that aspired to create a better world, yet had difficulty overcoming interruptions and conflict during meetings: "Are we trying to build a better world or a more abusive world, 'cause the abusive one already exists out there. We don't need to replicate it here."

"If you can't even play with each other, how are you gonna play with the world?" Kate Crane, who worked with the group, pondered. She explains:

> The last year, I stopped going to meetings because I have been struggling with three or four jobs. The year before that, I got really tired of a couple of people. There were a handful of people whom I wanted to throttle every time they opened their mouths. And it wasn't fun for me and it made me angry.

Jordan reflected on the demise of RTS in London:

> What happens was that when repression happens… what's really interesting is that, we didn't' … and again this is my subjective view. You could talk to other people and get a very different perspective. But when the really serious repression happened and, in all the papers, we were enemy number one, all the pictures, and we were going to bring everything that Britain held dear to come crumbling down, when all that stuff started to come down around 2000, especially around

> May Day 2000, post June the 18th [when the group organized protests around the G8 meetings and several McDonalds were smashed in London]. And then we started to get very pointed surveillance and threats and all of that sort of stuff. And we did not get together as an affinity group and discuss it…. Starhawk has said, 'more groups and social movements destroy themselves than any number of cops.' And that's exactly what happened.

There is only a three to five year typical life span for direct action groups. "True," Jordan noted. "That's a problem and something we shouldn't just take for granted. One, I for one do not think that direct action groups think strategically. And two, they don't include play in the process."

Super Barrio Man

Despite these difficulties, RTS members kept moving forward. By spring 2001, the group worked with the old LESC Community Labor Coalition to put together another large and successful action. The aim of the action was to speak up for the rights of undocumented workers. After years of standing in picket line on street corners and fighting at the negotiating table, the coalition turned to street theater. From 1999 through 2001, union workers met global justice advocates at Union Square to march on May Day. For 2001, RTS and the Community Labor Coalition organized theatrical wrestling matches between Super Barrio Man, a cartoon character based on a Mexican folk hero, and Union Busters Large and Small. Super Barrio Man was played by the campaign's lead organizer. The groups took the match and the May Day march to the front of a number of the green grocer stores where workers were being paid sweatshop wages, thus highlighting the plight of the workers in a unique, edgy fashion (Bogad, 2003, Ness 2002).

In so doing, the organizers brought the case to the attention of the attorney general. The day after the May 2001 protests and wrestling matches, Spitzer filed claims against four grocers for all back wages due to employees, who were being paid an average of $2.60 an hour. Joyfully peaking in character, Stephen Duncombe – one of the primary organizers – questioned whether Spitzer would have acted without all of the protests and pickets. "It sends a clear and loud message to other greengrocers about what happens to those who underpay their workers, block organizing, and hire thugs. Is it mere coincidence that these charges were filed a day after the appearance of Super Barrio Man, Champion of the People?"

In the End

The Buy Nothing Day action, the Seattle WTO actions, and the Esperanza Garden campaign that followed functioned as battlefronts in a public/private debate. In the era of globalization, there remains a need for civil society in between the market and the government. These groups are part of a burgeoning movement of do-it-yourself activism aimed at preserving public space and civic culture. Through radical street performance, play, culture jamming, protest street parties, and other pranks, spaces left for dead regained life, public sexual cultures are remembered/reenacted, and new stories emerged.

Chapter VII
Playing in Topsy-Turvy Times:
From Carnival to Carnage

By the year 2000, carnival had become the primary metaphor for the new model of protest. "The central idea behind the carnival," L.A. Kauffman explains, is that protests gain vitality if they mirror or actually create a feeling for a more caring, generative world:

> In a funny way, it's not unlike creating a community garden. It's a way of saying, we not only oppose what's happening now but we have a vision of a different moral order, in which people are free to express their creative energies to the greatest extent, a world where public space is dedicated to community-building and fostering public expression, instead of given over to commercial expression (2004).

If there was one theme that tied together the divergent themes of the global justice movement – which many first encountered with the Seattle World Trade Organization (WTO) protests in 1999 – it is the overlapping notions of creative play, community building, and carnival. For many, carnival was the perfect metaphor for a movement organized around the notion of playful engagement. This play model succeeded and propelled activists through a heady nearly two years from the "Battle of Seattle" through the World Trade Center attacks in September 2001.

The attacks seemed to pulverize the momentum of one the most hopeful movements many had witnessed in a lifetime of activism. In many ways, the play ground to a halt after attacks, and so did the momentum of the global justice movement. Yet the

carnival made a comeback, and so did the movement. This chapter considers the trajectory of a movement destined to involve play in topsy-turvy times.

Creative play has long been a strategy of cultural activism. Yet all too often, this form of cultural activism is ignored or considered an add-on instead of a central element of organizing practices (Kahn, 1995). “The fact that play and culture are actually interwoven with one another was neither observed nor expressed, whereas for us the whole point is to show that genuine, pure play is one of the main bases of civilization,” Huizinga explains (1950/2004, p. 120).

For those involved with the global justice movement, this creative play took place most prominently within the context of a series of social and political festivals, convergence actions, and “Carnivals Against Capital.” Here was a brand of protest that merged the joyous, ecstatic spirit of exhilarating entertainment with a political agenda aimed at progressive political change. Within this festive, revolutionary carnival atmosphere, progressive elements of political change would be linked with notions of social renewal, moving spectators to join in the fun, to become part of the concrete action of social change (Ornstein, 1998, p. xiv-xv, 6-9).

From 2000 through 2004, this model was pushed to its limit as protest as carnival struggled with the specter of carnage, terror, and war. Yet for a while, the model of “party as protest” seemed simple enough. Reclaim the Streets (RTS) London describes this potpourri: “The magical collision of carnival and rebellion, play and politics is such a potent recipe and relatively easy to pull off that anyone can do it," (Notes, 2003a, p. 61). “The carnival is one of the sort of play tools,” Andrew Boyd explains. “It grew up organically, partly out of the decentralized civil disobedience model, converging with the

dominant underground cultural sensibility with play and raving and all-night dance parties and do-it-yourself culture and free self-expression."

Playing Jazz in Topsy-Turvy Times

During most of the old RTS street parties in New York City, the do-it-yourself (DiY) sound system stopped working. Yet the backup was always provided by the rhythmic sounds of the Hungry March Band. If one looks back at the most powerful social and cultural activism over the last five years in New York, many of the highlights include performances by the Hungry March Band (HMB).

The first time I encountered the band was in a community garden in the winter of 1999. Activists from RTS New York converged with the band for a successful parade/street party to defend the gardens. Later that fall, the band led activists from Union Square through the subway to emerge and take over Times Square in a solidarity action before the WTO meetings in Seattle. The following April, the band led a group dressed as loan sharks in their rendition of "Mack the Knife" during protests of World Bank/International Monetary Fund (IMF) meetings in Washington, DC. The Hungry March Band functioned as the catalyst for the transformation of the street party into social movement, modeled on a carnival's goal of turning "the world upside down with joyous abandon and to celebrate our indestructible lust for life" (Notes, 2003, p. 175).

Just as protest was intersecting with a global movement aimed at reclaiming public space through a burlesque festival of possibilities, the Hungry March Band was there to provide a soundtrack. And most of the time, the band brought its Kurt Weill/ Brechtian/Weimar boogie-woogie to their actions cum performances. The band combined

the “harmelodies” of Ornette Coleman with Guy Dubord’s spectacle to create something new; it’s sad yet ecstatic tone seemed to echo a cultural demise as high culture clashed with low. Their performances created stages out of subway cars, concert halls, even beaches. Horns and drums escalated with a throbbing, yearning, frenetic quality like that felt at the best ska and punk shows. Yet they combined this with a marching band tradition which borrows from the best traditions in world music – one part the transcendent call of New Orleans saints , another the sound of a Mariachi band, overlapping into global sensibility and culture.

If there is one activist/performer who has integrated the spirit of play into her work and life, it is Urania Mylonas. A veteran of Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador (CISPES)] and ACT UP, Mylonas is currently a member of the HMB, the Church of Stop Shopping, and the Billionaires for Bush. Between these gigs, she writes, sings and performs as a twirler in New York. For Mylonas, humor and irony get to the truth of things. But the performance – that’s where we find the heat that Victor Turner (1969) says is needed to turn play into a process that creates change.

The first time Mylonas saw the Hungry March Band was during their performance at the Halloween parade in New York in 1997. “[M]aybe it was 1998,” she concedes. “ [T]hey were playing while someone was kicking a flaming soccer ball around,” Mylonas explains. “It stopped me dead in my tracks, and not just because it had singed my sneakers. Somehow, I knew that this burning soccer ball, these musicians and their siren call, were my destiny” (Hungry March Band, undated). That heat would characterize many of the band’s best shows, as well as the pranks she was involved with in groups such as the Billionaires. Like many in this study, Mylonas suggests these performances

create change by creating communities of friends, activists, and cohorts. “My father was in a march band,” Mylonas explains. His work in performance in an Eastern European marching band overlapped with political struggle. There’s always more to play than just fun. “He played bass drum and was always the one who got caught,” she continues. As a baton twirler with the Hungry March Band – who have their own issues with police attempting to arrest members involved in less-than-permited street actions – she brings these practical lessons to her experience with the group.

I asked Mylonas where she found meaning in the night after night of performances with the various groups with which she is involved. “Connecting with others, such as in New Orleans,” she explained in reference to the group’s Spring 2005 trip to New Orlean’s Mardi Gras street festivals – the last before the devastation of Hurricane Katrina the following summer. Of all the years of playful activism, some Hungry March Band moments in New Orleans were a highlight for Mylonas:

> I was also wondering how on earth the band could play, and play well, for that long. But play they did. They don’t call HMB the hardest working marching band in the, er, marching band world for nothing (undated).

Mylonas would recall countless wondrous moments during the parades, “such as when Sandra pointed up to the trees, whose branches sparkled with hundreds of beads, illuminated by the lampposts,” she wrote. “It was really breathtaking.”

Throughout the week, the band reveled in the almost magical realist quality of experience overlapping with Technicolor reality. “Probably the best compliment I’ve ever heard came from a guy who said, ‘You guys remind me of a John Waters film,’” She recalled. “The parade organizers actually called Samantha the next day and invited us to do another parade.” Throughout the festival, the band reveled in the experience of life

outside of regular experience that accompanies many carnival scenes and play moments, as Huizinga describes. “Our third parade was Krewe of Tucks, also Uptown. There is a kind of quiet beauty about a parade whose theme is the toilet,” Mylonas remembered. Here, the festival seemed to honor one of the twentieth century’s most iconographic play images: the readymade toilet made famous by Marcel Duchamp (see Molesworth, 1998).

Most of all, the band was able to thrive in the easy otherworldly beauty of the topsy-turvy world which took hold during the cavalcade. “That night there was an eerie mist in the streets, and if you looked behind you, the band was coming out of the mist, kind of like that movie ‘The Fog,’ only without the homicidal pirates,” Mylonas wrote. As we talked, she remembered a moment when a small African American girl marched, danced, and twirled with her, thriving in the authentic rituals of her community and neighborhood, which only months after the festival would be completely displaced with the hurricanes.

Hungry March Band shows create a participatory quality of performance, play, dancing, politics, joy, sweating bodies, and a cultural activism that rightfully speaks to the hopes and possibilities of a holy American landscape, a world where we’d like to live. As always, the improvisation of jazz is a metaphor for democracy itself. If the call of the movements is to globalize democracy, not corporate rule, the Hungry March Band has embodied both the sorrowful empty promises of this project as well as its possibilities. What happens along the way is a glimpse that of what freedom really can mean, if only for a moment. When the band jams, its playful mix of cultural play and protest offers a glimpse of the kind of “new humanism” and “praxis” Henri Lefebvre must have imagined when he called for urbanists to demand a new “right to the city,” which could

be achieved through a new jouissance, of sensual pleasure, free conscious movement, protest, carnival, theater, rent strikes, and recognition of the radical possibility of a lived moment (Merrifield, 2003, p. 84).

Play, Carnival, and Community Building

As the examples of RTS and the Hungry March Band demonstrate, it is useful to consider protest as carnival, a core component of Mikhail Bakhtin's work. He uses it to consider issues of empowerment, knowledge construction, and the embrace of social justice. This concept integrates all the themes outlined so far in the paper: the liberatory nature of humor, culture, performance, and the possibility of play. Further, by breaking down power hierarchies, carnival helps actors dream of and act on a more equitable brand of democracy than standard forms of political participation: "Carnival is a nonviolent form of social transformation as it breaks and reverses established orders of power," (Irving and Young, 2002, p. 20-25).

With the carnival model, play overlaps with a form of protest that conjures up notions of ritual, world music, and dance. Andrew Boyd talked about the ways the carnival model of protest borrows from a wide range of influences:

> So, for example, the South African marches, they were getting shot downin the street for, like, fifty years. I don't know if it would be called play – they would have these incredible dances, but they were warrior dances. So all of that hatred and all of that tension would go. It was similar to how our rave music relates to our street carnivals; their stomping, their dancing, their chanting, kind of meshed with their protest swarm. They would kind of march, stomp, dance, shake their arms up in the air. And it was very rhythmic. It harkens back to Zulu warrior marches with a sword and a spear, they were trying to scare the enemy. That's not play, but it's art, it's dance, it's the cultural expression that was totally appropriate for their kind of struggle.

Much of the utility of play as a community building strategy involves its capacity to create open spaces where new sets of rules and social relations emerge. Huizinga suggests that countless human activities are organized like games. Play that is competitive, goal orientated, and orchestrated takes place in closed, occupied space, whereas cooperative, improvisational, and open-ended play takes place in open space (Bial, 2004, p. 115). Socially transformative play generally takes play in such open spaces.

Larry Bogad ((2005, a).) breaks down political performance into contrasting frameworks: monological ("occupied/closed space") and dialogical ("open space") public protest. The difference between these two approaches highlights the contrast between what Turner (1969) differentiates as authentic transformative ritual, where social change is possible, from status quo-reinforcing ceremony, which is repeated without shifting power relations. In terms of practices, the problem with occupied spaces is that closed minds usually inhabit them. Weissman (1990, p. 252) explains that after all, "An oppressive environment lowers the odds on the gestation of creativity and innovation." On the other hand, open-space models says Bogad (2005a), "open a space for collective-individual, do-It-yourself creativity." The model's emphasis on "freeflowing multivocality" is often described as "carnivalesque."

The carnival model of protest begins with a recognition of the possibilities of pleasure. In *The Production of Space*, Henri Lefebvre (1974, p. 177) explains: "play, struggle, art, festival – in short Rros – are themselves a necessity." These forms of transgression cultivate a social Eros/energy that create new kinds of spaces and social relations. In contrast to models of scarcity, this approach assumes violations of social

norms create new forms of space. Lefebvre explains, “A productive squandering of energy is not a contradiction in terms: an expenditure of energy may be deemed ‘productive’ so long as some change, no matter how small, is thereby effected in the world."

One small example of the sort of change in space that Lefebvre is describing is the community gardens in New York. The spaces have become playgrounds for creative play, protest, and community building. For New Yorkers, community gardens function as directly lived “representational spaces” and spaces of “difference” (Lefebvre 1974, p.39). And, as Kauffman (2004), writes “[?]these spaces, like the carnival itself, function as spaces where activists create an image of an affirmative possibility, a space where creativity and democracy thrive.”

Inherent within this movement is a struggle to maintain spaces, such as gardens, where citizens can meet and deliberate over common problems – especially as gathering places for public discussion become more and more restricted. Without a public commons, there is little room for democratic participation. Without spaces for community to grow, it is very difficult for democracy to thrive. This is not a new point. More than a century ago, Jane Addams (1910/1998) taught new immigrants how to engage in civic culture through the concept of "socializing democracy” in settlement houses. Building on this sentiment, the global justice movement tries to establish spaces where citizens can engage, connect, play together, and build communities from the bottom up.

For those interested in creating a model of organizing in which there is no difference between leaders and spectators, the carnival model offers useful tools. Instead

of leaders speaking and followers listening, the carnival breaks down distinction between the two, allowing everyone to be a leader. Joe Tuba of the Hungry March Band explains his entry into the group within such a model. “I came into this band through Reclaim the Streets. The structure of it is, like, you basically can show up and participate. It’s kind of the antithesis of top down. Its not even bottom up, it’s just like – horizontal.” Others describe this low-threshold approach to community building as participatory culture. Groups such as RTS and others put out a press release, list a time, a place, and a theme for a party – such as inviting everyone to come dressed as Santa Claus for an event called Santacon. Abby Ehmann, who helped organize during the SexPanic! struggle explains:

> I’ve been very inspired by Santacon… Participatory culture as my friend calls it. I never had a term for it. But where you just put out that this thing is happening. And it isn’t at a specific place and it’s not sponsored by anyone and it doesn’t cost anything, it’s just something that everyone can come and participate in.

By design, this “carnivalesque” organizing approach honors multiple forms of participation (Bogad, 2005b). Everyone is invited to play a part. Thus, the threshold for participation is very low. “Carnival does not know footlights,” Bakhtin explains, for just as a stage with no lights would limit a theatrical performance, “[f]ootlights would destroy a carnival…" (1984, p.7). It’s a space in which everyone involved communes in a celebration of difference as diversity and democracy intermingle in an image of what our world could look like. And in the process, the carnival attracts audiences.

Another form of participatory carnival is the subway party. Here, members of RTS, Ransom Corp, and their offshoots announce a color for a train line (which serves a dress code), a time, and a meeting place; members arrive and create whatever ambiance they hope to create inside the trains as they careen through the night. In peak moments,

train parties become street carnivals moving through the city for hours on end. Sometimes they end up in Harlem; other times they end up at the ocean for a polar bear swim off Coney Island; after Esperanza Garden was bulldozed, a group of revelers exited the subway only to rampage over the fence surrounding the space and tear it down. Kauffmanrecalls:

> The other night, several hundred people calling themselves the Subway Liberation Front staged a raucous outlaw party, taking over first an L and then an A train. A large part of the crowd, juiced by its own defiance, proceeded to the recently bulldozed Esperanza Garden on Manhattan's Lower East Side, where they tore down the developer's fence and began replanting the land. This impromptu action came at a high price: With no news cameras or legal observers to provide cover for the radical gardeners, the NYPD swooped in, badly beating a number of the participants (2000).

Thus, what emerges within these parties is a context for pleasure, personal freedom, and risk. Yet the parties have their roots in New York City party culture and history. Joe Tuba, who has participated in his fair share of these parties, recalls when he first heard about them:

> There is a long history there. Ten years ago I was dating this girl who was kind of a raver and she was talking about how her raver friends had outlaw parties on the trains, years and years and years ago, a whole different group of people.

Famous club kid Michael Alig used to organize train parties where revelers careened through the streets betwixt and between trips in and out of clubland and New York's carnival underground (Haden-Guest, 1997, p. 305-66).

William Etundi describes the feeling of inherent freedom that often accompanies these carnival-like public parties:

> Another element to New York City, which is kind of specific perhaps to this town, but the feeling of inherent liberation even if its a semi-legal party in an alternative space, it feels liberating. If it's an explicitly illegal party on a subway or on the street, that is liberating. Just dancing in the street is a liberating moment. And we should never underestimate the power of these liberating moments.

> That's really self-sustaining. I mean, even if you get arrested after it, you feel like, wow, you stood up and took something. And sometimes being arrested is the most politicizing thing that can happen to a person. And hearing people's stories and having other people realize, 'Oh shit, I never thought I could get arrested for dancing in the street.' Suddenly a person's life has changed from that, which is interesting and exciting. I really recommend everybody getting arrested just once, and seeing the inside of the system is really important for activists to understand that.

Within Etundi's narrative, the street party becomes a transformative public ritual, creating the kind of liminal spaces capable of shifting the way people approach their everyday lives (Turner, 1969). Throughout these years, many activists were increasingly becoming aware of public actions as rituals. San Francisco activist David Solnit concurs: "I think as I get older that there is no difference between a ritual, a performance, and an action. You are trying to shift consciousness and change reality, and change how people view reality. And communicate ideas."

At its best, the movement's carnival atmosphere creates a space for participants to design interactions of their own invention and creation. "Carnival is not a spectacle seen by the people; they live in it, and everyone participates because its very idea embraces all the people," Bakhtin, (1984, p. 7) explains. Thus, the carnival offers the possibility of liberating "lower orders" of society. It does this through a laughter which depletes at the same time as it revitalizes; social boundaries are lost in a "joyous, outrageously humorous demonstration" (Bogad, 2005b). As Handelman explains, "play often is phrased in opposition to, or as a negation of, the order of things. This is the perception of play as unserious, illusory and ephemeral, but is it is also the perception of play as subversive and resisting the order of things" (Sutton Smith, 2002, p. 135). Yet when the aim is to create a more participatory democracy, this form is play is anything but meaningless.

If there is an enduring image of the recent movements, it is of a proliferation of marching bands. The Infernal Noise Brigade made its debut at the “Battle of Seattle” in 1999, ; Reclaim the Beats, a mass samba band, was organized by RTS New York during the World Economic Forum meetings in January 2002; New York's Rude Mechanical Orchestra regaled the crowd during the Still We Rise march during the Republican National Convention in 2004; and the Brass Liberation Orchestra jammed as San Francisco residents shut down the financial district during the Direct Action to Stop the War actions in San Francisco in March 2003. . The point of these bands and their shows in subways, streets, gardens, and other parts of the public commons is to cultivate a participatory quality of performance, play, and politics. If carnival is a theme of these movements, the soundtrack is often jazz or world music. Jazz’s participatory improvisation is very much a metaphor for democracy itself. *Notes for Everywhere* (2003A) explains, “It is the capricious moments in history when we can see that carnival and revolution have ideological goals: to turn the world upside down with joyous abandon and to celebrate our indestructible lust for life" (p. 175).

Limitations of the TAZ

If, as Naomi Klein (2000) postulates, the contemporary global justice movements are an

> effort to reclaim public space through a burlesque of activism, such interventions could not be any more necessary. While activists were busy reclaiming the streets, subways, and gardens for public access, they were also acutely aware of the role of corporate influence-peddling on government and the privatization of public spaces (Dunlap, 2000), with the public sphere feeling the squeeze.

> Simultaneously, activism, culture jamming, Ashe, Aikido, and countless cultural practices of resistance thrived as public space groups aimed to alter ways of experiencing urban space and to challenge the mall-ing of our cities (Farrell, 2001; Goldberger, 2001; McKay, 1998).

Despite all of these public rituals, activists were often left to ponder whether the idealized

> notion of a public sphere for public contact was not just another storied space, existing more in memories and carnivals than in practical day-to-day experience, no different from Hakim Bey's elusive temporary autonomous zone (TAZ). The TAZ had become a primary image for the movement of movements. Yet even Bey was aware of its limitations. He explained, "As soon as the TAZ is named (represented, mediated), it must vanish, it will vanish, leaving behind it an empty husk, only to spring up again somewhere else, once again invisible because indefinable in terms of the Spectacle" (1991, p.101).

Even during the peak years of the global justice movement, actors were keenly aware of the limitations of organizing around the carnival metaphor. Jason Grote, who participated in and organized many RTS actions, explains. "I think the limitations are that, obviously, it's a micro revolution. It's over and it's over." For others, the party-as-protest model often seemed to allow the political message to become obfuscated within the dancing and pageantry. For still others, there is nothing that ideal or transformative about dancing in the streets anyway. The notion of dancing in the streets started to wear thin. And, on a prefigurative level, others wanted more than to live in a world where dancing is an end goal.

As time wore on, what felt exciting after the Seattle protests in 1999 started to feel like a scripted ceremony. This is always the problem with the overuse of any one model. Public rituals are thus reduced to status quo-reinforcing exercises. As Solnit explains, "A lot of our demonstrations are like hollow church services where there's no guts or meaning to it and you just go through the routine. We're not conscious and on our toes." Yet activists were still aware that there had to be more than either street parties or boring marches, rallies, and fights with police. The authentic play element of the street actions could only remain intact if the actions felt like they generated heat while remaining outside of everyday life (Hubert, undated). Thus, RTS NYC and RTS London quite consciously took steps to reinvent their repertoire. Joe Tuba explains:

> The thing is, it's like an ongoing thing. Like, RTS doesn't happen any more. We learned a lot from doing that. But then train parties started happening. And that kind of ran its course... I kind of feel like there is this continuum going on, learning stuff along the way. But its also kind of getting bigger all the time... The problem is you can't advertise it in *Time Out*. ... But this is a different thing. You have to know people who know people who know people. You have to be hooked up in some way, which is good 'cause it's building a network and a community and all that kind of stuff that we all talk about a lot.

The limitation of the clandestine insider parties is that they are exclusive to those in the know. For many in the movement of movements, the aim was to move the protest carnival beyond the base toward a larger public. Without doing this, the model of protest-as-party falls into a trap of only speaking to itself, as opposed to the larger public. Solnit continues:

> I think the tendency among a lot of cultural activists is just to do cultural stuff and Reclaim the Streets type stuff. We have people out here who are not engaged in community struggles. Its good to have parties and celebrations, but if you are not trying to win something for your community then you do not have the pressure of trying to really communicate things. I think there is a trap people who do cultural activism and theater and playful stuff can fall into, which is take the same tools which have the power to reach people's hearts and minds and sort of universalize,

> and they can also become self-marginalizing. I've seen it with puppets, with clowning, with street parties. They can become sort of cultural images of rebellion that speak only to those who already share their beliefs. Whereas powerful clowning or a Reclaim the Streets party that's inviting to the community, it can also be catalytic and get people in a very positive way.

The limitation of cultural politics was by no means limited to RTS or the carnival model. It occurs whenever aesthetics is thought to be a solution unto itself. "Whenever I meet someone who is doing theater who says that their activism is through their work on stage, I always know they are full of shit," Grote continued.

But the larger point is that forms of theatrical activism function as a pressure release, which leaves the system intact as it maintains status quo equilibrium (Bogad, 2005b). Grote elaborates on this point:

> I think right now we are sort of witnessing a lot of the limitations to play. There was an article about Burning Man from the point of view of power. You have this amazing thing in the desert and you have all these creative misfits go out and expend energy on this thing. And it's a tricky thing because you don't want to have a movement or a society that's all dedicated to a sort of rank-and-file discipline. But at the same time, it's a real temptation that play is cut loose from traditional activism. I think that that was sort of the genius of ACT UP, that they were and continue to be so theatrical, but it's combined with a lot of organizational discipline.

Tuba describes encountering these same types of shortfalls as far back as his punk days before he joined the Hungry March Band:

> The problem with that, and this is the problem that punk rock has always had, that it is kind of exclusive. There is a limit to how much it can grow. In punk rock, you've got this community and it's really great and everybody depends on each other, but there is this uniform and it's really off-putting to a lot of people.... Like we don't really have a uniform. Like this RTS and post-RTS community is very into spreading itself out. And involving as many people as it can. Because it's kind of a legal problem. You can' t promote it like a party that's in a club.

Thus, Solnit suggests, activists face a choice with their cultural tools:

> There's a couple of terms that Patrick[Reinsborough – I THINK, BUT VERIFY] uses in *Globalize Liberation* [see Solnit, 2004], which is the concept of subverter

> vs. defector. Defectors are the people who can only speak in terms which only their immediate community knows and it can be very self marginalizing. Taking art, theater, and playfulness, you can be a defector, or you can take those tools and be a subverter and create inviting open spaces and really struggle to communicate outside your immediate group. It is that subversion which can be transformative.

RTS New York would never quite give up on the model of protest as one part theater, another part street pageant, another part political campaign. In the years from 2000 forward, RTS NYC would increasingly use tools of cultural resistance to help bring energy and messaging into larger political campaigns that built on the power of the carnival model of protest while aiming to connect it with actual campaigns on the ground. This model had worked when RTS supported the community gardens movement, a period generally considered a peak moment for RTS New York.

Before turning their attention back to the neighborhoods, RTS New York planned another trip to Washington, DC for some street theatre. This round involved a foray into political absurdity with their Students for an Undemocratic Society (SUDS) street theater at George Bush's first inauguration. Mocking the baby boomer obsession with the Students for Democratic Society (SDS) of the 1960s, the group sought to lampoon the right-wingers who had supported Bush's ascendance to power. Yet instead of earnestly bemoaning the depressing, undemocratic means through which the 43rd president was appointed by the Supreme Court, rather then being elected by a majority of citizens, the group brought a little of the "better to laugh than cry" satire of the global justice movement to the inauguration. The press release for the action introduced the group:

> WHO ARE STUDENTS FOR AN UNDEMOCRATIC SOCIETY?
>
> We are the children of the political, military, and business elites of America. We have worked for years to undermine democracy worldwide, and seek to celebrate

> the fact that—with the installation of presidents Cheney and Bush—even the pretense of American democracy has at last been cast aside. We march in support of the property-owning, white heterosexual male who rules by violence.
>
> NO, WHO ARE YOU REALLY?
>
> We're artists, actors, and activists using satire to point out the absurd, massive injustices inherent in a Bush-Cheney administration, and to question how democratic this country ever really was to begin with. We're especially focused on the legalized bribery of the campaign finance system, the disenfranchisement of African-American voters in Florida and elsewhere, Bush's murderous infatuation with the death penalty and the prison-industrial complex, militaristic US foreign policy, the chauvinist and homophobic anti-sex policies of the nascent administration, and the obscene income gap prevalent in the American economy. These problems were bad under Clinton and they're only going to get worse under Bush. There are surely many, many more things to be angry about, but let's face it, if you're reading this you probably already know.
>
> SO WHAT'S THE JOKE?
>
> We're going to be dressing up as "banana republic" dictators and marching around DC on J20, maybe antagonizing some real-life right-wingers, and generally doing media and street performance stunts to illustrate our point(s). Here's a quick "how-to" rundown for any interested do-it-yourself SUDS (feel free to use, abuse, and alter these ideas, or to create and share your own).

Jason Grote (2002) whose fingersprints are all over the above press release and whose playwriting skills were put to the test with the action – which generated worldwide news attention – described the day:

> Something strange happened on January 20, 2001. I don't mean George W. Bush, although that was weird too. There was a fleeting moment when I (and about 50 other people dressed like me) stood bellowing at a National Organization for Women rally. Behind them was a barricade, then Pennsylvania Avenue, then another barricade, then Republicans, and behind them the Capitol Building, its bland white concrete blending into the great gray sky above us all. And while I screamed "John Ashcroft doesn't dance!" in my fake British accent, boogieing spastically like some amalgam of Charlie Chaplin and a member of Devo, the hard brick ground seemed to turn into the boards of a stage. The Capitol seemed like nothing more than pricey set dressing. Everyone, from the NOW protesters to the fur-clad Bushites to the forced-to-be-avuncular Secret Service agents, was transformed, simultaneously, into actors and audience. It wasn't as if DC had been suddenly transmogrified into a theater: it's always a theater. It had, temporarily at least, been transformed from a bad play into a good one. There was

> no question that the inaugural was intended to be tired melodrama: the authorities, having become competent if mediocre stage managers, were determined to prevent the rebels from upstaging them as they had done in Seattle and elsewhere. They knew the cameras thirsted for tear gas, race riots, hails of rotten vegetables thrown at the Presidential limo. None of that was about to happen. The state knows as well as anyone the difference between the ceremonies that reinforce the status quo and the rituals that transform it.

In the following months, the group would increasingly turn their actions into theatrical events. For RTS New York, performance was the next step in the evolution of a protest repertoire that was heavily indebted to the arts. "Live gestures, performances, would thus function as weapons aimed at disrupting the routines, the conventions of the everyday," Rose Lee Goldberg (1988) writes about performance art as a social and aesthetic intervention. "Here performance art, guerilla theatre, punk rock would all function as aesthetic tools". For RTS, political performance intersected with the extreme costume ball model of protest (Boyd, 2002); simultaneously, it overlapped with a combination of ritual, street theater, passion play, prank, live art, and spectacle **(**Bevington, 1962; Goldberg, 1988**;** Pranksters, 1987; Turner, 1969**).** The aim was to transform the street into a public theater, a commons for debate and democracy performance. Here, public play was thought of as a route beyond means of necessary toward an organic feeling of alienation-crushing joyous urbanism. The following section considers examples and discussions of the politics of a number of street pranks that followed.

Buy Nothing: New Twists on old Plots

On Friday November 24th, 2000 – Buy Nothing Day – William Etundi launched the first street action for his new group/concept known as Complacent. The group made use of the aspects of both artful prank and aesthetic ritual, which Huizinga (1950) suggested constitute core elements of the art of play. One of the enduring elements of such forms of subversive play is to establish a degree of differentiation from everyday life. The Complacent web site describes the aim of the action dubbed, "Satisfied?":

> We wanted to create an experience that would make an impression on people. One of those rare spontaneous provocative moments that stick in the folds of memory. One of those moments that spurs conversation, at that second and later over dinner and on a phone call to Mom and years beyond. An occurrence that might, just perhaps make a person think in a way they hadn't before. An event that might just inspire someone (2000).

As with the best forms of political play, the action was not presented as a life-changing event. "A novelty? Yes. A risk? Definitely. Something of beauty? We hope so. A world-changing political action. Definitely not," the Complacent (2000) site explained.

The previous year, Etundi had been arrested during the RTS Buy Nothing Day action that clogged Times Square. This year, Etundi would build on his experiences with that group – both good and bad – and strike out on his own. The inaugural Complacent action built on the use of rituals and situations at the root of Etundi's work with RTS, with a debt to the work of the Yippies and the Situationists. The result was fresh and compelling. Etundi reflected on the first action:

> The next year was the inaugural action for Complacent.org, now being called the Complacent Nation. And it was a money drop somewhat inspired by Abbie Hoffman's action at the Stock Exchange, but very different. The idea behind Complacent Nation was absolutely about not focusing on the politics stuff or creating change. It was about focusing on exciting people. It was about engaging people on the fringes to come more into political movement, and hopefully from there they will learn about progressive politics. And there are a lot of explicit

> ways I've been trying to create that bridge. But the inaugural actions was all about creating something that was abrupt, exciting, completely insane, and something that was undeniably attention grabbing. You couldn't help but see it if you were there. You couldn't help but be struck hearing about it even a day, a week, or a year later. And so we had a huge party the week before and raised a few thousand dollars in one-dollar bills. Everyone coming to the party had to come with one-dollar bills. Each of those bills was stamped with the word "SATISFIED?" in big red letters. And it was stuffed into a bag. I'd donned a suit, a mask – a complacent mask – hopped onto a telephone booth, with a few people and cameras, and tossed these one-dollar bills, in fistfuls, to the shopping masses on the day after Thanksgiving, which is the biggest shopping day of the year in Herald Square, which is the biggest shopping area in New York City. It just happened to be around the corner from the fur-is-murder people, across the street from Macy's. And that wasn't by accident. And a lot of it was just the audacity of youth. I was like 21 or 22 at the time. But what I really wanted to show was just really shaking the crowds of people. The idea was as these fistfuls of dollars bills were wafting around, people were going nuts grabbing it, a few dollars in the air; they'd grab it and it said "Satisfied?" on it. They'd see this complete mayhem, which is what it turned into almost immediately. And see that they were getting crazy over this few dollars, just like flailing in the air.

The action highlighted the dark and light aspects of play in a crowd. From the Commedia dell' arte zanies to Punch and Judy slapstick comedy performances, crowd reactions to public performances can take on violent, grizzly forms (Bevington, 1962; Grantham 2001). One person became furious and screamed at Etundi, saying, "Are you fucking crazy? My kid, I lost my kid." "She found the kid," Etundi recalled. "He was just grabbing a few dollars." Yet, for a few moments there, a creepy image of a mob took hold in the public theater he helped create.

Yet Etundi never ran. "The entire time I had no illusion that I wasn't going to get arrested," he explained. "I was surprised that my charges were just disorderly conduct. The point was to experiment with different ways of asking people to think about their lives. The Complacent (2000) site suggests:

> This act was not a direct judgment of consumerism. Not protest to shut down the capitalist structure. Not a world-changing event. But a small thing to inspire

> people to step away from what they are used to. To stop on the way to Macy's and grasp at falling dollars and be asked, are you satisfied? (2000).

The point was to provoke questions and to inspire. And it did. The Complacent web site lists page after page of dialogue about the action. After nearly two years of working and playing with RTS, sitting on tripods in the streets, dancing at world trade meetings, and doing outrageous things to try to inspire people to think about the role of consumerism in their lives, the point of Complacent was to inspire a different way of engaging with political knowledge. Yet the action did so by reinventing one of the most famous pranks in US political history. "One of the most memorable protests in history was when Abbie Hoffman levitated the Pentagon theatrically or when they nominated a pig to be president. And they had the pig come down in the limo," Ben Mayers explains. "And then – throwing the real dollars down on Wall Street, those issues, they dog people to think about the issues Hoffman was trying to get people to think about. They were very powerful"

Live Art

For many involved in the new street activism, there was something amazingly life-affirming and exhilarating about bringing art into everyday life. "Of course, for me, a key inspiration was Dada, the Surrealists, and the Situationists," John Jordan explained. "I was beginning to read up on this. And thinking about ways to make the art invisible." For Jordan, the excitement of RTS and the movement of movements was about going beyond the theater, onto a different stage. Many, such as Jordan and the Billionaire's Andrew Boyd, reveled in the extreme creativity of the new movements; they delighted in watching art intersect with the everyday, street life, activism, and political life. They

revel in the Dada absurdist element of very theatrical moments in public space, such as pranks.

Boyd elaborated on his thinking about the relationship between theater and activism:

> [W]hen we talk about the uses of play, the way I talk about it is using artistic strategies, which has an overlapping sense with play, thinking like an artist about doing political action. Abbie Hoffman says that all protest, you can extend that to political action, is theater**.** So protest events that do not consciously think of themselves as theater are often really bad theater. Not always, sometimes there's an organic element. But we're all actors in a way. Sometimes there's an organically beautiful theater to movement, like whatever, like the kid in front of the tank in Tiananmen Square. He wasn't thinking of theater. His friends had just been killed. He was willing to die. He was caught up in this whole cathartic existential insane moment. He wasn't thinking about theater. He didn't know anyone was filming him. It was an incredible thing.

Boyd, of course, was by no means alone in bringing this perspective to movement work. "My background was very much performance art, or what is essentially called live art here," Jordan explained. Much of his work has borrows from an anti-art impulse described by Herbert Marcuse (1969) in his *Essay on Liberation*. Here, Marcuse looks to the transformative social and cultural possibilities of art, which helps people feel and see and think about the world in different ways. The Surrealists, of course, worked from such a vantage point. In pushing art out of the galleries into the streets, they were considered revolutionaries. Their ambition was to connect daily life with art (Marcuse, 1969). Through his work with live- rt, Jordan built on this ambition. "I remember being involved with a project about men's sexuality, where we actually made a fake sex shop," Jordan recalled. He describes the scene:

> Well, it meant renting out the whole shop at something like a 42nd Street emporium with peep shows. But it wasn't what people expected. Men went in and

> actually heard stories of other men talking about pornography. So, I was doing stuff that was provocative. One of the key things is the invisibility of art and an understanding that an audience has so many expectations about what art actually is. My early experiences with ecology and the notion of bits of body art on the street, the question of art was invisible. Yet we wanted to create different experiences of art for people who assumed, "I know what arts is – art's in a gallery, art's in a museum." And still people would bring enormous expectations to it. So I wanted to bring a set of works where the dimension of art was invisible. Where instead of there being funding or expectations, they would interact with it without even knowing it was art. Of course there's a possibility of creating different experiences of it. And in the end, part of that tactic is the notion of art as a western concept, not much more than 500 years old. In other cultures, it doesn't exist and it's actually a barrier to creativity, as if they [artists] have some monopoly on creativity. In the same way, I am critical of the activists who claim some sort of specialty in social change.

In the years to follow, Jordan would observe countless different forms of extreme creativity through his participation with the anti-roads movement and RTS. Yet RTS was by no means the only group within the movement of movements that made use of the combinations of prank and performance, ritual and aesthetic intervention that Huizinga (1950) described as key functions of cultural play. Some, such as pagan witch Starhawk, bring the elements of public ritual to almost every action in which they are involved. The point, of course, is to inject a series of questions that disrupt and transform the business of everyday life. Here, public ritual is offered as a source of social renewal. Yet to be more than sterile ceremonies, such rituals require some heat (Eliade, 1958; Turner, 1969; Zuesse, 1969). Starhawk recalls a moment at the G8 protests in Calgary in June 2002 when her group was able to generate this kind of energy:

> The other very favorite one (laughs) was in Calgary three years ago for the G8 protests. Calgary is the center for a lot of the oil that comes to Canada. We had done several days of actions. And the last day, nobody had planned anything, so the pagans decided we would throw an action that was a ritual. There's a park in the center of Calgary. We mixed up all this clay and water and made mud. And the people took off all their clothes and became mud people. If you are a mud person, you can't talk normally or walk normally. So the mud people went writhing through the streets of Calgary. And we had a prophesy, saying when

> power meets greed, the fortress falls and the ancient people rise. We'd stop and we'd proclaim the prophesy and then we went to all the oil companies and we danced and we had mimes planting seeds and then leaving a mark of mud on the oil companies' windows or walls and moving on. Calgary had never really seen anything like this. It started off with 60 or 80 people, by the time we got through the downtown, we had hundreds of people just following us, just mesmerized.
>
> At one of the drug companies, I saw this businessman taking off his shirt standing there with this totally tranced out look on his face with a scab of mud on his forehead. I went over and said, "Are you ok?" And he said, "There's a lot of energy here." (Laughs). "I can't leave. I'm supposed to go back to work, but I can't leave." He went all the way down with us. And finally at the end, we did a spiral dance in this open area and there was a big market by a river. Then finally everyone went into the river and washed off. It was beautiful. It was really one of the top actions and top rituals.

In terms of the differentiation between ceremony versus ritual, Starhawk suggested, "I think that one was obviously transformative. It was not reinforcing any status quo."

Another public ritual Starhawk's group often uses is called a spiral dance. "It starts with a circle and then it spirals in and people get close and it teaches people to see each other. And then you spiral back out and in and build the excitement and the energy," she explains to describe the elusively simple dance. "It's a way of raising power and raising energy which usually turns into a chant or an ooom." The More Gardens coalition often ends itsr fundraisers, which bring together different activist threads from various neighborhoods all over the city, with spiral dances, which force everyone to briefly connect. When done publicly, such as in the middle of a mass protest, the spiral dance creates quite a scene.

For Boyd and others in the movement of movements, the struggle becomes one of thinking of different ways to use public space to create such scenes. Heexplains:

> You are constructing these moments, what Larry Kramer call them, staging moments. And again, it's artistic strategies. You think about the symbolism, you think about the staging, you think about the character, you don't have to get very deep, you think about composition. These are all concepts of art from set design, from photography, from portraiture, I don't know. It's a whole resource kit that is

> often not made use of by political people. And it's powerful. If you look at any of these events, the Democratic convention, [Bush's] landing on the aircraft carrier, it's all Madison Avenue.

Boyd has made a career of borrowing from Madison Avenue's marketing of products, Las Vegas' marketing of entertainment, and Brecht's fixation with the popular educational and theatrical lessons of sports (see Boyd, and Duncombe, 2004) to advance the issue of income inequality (Boyd, 1999, 2000, 2002).

> Boyd recalls an examples of a prank that upstaged a push by the radical right to further justify tax cuts: So this Tea Party thing was doubly interesting because they were staging an event and we restaged it by intervening. These were two guys, two Republican congressman who I think are still congressmen, Dick Armey and Nick Townsend. One's from Texas and one's from Louisiana. And Townsend actually used to be a Democrat. They'd been campaigning for what they call a "tax reform," which was a flat tax or a national sales tax. They were pushing to get rid of the entire tax code and institute this very regressive tax system. It seems fair because it was simple and was treating everyone the same way regardless of whether they had eighty billion dollars or negative assets and seven kids. So it was a flax tax vs. a sales tax. So they were promoting that and they came to Boston and threw a cask of tea overboard the Boston Tea Party ship, the historic one where it all happened back in 1773 or whenever it was, thus symbolizing their liberation from the IRS tax code and the sort of reforms. So we called up pretending to be Young Republicans and found out what their basic plan was. We read the stuff they were talking about doing in the *Wall Street Journal*. And so we kind of thought how to restage this in a way that sort of brought out the truth of what they were actually advocating.
>
> You know, you can give a press conference afterward and say how they were wrong, or you can get in there and mix it up. So we got in there and mixed it up. We got there before they did, set up our people in a way that wouldn't notice them. And then [the Republicans] were about to throw their tea overboard and at just the right moment, we had this little dinghy which had been hiding in the Boston Harbor on the other side of the [tea party] boat, sort of padding furiously underneath where they were about to throw [the tea]. And the dinghy boat had two people on it. One had a construction hat and the other woman had a kerchief and they help up a sign that said "Working families life raft." And they started saying, "Don't sink us with your flat tax. Don't flatten us with your flat tax." "We're the working family life raft this tax will be terrible for middle class tax payers."
>
> And then [the Republicans] were sort of caught dead in their tracks 'cause the photograph caught these guys [in the boat]. They are about to throw this thing

> overboard, but then not doing it, because our storyline was that would be a bad thing. And then we had all these sort of rich people on a boat. They started saying, "We're the Rich People's Liberation Front. We want this tax plan. We want this tax plan. Sink 'em. Sink 'em. Sink 'em."
>
> And then [the dinghies] both capsized just at the moment that the thing hit. People ended up in the water and the little boat that the little woman was in floated away. The photos were in the *Boston Globe* and it was looped on CNN. It was Tax Day.

In a small example of political theatrics, Boyd's boat tipped over at the exact same time that Dick Armey's group dropped their cask of tea overboard. Boyd explains:

> They threw it overboard and we capsized at just that moment. This is the Boston Harbor, mind you, so it's not cleaned up like the Hudson. So it was a huge thing. But if you see the picture, you'll see basically how we restaged it. That's the point. We're staging something and we understood how they were staging and what the various things meant that they were trying to invest with meaning. And we invested them with different meanings, sort of creating a stage around their stage. Not disrupting them and not stopping them, but restaging them. Given that all politics happens in a very mediated way, its all about spectacle. It's all about symbolic communication with an audience. It's all about storytelling and mythology and using and repurposing symbols and stuff like that they were doing. But we did it the same way. It may be play.

Instead of storming the ship or screaming, Boyd and company staged a different kind of performance, changing the storyline, the day's plot line. Rather than overwhelming their opposition or fighting them, they engaged them in a different kind of discourse. Rather than trying to take anything, they shifted the terms of the play. Like Zapatismo (Marcos, 2002), they sought to create a different kind of production of democracy, without trying to take the power. Boyd adds:

> We're not storming the boat. We're telling them to do their thing. And here's what it means for all of us. Again, you're respecting the symbol system that they've set up. But you are re interpreting it. You're restaging it. And in a sense you are hijacking their power, their prestige, their star status that turned out all the media. If we were going to stage something on our own, who would come? But

> no, we hijacked all the media and the spotlight. They already had a stage. And they had a stage because they were powerful.

The prank, which gained media coverage on CNN and around the world (Ellis, 1998) sent Boyd on a trajectory from years of work with Boston's United for a Fair Economy, where he first articulated his ideas about artful activism (Boyd, 1999). He watched as this spirit of creativity propelled the a global justice movement; he later worked with RTS New York and its various permutations and formed the Billionaires for Bush (or Gore) with the 2000 election cycle.

Part of Boyd's work was propelling these ideas into the public consciousness where other activists could borrow from similar methods. Good artists borrow; great artists steal. William Etundi describes this viral dimension of the politics of play:

> I think the biggest assets to the politics of play are, to borrow some words from marketing, the viral aspects of public display. Like we create an interesting action, it's five people. And fifty people see it. Of those fifty, ten people are into it. And those ten people go out and create an interesting action that a hundred people see. And of those hundred, twenty people go out and they are inspired and they do something exciting. And you start getting this exponentially increasing thing. And I think that's the biggest strength of the politics of play.

Kate Crane follows up on Etundi's train of thought, noting how many people plugged into activism through their experiences with the Billionaires:

> I think about the Billionaires. You know, the Billionaires got on my nerves; it got boring. But they were able to plug so many people in who otherwise would not have gotten involved. Like the main PR person for the Billionaires, she's an ad executive who has no activism experience. She just knocked herself in full force and ran with it. There was a lot of it that people could plug into; they could feel it, they could identify. Here in New York because New Yorkers are sarcastic, elsewhere because it was fun. And also they were able to take their template and replicate it over and over again.

In the spring of 2000, John Jordan put out a call for participants to contribute to a reader on the movement of movements called *We Are Everywhere*. "We aspire to seduce these people into joining in the joyful revolution of the everyday," the call proclaimed. The call accurately reflected what was already happening on the ground. With groups such as the Billionaires, RTS, and others, play seduced countless new bodies into political engagement and participation. Yet even then the process of getting people out was far from simple. "It was not easy," says Abby Ehmann, who organized parties and used those ties to rally protesters against New York's XXX zoning law, but she adds:

> I have to say, it has become more easy, because more people are pissed off. And also, I don't know if you know, but a lot of the protesting has become more fun. And they saw that the way to get people out was to do it via nightlife. Like the Billionaires for Bush and the people who are making politics more palatable, Critical Mass and all this.

Ehmann suggested that this playful approach is the best way she knows to get party people involved with protest stuff. It is a way of expanding a political arena. And from there, people get involved in many different kinds of campaigns. Etundi explains:

> You see that in More Gardens and Critical Mass and especially in RTS. If you look at those early RTS meetings, that was my first experience with political organizing. You know, Mark Read, Beka, Andrew Boyd, so many people gelled there and went on to do just faaabulous things. And it really spawned a whole lot of stuff. The Billionaires were inspired by that. Complacent came directly out of RTS. A lot of other projects have. And then these separate projects have spawned people to doing [still more] separate projects.

The 23 Story Tower

While Boyd, Etundi, and Brook Lehman followed their experiences with RTS New York by forming new groups – the Billionaires, Complacent, and the New York

City Direct Action Network – by the fall of 2000 remaining members of RTS continued the group's work. In December, the group held a permitless parade through the East Village and the three Starbucks (known as "the Bermuda Triangle") at Astor Place, followed by the SUDS actions in Washington, DC. Upon returning from the inauguration protests in the winter of 2001 RTS turned back to the politics of neighborhood life on the Lower East Side of Manhattan. The aim was to do an action a month for as long as possible.

The group's first action of this period included organizing a street carnival/circus in opposition to a proposed 13-story tower which would loom over Houston Street. The action was to coincide with a community board meeting where the board was scheduled to vote on the building. Working with a large anti-displacement coalition, which included members of the Lower East Side Collective, Jason Grote drafted a flyer announcing a Friday night "Anti-Displacement Street Circus!" The flyer, which advertised the carnival as a burlesque, drew the attention of a graduate student named Larry Bogad who was completing his PhD dissertation on street theater. At the time, Bogad had been wanting to draw his theater friends into this form of political engagement, but with little success. He explains:

> [I]n New York in 2001 when I met you, I was very much wanting to do this kind of thing. But my theater friends were theater friends. Even if they were political, they were political friends. And my activist friends were activist people. They weren't doing theater. And that's in the streets and I always had that separation, whereas I was in the middle. So getting to know Reclaim the Streets people in the city was a great moment. I was very much looking for that. And finding that affinity group was a big thing for me.

Bogad remembers his first experience of RTS in New York City:

> Well, it was an event where there were a lot of RTS people involved, but it might not have been an RTS event. But it was about preventing something that has now

gone forth, which is a big building on Houston Street, where there was a parking garage. There was Reverend Billy doing his thing. What brought me to the event was the great creative flyer that talked about a radical circus in the streets and a human pyramid that was going to be built.

The flyer, advertising a circus in the street, was posted throughout the city and on the Internet. The e-mail announcement for the event began with the subject line:

"March 23: JOIN THE ANTI-DISPLACEMENT CIRKUS OF THE STREETS!"

(quoted in Moshenberg, 2001). It continued:

PLEASE FORWARD AND POST - SORRY ABOUT DUPLICATES

23-23-23-23-23-23-23-23-23-23-23-23-23-23-23-23-23-23-23-23-23-23-23

WHO: Reclaim the Streets NYC, Reverend Billy and the Church of Stop Shopping, CHARAS/El Bohio, the Lower East Side Anti-Displacement Coalition, 23 or more random street performers, and maybe YOU!

23-23-23-23-23-23-23-23-23-23-23-23-23-23-23-23-23-23-23-23-23-23-23

WHAT: An ANTI-DISPLACEMENT STREET CIRKUS featuring performers, jugglers, fire-eaters, hellraisers and LIVE NUDE HUMANS and possibly NON-HUMANS! And maybe YOU! Note: this is a NON-ARREST ACTION! We are NOT PLANNING on BREAKING ANY LAWS! Also, there will be a 23-PERSON PYRAMID!

23-23-23-23-23-23-23-23-23-23-23-23-23-23-23-23-23-23-23-23-23-23-23

WHEN: Friday, March 23, assembling at 5:30-6pm, then parade to LUDLOW and HOUSTON, the site of a proposed 23-story luxury tower (ugh!), then CIRKUS at like 7pm we guess but WHO KNOWS really!

23-23-23-23-23-23-23-23-23-23-23-23-23-23-23-23-23-23-23-23-23-23-23

WHERE: Meeting in front of CHARAS/El Bohio Community Center, 605 East 9th between B and C!

23-23-23-23-23-23-23-23-23-23-23-23-23-23-23-23-23-23-23-23-23-23-23

WHY: To fight the forces of displacement and gentrification the only way we know how, which turns out to be doing cirkus acts and stuff like that. CHARAS is a community center and vital resource that was sold by Giuliani to an evil

> developer named GREGG SINGER. Ludlow and Houston is the side of a proposed 23-story luxury tower that would drive up rents and chase the poor residents – mostly Latino and Asian – out of the Lower East Side.
>
> 23-23-23-23-23-23-23-23-23-23-23-23-23-23-23-23-23-23-23-23-23-23-23-23-23
>
> HOW: I DON'T KNOW!
>
> PLEASE FORWARD AND POST - SORRY ABOUT DUPLICATES

"That was the great teaser, almost Mark Twain-y," Bogad observesd. I noted that one of the flyers also included the words, "live nude girls." "I think that was why I really went," Bogad joked. "And that brought me in. I was the demographic. Here I was,being marketed to by the movement. And it was an excellent movement." He continues:

> I saw the flyer and said, "I gotta go." And I couldn't get any of my more conventional activist friends to go. That's again a symptom of that. I went, there was a bunch of people doing great stuff, people flying around in wings in a big formation, like a bunch of birds following each other, this wonderful little Utopian creative gesture, brush stroke in the street. You see what I'm saying. And there's Reverend Billy. And it wasn't even the most radical costume ball type of event. It was quite modest by RTS terms, I think now, but just to add those few touches to it were wonderful. Reverend Billy being friendly, I was psyched... He was a real down-to-earth guy after being this character... So I got a very good feeling from that.

Play as a Stepping Stone in Politics

Steven Duncombe an organizer and theorist with RTS New York, suggests that just these sorts of bits and pieces of community theater and culture provide a focal point around which to build collegiality and connection; it functions as an easy entry point, "the stepping stone into political activity" (2002, p. 5-6) As actors support each other and gain new tools, other engagements in more formal political work become feasible. Throughout the years of RTS New York serving as a "stepping stone," the group

involved itself in successful campaigns to save community gardens, win back-pay for immigrant workers, and preserve civil liberties after 9/11 (Ness, 2002; Shepard, 2002, 2004). Through such engagement, players discover new approaches to organizing as actors develop new repertoires – collective action forms – for political action (Duncombe, 2002, p. 5-6).

The politics of play and creativity include countless dimensions. For Etundi, this stepping stone into political activity included two competing incluenes[??] – nightlife and neighborhood activism. He explains:

> I was going to raves when I was like 16 years old. Another lineage is in real neighborhood community organizing and real work, with queer politics in the Castro in a progressive church in San Francisco. That was when I was coming of age, 11 or 12 years old. It helped me lay the foundation for sex and politics, which is of course a life-long process.

Of all places, San Francisco is where the politics of play and liberation is deeply rooted within a dominant political coalition of labor, immigrant rights, environmentalism, and gay rights activism. As it did for many, RTS New York served as a stepping stone into New York City politics and organizing for Etundi. He recalls:

> With RTS, I got really enticed with the New York City political scene. And from there, I got to learn more and more about other spheres of organizing in the city, a lot of the community-based organizing, which is incredibly strong here. And it slowly but surely became my entire life, a collective non-profit called me. We work with community non-profit organizations building capacity and also participating in campaigns.

For Etundi, as for many others, politics overlapped party culture:

> Its drawing from a lot of different bits and pieces, from a whole lot of different experiences, trying to bring them together to create something that is rooted to do real work and create progressive social change at both the community level and the national level, but also bringing in elements of graffiti, of party culture, of hip-hop culture so we can make the stuff more interesting. And we can make it enticing for other people to bring their voices in and create a real exponential, physical growth.

L.J. Wood of New York's Direct Action Network speaks for many when she suggests that this playful politics is helpful when it serves as a compliment to larger campaigns. When asked if creative protest and community building is a viable alternative to traditional models of organizing and politics, she explained: "Basically, its complimentary. One of the things I've found in Toronto is there is a fair amount of hostility to some forms of creative protest. Its seen as not taking seriously the issues that the people are going through." The strength of the model emerges when it is not seen as a substitute. "I don't think it should be so oppositional, I think its more creative when people can advantage of the widest range of tactics," Wood explained.

RTS was by no means the only group within the movement of movements aiming to connect playful, engaging approaches to both local and global campaigns. John Sellers of the Ruckus Society suggests this approach is part of what has made his organization effective:

> One of the things that Ruckus is known for is bringing more creativity and artistic-ness and playful irreverence with a really serious issue. So often times, we do a lot of banner hangs. But often times we try to make those banners entertaining, to use double entendre, to ask multi-level questions, to show that we are often times not only right, but smarter, and funnier, and more theoretically sound than our adversaries.

Examples of these irreverent actions include events such as the Ruckus Return to Sender action. "We had toxic waste being sent around the world. And we had an Elvis impersonator out there singing 'Return to Sender,'" Sellers recalls. "We had a lot of fun with that." Another example was when the group brought laughing suitcases into a board meeting of a target company and chained them [the suitcases] inside. "Just having a bunch of people with laugh boxes," Sellers explains, "in meetings, having these laugh

gags going off in different places." The laughing boxes continue the tradition of subversive humor, of radical ridicule from the Yippies to Operation Ridiculous to the community gardeners (Bogad, 2005b).

The point of the humor at Ruckus actions is to help actors involved in social movement activity connect with their work in a visceral, emotive way. "[P]eople need to be inspired; they need to be motivated; they need to feel powerful; they need to have fun; [actions] need to be something that people want to join and be a part of," Sellers explains. "I think that when you create attractive actions, when you create smart funny actions, I think humor is an incredible motivator and an incredible teacher." Yet part of the effectiveness of the ridicule involves a capacity to not take oneself too seriously. "Often times, if you can show you can laugh at yourself a little bit and laugh at your adversary, you can bring it down to a very human form," Sellers elaborates. "It breaks down a lot of walls."

> These tools work best when incorporated into a larger ongoing campaign and strategy. "We were also doing work that was in support of communities taking action, we were doing non-violence trainings and communications," Sellers explains. Thus, the group tried to support the work of local community groups, with training and technical assistance, during the Democratic National Convention in Los Angeles in August 2000. "We were doing a lot of work in the community in solidarity with different community struggles, and I think people were more receptive and supportive of the actual action when it happened," he says.
>
> Sellers, who is often thought of as a tactician, was quite open to thinking of different ways playful tactics could support and undermine campaigns. "Let's wrack our brains

a little bit more about why it makes sense to do community organizing," he suggests. "I think that it can." Yet the larger social movement organizations – Greenpeace, Rainforest Action Network, Global Exchange – take the lead in anti-corporate actions. Others, such as unions, are involved in the organizing campaigns. Working together, social movement organizations and grassroots groups are shifting the terms of debate and discourse; in Sellers' words, they are "branding themselves and trying to jam the brands of their adversaries and get them to the table and have enough momentum and leverage to change their behavior." Such tactics "can be really effective because they are very attractive to the media," he says. This is where the play comes in. "When you're smart, when you're funny, a lot of the time you are, 'using the master's tools to tear down the master's house.' And creating an intelligent, fun kind of public confrontation," Sellers explained. Through these techniques, counterpublic groups are able to advance "a pretty radical message through the filter that is the corporate media." Sellers continues:

> What I think Ruckus has done is start to bridge the divide between those big campaigning organizations that have incredible budgets and resources and expertise to pull off those actions, and the grassroots organizations that could and should and want to do those actions but didn't think they have the resources or don't feel they have the expertise in house. And so what we do is take all those tools out and give them away to people and invite people to have access and we also build with grassroots organizations.

Focusing on Local Struggles

If there is any one challenge that has truly vexed the movement of movements, it has been consistently translating the movements' political wanderlust into local targets and neighborhoods struggles. William Etundi explains:

> I think the real challenge to the whole creating a creative movement stuff has been to move creative energy into specific policy change, energies that move it out of the Lower East Side into the South Bronx and into neighborhoods of color, where the issues are more urgent. And there is not the financial or cultural room to go dance in the street. I think that's the inherent challenge to this movement of the politics of play or whatever you want to call it. And I'm not sure if it's one that can be met by any simple solution. I'm not sure if there is a solution. They might be inherently at odds with each other.

Play is not is a substitute for the tools necessary to engage in neighborhood-based organizing. It's a complement. It's a useful additional component. It helps keep people engaged, helps keep them on the move. It keeps ideas flowing, civil society pulsing. It's an easy point of entry to activism. There are actually two components: keeping people going with the absurd defiance, and the staging. There is a theatrical element to framing a conversation about who is involved in a democracy. The drama of such protest invites spectators to think about reality in different kinds of ways. When the notion of political organizing overlapped with the model of the extreme costume ball (Boyd, 2000, 2002), many were intrigued.

> After previously viewing politics as a heavy space, this new model created a space many people wanted to be part of. Yet the question remains as to whether the politics of play is a viable model for getting people involved in political engagement. If one considers organizing to be bringing getting people together and then doing something, then this can be viewed as a reasonable option. Boyd suggested it is useful to be aware of what such a politics can achieve and what it cannot: I don't know if it's good at doing that sort of [lowering utility rates in poor zip codes]. It's more of a kind of swarming pattern. It doesn't have a sustained, kind of meticulous "eyes on the prize" kind of a thing. That requires more of paid organizers. People on the ground who are fighting for their own rights, in combination with the Alinsky model or something along those lines. There are critiques of the Alinsky model. I don't mean that exclusively. I just mean that kind of thing, which is much more brass tacks.

Thus, the question remains: How does the politics of play influence local campaigns, especially in low-income communities such as the South Bronx? Like Vicente "

Panama" Alba, Etundi suggests that movement actors recognize that there are different contexts in which play takes place: "[T]here is different politics of play within the South Bronx, within South Brooklyn." Yet this is not to imply that cultural activism is not effective in different communities across a range of income levels. Etundi continues:

> Prison Moratorium Project (PMP) is a group which wants to stop prisons from being [built] in New York State. And it has been successful in some cases at preventing new jails from being created. Same thing with some projects working in New Orleans [after Hurrican Katrina] – using aspects of local culture, including hip hop, that excite people around these campaigns. It's a different kind of politics of play, but has the same goal. It's intriguing people. It's moving people. PMP uses hip hop in almost every aspect of everything they do. They get young people from the neighborhood exciting and working on things and knowing about the prison industrial complex and this whole system and how it's working against them. And it's super powerful.

Obviously, there many approaches to strategizing about the best way to organize different kinds of communities. Coming out of Seattle, many in the movement of movements discussed the need for a respect for a "diversity of tactics." Within this paradigm, activists from a broad range of perspectives – from anarchism to liberalism – would respect each others' different approaches to political organizing and activism and would not condemn them in public. Here, social actors create spaces for those with vastly different points of view.. This ethos has helped keep the movement amenable to different approaches to cultural activism and animation.

In an interview completed shortly after the Seattle WTO protests, Sellers considered the movement's nod toward praxis. "I like to read Gandhi and King, so if I were to pick two particular thinkers, I guess it would probably be these two," he explains (Sellers, 2004). While the anti-corporate critique remains a centerpiece of the Ruckus

Society's work, Sellers is not above engaging those interested in creating "more sustainable and responsible corporations, more stable forms of capitalism, who aren't going to have the same kind of systemic critique" (p. 186).

Instead of depending on an iron-clad critique, movement players tend to organize around mutual assurances and common principles including: creating more sustainable models of development; building movements with less hierarchical, more direct forms of democracy; and making efforts at a more liberatory, joyous form of change (Solnit, 2004, p. xv-vi). Within this vein, Sellers talks about creating a form of organizing in which process counts. "Marx's critique of capital is terrific, but I've always thought Weber was right that human beings can find some way to exclude and oppress one another without necessarily involving capital" (2004, p. 186). Instead of a one-size-fits-all ideology or misapplication of theory, activists within this movement of movements aim to work within an intersection of theory and practice, or praxis. The aim is to prevent ideology from impeding work on concrete goals.

Direct Action and Political Performance from Chicago to Chiapas

With activists including Aresh Javadi, Andrew Boyd, Larry Bogad, and Jason Grote moving through actions with RTS, the More Gardens Coalition, and the Billionaires, as well as with long time organizers such as David Solnit and Starhawk, the movement of movements was increasingly influenced by the notion that all direct action can be understood as a form of political performance. Many in the group were aware of the long history of dramaturgy which propelled activism from the civil rights era (McAdam, 1996) through the radical street performance that dominated the

years from the birth of ACT UPthrough the Seattle WTO protests (Cohen-Cruz, 1998; Shepard and Hayduk, 2002).

Yet political performance is never simple. As the account of the Young Lords in chapter one illustrates, play is interpreted in fundamentally differing ways according to class, race, gender, and political culture. Boyd elaborates on these differing understandings of play: “Martin Luther King understood the power of theater. But it was not necessarily true that everybody who was getting hosed down in Selma understood theatertheater.”

Others, who had been involved in the civil disobedience (CD) training provided for Civil Rights activists at the time saw it in different ways. “[T]he guys who went through the Highlander seven-month course and then sat down at the Greensboro lunch counter, they understood theater,” Boyd explains. “You didn’t have to read Artaud. They understood it more from that tradition, of Ghandian theater. Ghandi understood theater.” Yet political theater – the theater of democracy and direct action – takes on an entirely different kind of complexion. “It’s more like in terms of human drama and human power and chemistry, and it’s not so much like the way we, cultural studies, define protest. But nonetheless, it has this incredible impact,” Boyd concludes.

In this sense, the police and the entire street culture can be incorporated into the theater. In some ways, police advance their own forms of drama – or fascist theater – with their uniforms, badges, batons, and wagons for arrests. While activists advance a liberatory drama, police are often more interested in the theater of fear, which

contains crowds and supports a social status quo. Here, the aim of activist theater is to shake up the plot lines of such of such performances of repression.

Within this context, civil disobedience, which challenges the legitimacy of the police, can be viewed as a form of theater and creativity that works to advance narratives of social change and renewal. “The theory with direct action is that it dramatizes the issues and focuses the spotlight on it,” Starhawk explains. The social change drama brings issues into the public sphere for debate and education and change. “It highlights it in different ways and makes it visible when it has been invisible,” she continues. “It raises the social and political costs for the oppressive system to carry on what it is doing.”

The best political theater invites audiences to join in a joyous performance of social renewal and abundance. Here, street theater is intended to move audiences, to seduce them into participation in a social change drama (Ornstein, 1998). “You just get a real response,” Tim Becker explained in describing the response to the theater used to bring awareness to the plight of New York’s community gardens. “People seemed to love it. It helped them feel good about the gardens and feel good about being politically active, without feeling they were part of something really radical or they would get in trouble in the office.”

For others, the dynamic involves small, subtle subversive gestures that constitute a distinct form of disobedience. Political performance comes in many forms.

When Ghandi led his followers to gather salt, it was considered a criminal act, yet the disobedience resulted in a shift in policy. The same could be said about the simple of giving away a clean syringe. Members of ACT UP New York, after all, considered

their Lower East Side syringe exchange the group's longest running civil disobedience. This resistance to city policy was very much considered a piece of political drama capable of changing customs of a culture (Elovich, undated).

Prefigurative political drama comes in many forms – from making salt to syringe exchange to electronic civil disobedience (Dominguez, 2002). The point is to elevate the opposition to an action or a gesture – such as Ghandi's salt-gathering – into a dramatic confrontation that leads to political debates about a repressive policy, which ultimately can result in practical shifts in people's lives. In prefigurative political drama – where the actions, the civil disobedience actually translate into life-saving intervention – the intervention is embodied in the action. Other examples of this include community gardens and Critical Mass bike rides, in which the disobedient action – the garden growing or the bike ridding – reflects the external aim.

"The other one I would add to that would be Food Not Bombs," Starhawk suggests, alluding to a direct-action food distribution program started in 1980 by anti-nuclear activists in Boston that now has autonomous chapters throughout the world.[SEE www.foodnotbombs.net]. "Most of the time, they would be supporting people at actions," she explained. "But for quite a long time in San Francisco, they would be serving food right in front of City Hall, where the homeless people hang out. And they literally got beaten up by the cops every week." As Starhawk explains, police would pull activists out of the Civil Center area and arrest them for giving away food without permit. For a period in San Francisco, gestures such as feeding homeless people were criminalized. In 1987 alone, 725 volunteers associated with the group were arrested for giving away food without a permit (Vitale and McHenry,

1994). “It was encouragement,” Starhawk explains. “It was an embarrassment to the city that the area around City Hall was full of homeless people. They were going to get them out of there and clean up that area.”

Different activists locate this dramatic turn in movement tactics, action, and performance within different periods. Most date the global justice movement to the Zapatista revolution in 1994 (Marcos, 2002). Yet in the years between the end of the Vietnam anti-war movement and the rise of the No Nukes actions and the Guerilla Girls, there were countless moments when direct action overlapped with a dramaturgical flair to lay the groundwork for a form a radical renewal. Stateside, interviewees suggest, Zapatismo overlapped with artful performative activism during the Democratic National Convention in Chicago in 1996. David Solnit mentioned Chicago as one of his best experiences as a creative activist. He recalls:

> [At] the 1996 Democratic Convention in Chicago, there was an anarchist, radical gathering called Acts of Resistance. One of the areas that I worked on was called, “Art, Theater and Culture.” We organized a muralist from the San Francisco Mission District, some puppeteers, a mask-maker from Chicago, a wide range of artists and musicians and dancers, and we spent a week together making art and theater. Because the local organizers at the conference were so busy making the conference, we ended up organizing the demonstrations for active resistance. So what was so incredible about that was that for one of the first times, we had a demonstration where the art and theater wasn’t sort of icing on the cake or a decoration. The entire logic of the protest was organized as a street theater pageant. We took over the main six-way intersections in Chicago.

I attended the Chicago Democratic National Convention protests Solnit is referring to. There was certainly an absurd defiance to the whole thing, but I also remember not always knowing what the activists were talking about. My notes included an appreciation for all that felt wonderful and flawed about the street demonstration. Here, a lack of coherence seemed to overlap with a wisdom emerging from a street-level

critique of business as usual. The "Stop the Racist Imprisonment Binge" stickers that activists passed out seemed to embody the raw, undirected anger of the moment. There was an over-fixation with what happened 28 years before in Chicago at the 1968 convention, and, with the memory of a vast progressive history that began with William Jennings Bryant's first nomination for president in 1896, a hope to rekindle something of a progressive possibility, coupled with a desperate need to reinvent the protest repertoire. Yet there was something profoundly inspiring about the actions.

"That was a departure to have art and culture at the center of it, moving artists from being the decorators to actually being in the center," Solnit explains. "And that was actually the catalyst for forming Art and Revolution." Other interviewees also participated in the Arts and Revolution actions in Chicago. LJ Wood, another participant, remembers a play element emerging from the streets during those actions, which were accompanied by an intense police presence:

> The first Art and Revolution action I was ever involved in was actually in Chicago at the Democratic Convention in 1996. It was in a park, there were kids making puppets and street paint. And then marching around town with everybody in the community. It was a little problematic in that we didn't realize how intense the police pressure was going to be at that point. We were flagged by the police presence and the FBI and horse cops and all this. They were really avoiding public arrest at that event because of the history.

David Dellinger, one of the Chicago Eight nearly three decades earlier, was an enduring presence throughout the week of actions. I had never seen someone so determined to get arrested for what looked like the sake of getting arrested. But the sophisticated Chicago police, who had become examples of excess in 1968, refused to be provoked or to give Dellinger a moment to reclaim his old glory until the last day

of the actions, when he was finally arrested. “He had to work at it,” Wood remembers. Over the next two political conventions, police would become more and more sophisticated about not participating in the activist storylines.

Throughout 1996, competing protest narratives about Chicago’s anti-war past and the global justice movement’s future intersected as styles, tactics, and aesthetics clashed. While Dellinger looked backward, the group that would become Art and Revolution built on the collective intelligence of the prefigurative political performance of Food Not Bombs and the whimsical poetry of Zapatismo to create an entirely different kind of street presence. Solnit recalls:

> [T]he response to us doing a parade down the street, we had a theater pageant and a twenty-foot corporate power tower dragged along by voters, consumers, and taxpayers in all these different costumes. People walked out of their stores, doors, and kitchens, and the kids smiled and waved. It just had such a different quality and when the police started cracking down on it, they just looked very outrageous. They were in unfamiliar territory. They were dealing with a giant puppet and theater pageant with eight hundred people rather than a traditional left protest.

Solnit went on to describe the founding of Art and Revolution soon thereafter:

> It’s mostly an idea and a collective. It was a little bit like Food Not Bombs, partly a concept and partly a network of groups. The following year after Critical Resistance, I was so inspired by it and [so was?] a community arts organizer in Seattle. There was a gathering, a convergence. We basically took the ideas from Chicago and did a gathering in which we would train art activists and organizers how to use art and theater and culture as an organizing tool and as a weapon to change things. And then we would get artists and performers and cultural workers and teach them how to do direct action and do press and try to turn them into organizers.

Four years later, the police confiscated all the puppets before the protests against the Republican National Convention could even begin in Philadelphia in the summer of

2000. The police raided the convergence space where the puppets were being made. And the space for play was thus reduced. “That’s obviously no accident,” Larry Bogad, who lived in Philadelphia while attending college, comments. He recalls the police action:

> It was before they had a chance to use those puppets. They had plainclothes police or what-have-you inside the space already. And they arrested everybody, I forget, but I think it was 64 people, puppetistas, destroyed all the puppets –which they do in Philly, they’ll destroy stuff before you can get it to court as evidence. So they destroyed all the puppets. They claimed all the paint thinner was flammable for making a bomb. They said [the activists] were making a slingshot, but it was like a stick to hold up a puppet arm.

The police response appeared to be an effort to prevent the actions from having a feeling of playfulness. “There had been a series of crackdowns, particularly on art and culture,” Solnit recalls. He concurs with Bogad’s assessment of the police tactic of shutting down spaces for culture within the protests. “It’s a little hard to articulate, but I think that the police understand that when you control visual space, giants puppets can actually hold a street much better than a black bloc ready to fight,” he says. Yet there was more to it than shutting down culture space, as Solnit explains:

> The other part is that whether its street theater or clowning, we’re developing skills to confront power that they are unskilled with, that put them in very unfamiliar territory. They are better skilled at violence and physical confrontation. Yet humor and silliness and art and theater, they just don’t know how to related to it.

Here, a playful spirit serves as a different way of responding to and engaging with power. It is often viewed as a way of breaking down social controls. For Solnit, much of this began in 1996:

> In the streets of Chicago, a combination of using theater and playfulness shifted the terrain with the police. It wasn’t that we just make art, we were also self-organized. When the cops started rushing in, we all grabbed [the art] so the police couldn’t get it. We had police liaisons trying to back them off, just a bunch of physical stuff, trying to hold our space, using street tactics. But I think what was

> different was that we had something proactive and positive. That we had a theater and a celebration and a festival going on made it so it did not matter whether the police showed up.

The street carnival created a different kind of story.

By the late 1990s, the movement of movements borrowed from the multiplicity of narratives flowing from the Zapatista saying, "one no and a thousand yeses" – no to neoliberalism and yes to humanity, culture, and difference. "That was actually very present for me then," Solnit recalls. "I had done singe-issue organizing from 1980 to the early 1990s. And had dropped out for a year. Partly I was just tired of single-issue organizing, even mass direct action organizing. And I believe in direction action." The challenge was simple: "We all knew that the problems were systemic." But the old tactics were not up to the task. "We also felt like our tactics and our forms of resistance and communication were very stale," he explains.

Yet with the Zapatista uprising in Chiapas, in the Yucactan region of Mexico, there was a feeling that a different storyline was emerging. "[I]t was qualitatively different from the Sandinistas and the FMLN," Solnit recalls. "[The Zapatistas] were talking about poetry. And they were not trying to take power. Their strategy was probably more theater than military strategy. A lot of us were quite inspired." Zapatismo was a breath of fresh air. Here was a way to open up lots of different storylines. "There was a merging of intelligence. People involved in social movements around the world were looking for new ways to change the world because the old ones weren't working," Solnit explains. With the end of the Cold War, the old ways of organizing and approaching political solidarity were wiped away, creating a new kind of movement story. "The final blow that kind of freed that space up was the collapse of the Soviet Union," he continues.

"The miserably failed model of the left finally fell in on itself. And that freed a lot of us up." With Zapatismo, a different kind of a left story filled this void. "When Margaret Thatcher said 'there is no alternative,' the Zapatistas said 'Ya Basta.' Here's a story of a different way to change the world," Solnit explains. "And right after the uprising in 1994, Marcos was called the Subcomandante of Performance Art." Instead of being another left-wing movement aiming to take power, the Zapatistas played with it, they told stories with it, yet they did not try to hold it in any traditional sense.

What followed was a qualitative turn in movement organizing, in which art and culture were no longer seen as mere add-ons, but were recognized as central ingredients in a social change stew. Solnit explains:

> For me, organizing around art and culture and theater was a way to do anti-systemic organizing, or anti-capitalistic organizing. We all knew that the problems were deeper than any single issue. The conventional wisdom was, you can talk about your issues, you can make a few changes. But if you talk too much about any of the systemic issues, you alienate your constituency. That was the single-issue organizing wisdom that I was brought up with. It was very unsatisfying to me. Most of us knew things were wrong and wanted to overthrow the system. And we didn't want to just get reforms around one issue. The corporations do not have a different committee for how to destroy the ecosystem and how to disempower the communities and how to screw the workers. They act cumulatively and think more systemically than our social movements often do. Doing Art and Revolution, in the same week I'd work with forest activists and homeless groups, indigenous rights groups, striking unions. Sort of tie it all together and be able to put out radical messages. If I wore all black and clenched my fist and yelled into a microphone, people would all shut down, but if you do it with dancing puppets, if you make it fun and lose the rhetoric, then people are very open to it.

Yet the challenge remained: how to link this anti-systematic critique with a winning political strategy that led to shifts in people's lives. This was the question the global justice movement would face in the years to come.

SuperBarrio Man and the Struggle to Bridge the Praxis Divide

In the spring of 2001, members of RTS found a very practical way to bridge the praxis divide between the political wanderlust of the movement of movements and core economic issues about wages, salaries, and work. Part of the praxis of the global justice movement was finding and acting on local manifestations of larger global problems. While there was a clear recognition of the global dimensions of trade policies – such as the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) - groups such as the Lower East Side Collective's Community Labor Coalition and RTS worked together to address the local dimensions of these policies. For RTS, the aim was to use pieces of culture, such as guerilla theater, to articulate a systemic critique and to have an impact. The challenge was to integrate this critique within a campaign on the ground. This is where RTS worked in a complementary way with the LESC Community Labor Coalition (CLC) greengrocer campaign.

That spring, members of RTS New York, who had worked for years on the picket lines with the CLC, called on their theatrical skills to support the larger campaign which was coming to a head. The action, in which SuperBarrio Man, a Mexican pop culture hero, wrestled "unionbusters large and small" would take place Mayday, the international worker's solidarity day. RTS members would remember it as a peak theatrical moment for the group. Andrew Boyd, of the Billionaires, would serve as the referee for the action. When Bill Talen, aka Reverend Billy of the Church of Stop Shopping, dropped out as the emcee, the group recruited former dramaturge Ricardo Dominguez, a co-founder of the Electronic Disturbance Theater (EDT), a group that developed the "virtual sit-in" in 1998 in solidarity with the Zapatistas. Dominguez, who

was in Rome meeting with the Italian direct action group Ya Basta, was recruited through a series of phone calls and e-mails to participate in the action less than two weeks before it was to take place. . "[N]ot up to speed on this SuperBarrio performance," he responded in an email (2001) to the RTS mailing list. "[W]here and when is it?...if I can...I would be more than happy to play!"

As it turned out, some of the best activists in the neighborhood were willing to play. Dominguez, the lead organizer with UNITE, which was helping organize the greengrocers, would play SuperBarrio Man. Jason Grote and Matthew Roth would play union busters, and RTS newcomer Larry Bogad would play one of the union-busting henchmen.

Grote (2001), who was not actually at the meeting where he was drafted to participate, was an early recruit for the action. "Well, I picked up the latest issue of *Variety* and they tell me that I'm still on tap to play BarrioMan this May Day." He was later informed he was actually slated to play a union buster. Still, he wrote, "As per my usual contract with RTS, I've got a few requirements." These included a copy of the video footage of BarrioMan. In addition, Grote explained, "Like before, I will be needing the tractor trailer with the full-service gym inside." And finally, " for the last time, can someone tell the catering people that I want the crusts cut OFF of my fucking sandwiches?" That was followed by caveat, "OK, OK, number one is for real. Does anyone have any BarrioMan footage?" This type of rambunctious banter was a consistent part of the group process when RTS New York was functioning on all cylinders. Groups that play together tend to stay together.

By mid-April, rehearsals were scheduled and a call for participants in the action went out over the RTS email list:

> MAYDAY 2001 WRESTLING MADNESS
> SUPER BARRIO MAN VS. MULTI-NEFARIOUS BOSSES
>
> The odds may be stacked against us
> The money may all be in the BossMan's Hands
> But come Mayday we will collectively smack THE MAN down to the MAT until he cries UNCLE
>
> As the first Mayday of the new millenium approaches, propaganda- adcopy ballyhooing the miracle of the "new economy" is as relentless as ever, despite the obvious emptiness of the rhetoric. For many workers there's nothing new about any of it. Greengrocer employees are locked in a fierce two-year-old struggle to gain the basic right to organize. Sweatshop garment workers toil invisibly in the middle of Manhattan. Immigration officers threaten them all with deportation while the Bosses pick their pockets and starve their families
>
> OUR RESPONSE: Reclaim the Streets, in coalition with the Community Labor Coalition, will march with thousands of immigrant workers to demand their rights. Along the way Reverend Billy, Radical Cheerleaders, Billionaires, EDT and the requisite pack of rabbl- rousers will be stopping by greedy Greengrocer stores and garment sweatshops, staging wrestling matches between SUPER BARRIO MAN, people's champion, and various offenders of common decency, including FAT CAT Billionaires, CORPORATE taskmasters, international BANKERS, La Migra, and of course our very own resident SWEATSHOP owners. Our money's on SUPER BARRIO MAN.
>
> WHAT YOU CAN DO: Join the March for the Rights of Immigrant Workers!! Come to Union Square between Noon and 3:00 at for the kicking off rally (3:00 for Round 1 of the Wrestling Match!). From there we will march, leaving at 3:30, up to 36th Street and 8th Avenue, arriving at 4:30. From there the March will proceed to the headquarters of the International Monetary Fund at 44th Street and 2nd Avenue. If you feel like gettin' in the ring, well by all means, come as your favorite evildoer, but be forewarned, SUPER BARRIO MAN will be in no mood for mercy on MAYDAY 2001.

Bogad, who had first encountered RTS during the 23 story tower campaign, became active with the group after reading the call for SuperBarrio participants on the

email list. Like Grote, Bogad had training in theater, which he brought to his work with RTS. Bogad describes becoming involved with the group:

> I got on the RTS list, met you, we did the SuperBarrio thing for Mayday 2001. We met to rehearse and I was the new guy. So this guy, Ben Shepard, was very cool about that. He said, "Are you Larry from the e-mail?" which was great 'cause its hard to be the new guy. So that was good for activists. Sure, be COINTELPRO all the time and get an ulcer, but while you are doing that try to be friendly to the new guy, he might not be an FBI agent.

In contrast to movements which places so much emphasis on security culture that they turned away young activists, the RTS strategy for dealing with agents provocateur was always that if police get involved in the group or an action, put them to work. "That's right. If the FBI guy is in your show, at least make him sew a costume 'cause you're paying for his salary anyway," Bogad concurs. He went on to describe what worked for him about the Superarrio Man action:

> What I liked about it is that it's in the culture of savvy interculturalism. I thought it was really apropo and smart as well as being festive. To take a real folk hero of Mexican wrestling for working-class kids and audiences, to take that SuperBarrio character, who is a real performer, obviously, in Mexico and say, "Let's take his costume. Let's do a knock off version of that." 'Cause we have Latino workers; we have UNITE and the Community Labor Coalition, and a lot of workers who could enjoy the symbolism of this person. Let's make our own SuperBarrio Mayday wrestling madness in the street against the thugs, the union-busters, the Billionaires, the Dead Money Devil, and all these cats. The Dead Money Devil was Garret, who got arrested for wearing his mask. He was Del Diavelo del Dinero, the money devil. All the creative characters doing cool stuff. And I knew a little bit about stage fighting, that little bit of theater background. Hey, you can pretend you are pulling someone by their hair this way. And it looks like he's doing it, but he's really barely touching him. The union organizer who played SuperBarrio man was great because he knew martial arts. He was graceful and can move around and pretend to move around and pretend to fight. So its a skill sharing. The labor organizer who was willing to wear the funny costume, maybe not too worried about his conventionally defined masculinity. He was totally into it. The fact that we had a couple who played accordions together as the sound track for our live show, again, it's this do-it-yourself stone soup kind of aesthetic. It's like if they both played tubas we'd say "great." Make that work. And it's funny. It adds to the humor, it's like, who are these accordion guys? They are wonderful. I played the objective press character 'cause it happens to be

> something I'm bitter about and it's nice to make humor about things you are bitter about. And that's, I think. releasing.

Matthew Roth, who was also involved with the action, describes the scenario

> The idea was bringing the people's hero, SuperBarrio Man, who wrestles the corrupt politicians and business persons and mob bosses. And who is almost defeated every time, almost unmasked every time so that they may get his real identity. But with the power of the people, the crowd's cheering, he gains strength from that and is able to defeat the corrupt, evil overlords. And so we had our own SuperBarrio in New York. And I was Phil the Dark Knight with my cadre of Fashion Whores, who bound SuperBarrio Man with the power of credit. Merely flashing their cards stunned him. And enabled me to sweep in and nearly win. That wily bastard. He somehow escaped. The crowd is cheering and all these people are going crazy. La gente unita.…I was overwhelmed and of course he won as usual.

Bogad elaborates:

> It starting being a piece of street theater. It was mobile. So it went along the permitted march route of UNITE for this march for immigrant workers demonstration, which started in Union Square, appropriately enough. So we first performed in this rally context. And then the rally, of course, turned into a march. And we marched all the way around the city, passed some sweatshop bodega kind of places that we were protesting, stopping there, and we were going all the way to the IMF building, which again was something that was cool about UNITE being a progressive union that draws a bigger picture. And RTS too being down with that, having an international perspective, work local, think about global issues and how this all tied together. The show, of course, was a blast. It was a professional wrestling type of outrageous fight, which of course, being SuperBarrio Man, they are going to take his mask off, which is the greatest defeat for a Mexican wrestler to have your secret identity revealed. Which becomes ironic. Everyone winces, "he's going to lose his mask, oh my god" and then cheers when he gets his power back, even though the Billionaires are all bludgeoning him three to one. And our ref is looking the other way all the time, you know. So we had a lot of fun things like that.

Roth played a spoof of Phil Knight, who at the time was the CEOof the Nike company, which had made a habit of supporting sweatshop labor. "I had on those Lycra super-tight, flex black spandex pants things that runners wear and a bright yellow 'swoosh' shirt," he recalled. "I had a nice cape with a 'swoosh' on it and it said 'Dark

Knight' on the back. And some funky bluish, purplish runner's shorts, kinda hiked way too high up. I looked actually quite ravishing."

The performances were to take place in front of greengrocer shops that paid workers substandard wages. A later performance would take place in front of a former Donna Karan subsidiary sweatshop in the garment district on Fashion Avenue (Seventh Avenue). By the time it reached Seventh Ave., the procession passed the headquarters of Human Rights Watch, where Bob Kohler stood outside monitoring who was getting housing from the Human Resources Administration and who was being turned away.

For much of that spring, the global justice movement of movements overlapped with campaigns juxtaposing local and global issues. The streets were alive with a cross-section of local struggles that mirrored global issues related to poverty: housing, wages, human rights. And many people were getting involved with these struggles. I spoke with Kohler and Jennifer Flynn about their experiences that spring. "My friend Robin Bird [who runs a local adult TV call-in show] didn't' want to leave," said Kohler.Flynn, who helped coordinate Human Rights Watch, remembered political actions as a kind of party space that spring. "There was a time when that was the place to be," she explained. "More popular than Meow Mix [a downtown lesbian bar]" But she did offer a caveat: "Of course, that was only when it was warm." By that fall, things would get hotter than most preferred.

Yet even back in the springtime of 2001, the political performances were starting to push up the temperature. Roth recalls, "We pulled out the ropes and had the full-on mock wrestling match on the street in the name of SuperBarrio Man, reclaiming that space and taking it back for the people." The performance thus highlighted the struggle of

workers to find a different way to work in the world with dignity, fair wages, and union support, as opposed to in a sweatshop without the support or solidarity of a union. Roth elaborated on the multiple meanings and audiences for such social change drama. “I think it was various levels,” he says.. “The first is the sort of radical engagement with the unknowing public around you. On Mayday, we occupied a lane of traffic on the street.” Yet beyond taking the streets, Roth explains:

> The point was to embody this character [Knight] and get as wicked as this shoe empire person who still very much hates this champion of the people. So on one level it’s engaging the public. And we saw it very clearly. Within minutes of the action, there was an enormous crowd around us. The police were trying to separate the crowd from traffic. So we’re right there in the middle of a thoroughfare that’s not intended for people. And we didn’t have a permit for the performance. The march part was permitted, but what we were doing wasn’t. We weren’t asking permission to be on a roadway that’s not intended for pedestrians and certainly not intended for pseudo mock wrestling matches, for street theater.

SuperBarrio Man was able to prevail in round one at Union Square, after which the march set off to the site the most infamous anti-union greengrocer, East Natural on 13th Street? and 5th Avenue?, for round two. Bogad recalls:

> What ends up happening is we’re surrounded by a massive police presence. I think there were as many police as there were demonstrators. And they are doing what I call their own little theater of domination, where they are criminalizing things, thinking we must be psychotic if there are hundreds of cops surrounding us. We must be really dangerous. So I think it has that effect on passers-by. It’s obviously a little intimidating to us, especially if you are not just a regular RTS member but one of these immigrant workers out there to express your feelings on this issue. Maybe your papers are not in order. But whatever it is, you’re a little intimidated by being surrounded by police. And if your papers are not together, all the more so. Certainly. If you’re “sans papiers” or even if you’re up here from El Salvador, you’re having flashbacks, you’re uncomfortable. It’s not a good feeling. So it affects the people.

Not long into the match, the legal observers began to whisper that the police were planning to arrest a number of activists when the wrestling matches, held inside the legal bullpen, ended. For Bogad, the interaction between police, activists, and the audience --

which included many undocumented workers -- produced a series of competing stories and performances, as a joyous theater of social and economic liberation intersected with a theater of domination:

> It's really a performance and counter-performance, 'cause why are we doing this? We're doing it 'cause its fun. We're also doing it because it creates a bit of a carnival spirit for ourselves and for the labor people, where it's like, "Wow, I went to that demonstration and it was a damn good time and those people were funny while still dealing with our issues."

Yet that performance of community was complicated by a different kind of performance. Just as the Radical Cheerleaders began to perform, the police arrested one of the Billionaires who'd been wrestling; his charge: "masquerading in public." The crowd began to chant, "Shame!," "Let Him Go!," "No More Police State," and the ubiquitous, "Big Sticks, Small Pricks!!" "Now, being surrounded by police," Bogad explains. "That's the opposite kind of energy, that's trying to cancel it out, where it's like, 'I went to that demonstration and it was a drag and I felt intimidated. I'm not gonna go next time.'" The word was that the police were looking for anyone who'd worn a wrestling mask for the guerilla theater. One bystander wearing a Giuliani mask was told that the police were looking for her. The activist wearing the Giuliani mask left the site, while another snuck off to the New School for Social Research. A few minutes later, the police moved straight into the crowd with billy clubs swinging, assaulting and arresting another group of protesters, including one of the Radical Cheerleaders who had been performing. Bill Talen, who teaches a class on political performance at the New School, had taken his kids out to watch the show across from East Natural. He was harassed by the police merely for watching the action from across 5th Avenue. As the melee broke

out, one of Talen's students was arrested. So the police stopped the show. Bogad describes how a theater of domination took hold:

> [T]hey end up arresting Garrett, the Money Devil; they don't arrest the real money devils, they arrest the fake one, amusingly enough, for wearing his mask. There is the mask law. And the irony being, of course, SuperBarrio Man doesn't want to lose his mask in the wrestling match. That's the storyline. Of course, the police will make you take off your mask. So Garrett got arrested, as you know. 36 hours in jail, months of court, and charges are eventually thrown out because its completely ridiculous. They used this 1845 mask law that has nothing to do with your freedom of speech. But of course, it's being selectively applied to activists. And what that's about, on one level, is just raising the social cost of participating -- the financial, personal, emotional costs and labor of participating in a democracy. And as you have said, it's a chilling effect.

It was clear to everyone that the police intimidation and arrests were designed to turn people away, chilling interest in future protests while reducing access to a public sphere for debate and political participation.

Much of the action's vitality stemmed from the subversive, unpermitted -- and therefore unregulated -- performance, linked with a very specific grievance. Bogad described the stages of the performance as the group started moving to perform in front of the various greengrocers. "Stopping again, this is making it not just for fun in a vacuum; when you are doing it in Union Square, it's for ourselves and the people in the rally," he explained. "But the nice thing about doing this in a mobile context is now we're going to stop right at a place where there is a conflict over their labor practices. Now that is a little more confrontational." The group was clear about stating what was wrong with the situation in an ironic, dramaturgical fashion, but "without being violent or even really nasty in a negative way," Bogad explains. "We're not standing up there screaming at them, but we're doing something that does satirize them and show them for the bad cartoon characters in our cartoon." At these sweatshops, the group performed at the scene

of the crime, "where people are making $2.12 an hour under the table," Bogad elaborates, "Or they're not getting paid. It's just outrageous. So that's a little more confrontational, but still in a playful way."

As the other cases in this study have illustrated, when authentic, unregulated, unpermitted play takes place, it often functions as a threat to business as usual. With SuperBarrio Man, core economic issues were involved. Theatrical confrontation was remarkably effective at communicating a message about economic injustice. The day after the protests, New York attorney General Elliot Spitzer filed claims against East Natural, Abigail's, and Hudson Market (all owned by the same family) for back-wages due to employees, who werepaid an average of $2.60 an hour. The CLC and UNITE, which spearheaded the Mayday actions in coordination with RTS, brought the case to the attention of the attorney general, and the movement actually had a win on its hands.

The SuperBarrio skit was combined with ongoing pickets organized by UNITE and CLC outside the stores. Those on the picket lines tried to turn away potential shoppers and passed out literature to disseminate information about the labor issues involved. The creative piece helped provide a catalyst. Bogad describes the interplay between theatrics and more traditional organizing: "I think that you put a certain amount of creative labor into something and it's almost like, you know, how you get more leverage with a crowbar, you expend less energy for the push that you get." The theatricality of the Mayday action combined with the communication to the attorney general and other stakeholders including the local city council woman, as part of a multipronged approach. "You put a little bit of creative effort into making a certain kind of a visual and you can get more play than you might have thought," Bogad explains.

Yet, as described above, the action was not without incident. As the context for the action shifted, so did the police presence. And arrests followed. “It’s the end stages of Giuliani,” said John Mage, a radical lawyer and longtime observer of police misconduct. “The police are as out of control as I have seen in my lifetime.” For Bogad and many others, there was an acute feeling that the police were trying to shut down the carnival, the subversive space for play and performance and democratic participation that emerged with the unsanctioned guerilla theater. “Again, it’s bringing down the carnival,” Bogad explains. “We’re saying we’re trying to build up something of a carnival, a play space.” Such a space for topsy-turvy expression is not always [WHAT?]. On the other hand, the First Amendment clearly guarantees the right to peacefully protest and air grievances, even in the dying days of the Giuliani era. For Giuliani, shutting down the carnival was part of squeezing social movement activity.

A vital ingredient of the carnival is that everyone is encouraged to participate. Matthew Roth described how he felt moved to participate in such a performance:

> What I find so much more interesting about street theater and Billionaires for Bush type of things is the way it pushes me beyond my normal limitations. I’m not an actor, but I certainly am a performer, which is something I didn’t know before I got involved in this. So it’s taking this raw protean nucleus of energy and giving it some direction and then seeing what happens with that. I was always nervous with public speaking in school, but I don’t remember being nervous with this. There were some directions we had established by consensus. But if you performed it 100 different times, you’d have 100 different versions.

Thus, this form of democratic performance functions much like jazz improvisation or an oral narrative and community story. Through participation within such a story, people find a new connections to themselves, their communities, and their own potential. Such a jam cannot take place without the interplay between audience and musician, storyteller

and listener. The full-participation carnival space is thus "a play space to imagine other worlds and to liberate ourselves," Bogad explains. His thinking about the liberatory possibilities of the carnival is consistent with Roth's views: "I'm a ham, I'll perform all the time. It's fun for me. For other people, it's quite liberating to put on a costume and go do this. I didn't know I could go do that."

Roth went on to describe the politics he was involved in before he discovered ways to incorporate elements of creativity, play, direct action, or performance into his organizing:

> I had been involved in other protests in college and stuff. But I had never been able to conceptualize why I loathed and felt uncomfortable in normal protest situations with the placards and the march and the chanting. And it wasn't until I discovered the politics of play, the politics of street theater, or how it discovered me, or how we came together at the same time, that I realized how I could use my energy in a way that I completely condoned everything that was happening because of the creativity. Whereas when I was standing behind a placard that says 'don't do this' or 'power to this' or 'whatever this' and people started chanting things that I may know or not, I never bought it. I never bought into it. There was something about being behind that where it wasn't me speaking. It was a canned slogan. It was a canned speech. It's all these things that weren't authentic. They weren't spontaneous. And even though street theater has direction, it's still about spontaneity; it's still about authenticity in that moment and experience.

For Roth, the connection to the full-participation politics of play, where there is no distinction between leader and follower, participant and crowd, proved to be a transformative entry point into politics. He continues:

> It wasn't until after I discovered that form of expression and that form of performance that I realized exactly why I could never go back to doing the traditional marches. And I haven't. I've been to every major summit-hopping enormous protest since A16 that's been within a few hundred miles and even to the FTAA protests in Miami. And I can't engage in the same way. I can't. I need to be playing music and dancing. I need to be filming and doing a video project, doing communications and scouting and performing a different role. That way I feel like I'm contributing to the general feeling of the day, but I'm creating in my own right.

When the state seeks to shut down the carnival, it is that feeling of authentic experience, of possibility, which the state seeks to regulate. Without such restrictions, a free-flowing experience of community and personal possibility, which comes dangerously close to feeling like a democracy, can emerge. Hence, Bogad suggests that these playful expressions tend to be seen as a threat. "The great fear of arrest discourages people to wear masks, which is a great part of any costume." What follows is a regulatory politics of fear, of mass arrests, of selective enforcement, of policies such as the mask law. And the result inhibits political participation. "Now you can't have a mask and you can't have a puppet 'cause we're going to take your puppet away," Bogad explains. "And you can't have this, and you can't have a banner that's too big. And now, they are just taking away our props and our costumes, which are our theatrical tools."

Nevertheless, despite these efforts, by the end of Mayday 2001 dispatches reported mass protests in Zurich, Taiwan, and South Korea, where a crowd of 20,000 clashed with 15,000 police. Economic security, jobs, and the right to organize were the focus of mass mobilizations across the globe. New York City was no different. SuperBarrio Man serves as a best-practice example of the use of play to support a larger campaign. LESC's CLC had worked on the greengrocer campaign for years. RTS New York started off as a part of LESC and continued its work with CLC after LESC dissolved the previous summer. Many RTS members were also active in the CLC; they had been in the meetings and had worked the picket lines. So the playful spirit was not disconnected from the larger support for the campaign.

Complacent Engagements

William Etundi immediately used Complacent to support other campaigns and the work of groups including RTS and the League of Pissed Off Voters. Through such work, playing and dancing allows social actors to participate in building a better world and creating a more compelling story. Etundi describes how these pieces fit together:

> The winning campaign, political movement building goes in two ways. It works in two different directions at the same time. Number one, there is winning the campaign or the tangible goals, like shutting down this prison, saving this garden, stopping this law, getting this person elected. Winnable, attainable goals is one element of movement building. The other element is creating a sustainable alive and active movement. This doesn't necessarily involve winning campaigns. It does involve being involved in a process that is working for people, for feeling heard, being respected, being interested and engaging. Creative protest definitely works in both campaigns. But it works best to create movement in the less tangible sphere of creating something interesting, engaging, and sustainable.

As an example, Etundi refers to the work of the urban garden activists who have worked so effectively to bridge the local/global praxis divide:

> I think More Gardens is an awesome example of that. Around Esperanza, that was a campaign that was quite clearly lost; the garden was destroyed. But that really gelled a whole lot of people around a specific thing, a lot of specific connections between people. It was an emotional everything. It was challenging. It was growth. It was building connections, networks. It really catalyzed different sectors of people around one thing.

In many circles, the gardens are consistently mentioned as a best-practice example of creating community while linking local and global issues. And this example is by no means merely isolated to New York City. Starhawk describes a similar politics in San Francisco:

> We did a whole action here in San Francisco the year before called Reclaim the Commons. It was around a biotech conference. It was kind of in our home ground, so we planned it for weeks before. We had prop-making parties there for months beforehand, where we propagated thousands of plants. At one point we took them into the street and created a blockade with them, creating a garden in the streets. We did a "really free market" where everything was free. We gave away hundreds of organic plants, seeds, lavender, and chocolate in the middle of

> downtown San Francisco, right in the middle of the shopping district. And then at the end we took all the plants out and planted a garden in the Bay View/Hunter's Point, which is the equivalent of the South Bronx.

By far the largest obstacle to linking local and global struggles is the effort required. It takes a great deal of work to have a long-term impact and create wins such as the gardens that were saved or the CLC's greengrocery victory. As WilliamEtundi, who is no stranger to these challenges, suggests, there are countless challenges involved in linking the politics of play into larger campaigns, especially across race, culture economic inequalities. Here, an income gap becomes a fundamental challenge for such a politics. Barbara Epstein (1991) said prefigurative community building does not involve political economy. Steven Duncombe (2004) says culture is political economy. And organizers around the world use culture as an organizing tool.

Community Building from Diablo Canyon to the Lower East Side

Much of the vitality of the politics of play finds its foundation in the process of radical renewal, which took place with the "emerging wisdom" of the Zapatistas (Marcos, 2002). David Solnit refers to this as it dovetailed with the prefigurative community-building impulse of the anti-nuke activism of the 1970s and 1980s (Epstein, 1991). Renowned campaigns included targeting the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory in Livermore, California, and PG & E's Diablo Canyon energy plant near San Luis Obispo, California. Both Solnit and Starhawk were active within these campaigns. Joyous prefigurative community building accompanied the direct actions of these campaigns. Here, one can locate much of the foundation for the community-building impulse that

gives the global justice movement of movements so much heart. Groups like RTS New York helped build on this. Prefigurative community building helped establish the context for a play impulse that was central to later stages of the group's process. From Diablo Canyon to the Lower East Side, an impulse to paint a canvas of a more caring democracy inspired a new generation to engage.

"I was gonna study art, but it didn't seem really relevant to the world so I put that off," Solnit explained as he discussed his roots in community organizing. Instead of going into the arts, the creative urge found its way into his activism. "In '82, I got involved with the Livermore Action Group, which was sort of the direct action wing of the anti-nuclear weapons movement," he explains.

The Livermore Action Group locates its roots in the work of the Quakers, such as A.J. Muste and Bayard Rustin (D'Emilio, 2003), who first linked anti-war politics with civil rights and nuclear disarmament within a broad human rights discourse. Solnit describes how this broad impulse found its expression:

> It was a chapter in the threat of nuclear war and people chose disarmament, with the distribution of resources from the military to human needs. There was a campaign in the Bay Area focused on the Livermore nuclear weapons lab. And so people were lobbying for de-escalating the nuclear arms race. So people did a mass direct action campaign in 1982 and '83 with well over 1,000 people getting arrested. And it included spending a couple of weeks in jail [Epstein, 1991, p. 125-56]. That was an incredible hub of networking and creative ideas and innovation. So there was a lot of creativity in the protest and the demonstrations themselves were very participatory and horizontal. A lot of people had costumes. It was a departure from walking down the street or listening to speakers at a rally.

Thus, while the Livermore group built on the ideas of A.J. Muste's pacifism, it also found room for the queer aesthetics that Rustin had yearned for. It also found room to build on the creative DiY culture of punk and anarchism, which inspired so many young activists, including Solnit, in the early 1980s. He explains:

> I got familiar with some ideas and energy from the punk rock scene, but I thought it[anarchist philosophy] was something that happened a hundred years ago and there wasn't anybody outside the punk scene that was talking about it. But to run into a whole entire movement… I wasn't all that connected to it initially. I just showed up and was involved with some weird Catholic priests and a bunch of old ladies and got dragged off. And then I was in jail with 500 men who were all making incredibly ornate decisions about how to fight collectively around jail solidarity. It was a spokescouncil model that was actually working in that people felt they could change the world without actually relying on politicians. It was person-to-person anarchism.

The movement also built on a righteous tradition of consensus-based decision-making inherited from the Quakers. "It was incredible," Solnit recalls. "The thing about decentralized or horizontal organizing is, you create frameworks that create these wide-open spaces where people are very diverse and work together." Over the years, waves of protests overwhelmed the Livermore weapons lab as the case for nuclear disarmament found expression in countless different forms and zones surrounding the space.

Here, the roots of the Zapatista "one no and a thousand yeses" – the diversity of tactics – could be seen in a wide array of direct actions. "There'd be an area for the religious people, a creative theater area, an anything goes tactically area. It allows huge amounts of different cultures to flourish," Solnit explains. The impulse resulted in a departure from straight protest toward a highly participatory carnival model of protest. This diversity allowed a wide range of groups to coordinate their actions, which were rooted in a number of different protest traditions. "So there were Christians who were praying, and pagans doing spiral dances, and punks doing street theater, and all kind of crazy old radicals doing all sorts of political things," Solnit explains. Yet the overall effect of these actions was a highly dramaturgical display. "The real theater of it all was people blockading cars with their bodies," he recalls.

More than anything else, there is a social Eros in the mix of play and fun and love of the people, the space, and the community-building efforts involved in these campaigns. Starhawk describes this feeling during the campaign to shut down the Diablo Canyon nuclear energy plant:

> I think I felt that really way back in Diablo Canyon in the very first non-violent direct action, being encamped with people. Really, I think I was down there for about three weeks, where decisions were made by consensus; where there was this tremendous amount of care and good vibes from people. It's really transformative. Some of the people who had been at the G8 [protests in 2005] were saying they'd been at the one in Avion and there had been a camp there and the process had been so inspiring to them of people coming together and making decisions, that they came back inspired to create something like that.

Larry Bogad, who also participated in the G8 actions Starhawk mentions, describes how this community-building impulse propelled his work with RTS New York. As it did for Starhawk, Solnit, and Epstein (1991), a certain creative social Eros characterizes much of this work and play. "I think it was great to see, when you started working with a group, the personal connections, being part of the whole affinity group building, how different issues called for different techniques and tactics," he says. The human dimension included many of the most basic of human struggles, Bogad explains: "You know, within the affinity group, who's busy, who's not. Who's having a kid and who's not. Who's overwhelmed with work or who leaves town or whatever. I'm usually he one who was leaving town."

For a period between 2001 and 2004, Bogad found that RTS New York offered a useful space in which to utilize elements of creativity, play, direct action, and performance in his organizing. It was also a sort of laboratory for the politics of play. For him, the play within the RTS affinity group follow a series of stages from banter in meetings, through rehearsal, and eventually performance. "I think the play came out in

several modes. Play came out in our rehearsals and in our performances, and those are two very different things," Bogad explains. "In the rehearsal, we are in our safe space." Bogad and this interviewer laughed about the room being miked so there was an external audience for the rehearsal, especially given the reality was that by this point, domestic spying was a reality for many activists. "It makes me feel special to know I have an audience," Bogad explains. "And it's nice. But there we are playing together...making our costumes together, which we often did. That's an act of creativity together too." Thus, even the most routine activist engagement becomes an opportunity for expression. "Rehearsing and playing around, trying different schticks and different scenarios," Bogad continues. "That's fun and that's in a totally more free space, cause it's like our space, that we're making warm with our own creativity."

From the rehearsals to the day of the scheduled protest, the play dynamic shifts, as Bogad explains:

> Now in the moment of play in the actual action, of course, there's a different dynamic in play, because now we're directly engaged with others that are not in our affinity group. Then it's passers-by and it's the state and other activists that are not into what we do and other activists that are into what we do. The media, passers-by – that's the difference between rehearsal and performance. And the stakes go up. You don't do over. You can do over on the next city block, but whatever you do, that's what you did. When you are going "woo, woo!" and another member doesn't want you to go "woo, woo!," well, you are right, you just went "woo, woo! That's a silly example, but when you have your first interaction with a policeman and you have this clown character and he says this, what do I say to him? Now, it's the time. You're on. Lights up. And you tweak it and you have a doublement, a doubling. There's you and the character in the moment. There's just you watching yourself in the scene from the outside, evaluating your own performance consciously or unconsciously. How's this going? How are we doing?

For RTS, as with many creative troupes, play also accompanies good process and a healthy culture. Bogad describes the third level of play within the group:

> The third part of play which actually permeates all of this is the play within our affinity group of banter. Of making the room warm, you know what I'm saying, when we're all at the Life Cafe drinking and eating something and hanging out and talking and playing around, I think that's part of the play, 'cause we build our own interpersonal culture of playfulness, of irony, that has different tones to it. I think that's part of building the trust and the affection. And that's not about sewing the costumes. I'm saying when we're just hanging out and not getting down to business, right? So when you have an RTS meeting and there's schmoozing for a lot of it, that's part of what's happening.

For many direct action groups including RTS, play as a verb play involves a form of participation in a game or performance; as a noun, it involves the performance in which the play takes place. There is the spirit of play and then there's the play itself. The play's the thing Hamlet used to catch the conscience of the king. "In Hamlet, the king blanches and goes white and calls the whole show off," Bogad recalls. Yet he is also realistic about which publics one is addressing within direct action and political performance. While the performance may not function to shift the terms of engagement with the state, there are many things it can achieve. "We're about building a movement culture that can spread and more people can join the movement and get into it," Bogad explains. "And get those people in the middle to join us. Get the people who are already in the middle to get excited and active and engaged." Thus, play is about creating a different kind of a democracy.

For the members of RTS New York, play involved both creating a supportive culture of resistance and community as well as serving as a catalyst for personal freedom. "That all of this boils down to, perhaps, liberating ourselves I guess is an obvious point," Bogad says. "Modeling our version of citizenship – which means to be playful and participatory as citizens. And giving that model of how to behave as citizens, not just consumers." Thus, for Bogad and others in the movement of movements, "To be a citizen

means to be a voter, to be a citizen means to be a consumer, to be a worker, a producer. All of those things of course you are doing every day." Yet there is also the flip side of the play dynamic. "But for us, it's also about being a trickster," he explains, eluding to the mercurial, disruptive side of the human imagination (Hyde, 1998).

The struggle for play becomes a struggle to find a place for different kinds of perspective on social life and experience and participation. In other words, this play element involves a new perspective on theater as a metaphor for democracy. To end being passive, to break down the forth wall. Here, Bogad refers to a different kind of participatory theater where a lot of us are invited to be engaged in part of the play. "That's why I got into Boal[HUH?] and Theater of the Oppressed long before I met you guys," he explains. "I would say in 1995 I was reading it and training on it and going to the conferences and seeking that. That makes a lot of sense as a trajectory." The point for many during this period, of course, was to inspire people to fully participate in a drama of social change.

Summer 2001: FBI Memos and a Masquerade Project

By the summer of 2001, the movement of movements was churning forward at full steam. The protests over the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) in Quebec City in April produced some of the most intense confrontations yet seen with the young movement. Many would describe the confrontations between the protestors and police over the wall surrounding the old city as hair-raising and thrilling dark play (Graeber, 2002; Kauffman, 2004). The FTAA protests in April successfully challenged the validity of global trade system, and RTS worked with the CLC to win back-wages for workers in May. Throughout the summer, a living wage campaign at Harvard University captured

the attention of the country (Shepard, 2004c). The living wage movement gained steam nationally as workers' conditions became a topic of debate, political deliberation, and action.

Yet with every success, control culture increases. Panic re-emerged, followed by increasingly creative responses. The political marginalization of anarchists – "the terrorist or anarchist black bloc hysteria" as Jason Grote describes it – was gaining steam. Long before September 11, the powers-that-be sought to delegitimize activists by branding them terrorists. On May 10, FBI director Louis Freeh testified before a Senate committee hearing: "Anarchists and extreme socialist groups—such as… Reclaim the Streets…—have an international presence and, at times, also represent a potential threat in the United States."

First Ron Hayduk and later L.A. Kauffman (2001) posted notes about the issue to the RTS email list. His e-mail included Freeh's testimony:

> LEFT-WING AND PUERTO RICAN EXTREMIST GROUPS: The second category of domestic terrorists, left-wing groups, generally profess a revolutionary socialist doctrine and view themselves as protectors of the people against the "dehumanizing effects" of capitalism and imperialism. They aim to bring about change in the United States through revolution rather than through the established political process. From the 1960s to the 1980s, leftist-oriented extremist groups posed the most serious domestic terrorist threat to the United States. In the 1980s, however, the fortunes of the leftist movement changed dramatically as law enforcement dismantled the infrastructure of many of these groups and the fall of communism in Eastern Europe deprived the movement of its ideological foundation and patronage.
>
> Terrorist groups seeking to secure full Puerto Rican independence from the United States through violent means represent one of the remaining active vestiges of left-wing terrorism. While these groups believe that bombings alone will not result in change, they view these acts of terrorism as a means by which to draw attention to their desire for independence. During the 1970s and 1980s numerous leftist groups, including extremist Puerto Rican separatist groups such as the Armed Forces for Puerto Rican National Liberation (FALN - Fuerzas

Armadas de Liberacion Nacional Puertorriquena), carried out bombings on the U.S. mainland, primarily in and around New York City. However, just as the leftist threat in general declined dramatically throughout the 1990s, the threat posed by Puerto Rican extremist groups to mainland U.S. communities decreased during the past decade.

Acts of terrorism continue to be perpetrated, however, by violent separatists in Puerto Rico. Three acts of terrorism and one suspected act of terrorism have taken place in various Puerto Rican locales during the past three years. These acts, including the March 1998 bombing of a super-aqueduct project in Arecibo, the bombings of bank offices in Rio Piedras and Santa Isabel in June 1998, and the bombing of a highway in Hato Rey, remain under investigation. The extremist Puerto Rican separatist group Los Macheteros is suspected in each of these attacks.

Anarchists and extremist socialist groups – many of which, such as the Workers' World Party, Reclaim the Streets, and Carnival Against Capitalism – have an international presence and, at times, also represent a potential threat in the United States. For example, anarchists, operating individually and in groups, caused much of the damage during the 1999 World Trade Organization ministerial meeting in Seattle.

SPECIAL INTEREST EXTREMISTS: Special interest terrorism differs from traditional right-wing and left-wing terrorism in that extremist special interest groups seek to resolve specific issues, rather than effect more widespread political change. Special interest extremists continue to conduct acts of politically motivated violence to force segments of society, including, the general public, to change attitudes about issues considered important to their causes. These groups occupy the extreme fringes of animal rights, pro-life, environmental, anti-nuclear, and other political and social movements. Some special interest extremists – most notably within the animal rights and environmental movements – have turned increasingly toward vandalism and terrorist activity in attempts to further their causes.

In recent years, the Animal Liberation Front (ALF) – an extremist animal rights movement – has become one of the most active extremist elements in the United States. Despite the destructive aspects of ALF's operations, its operational philosophy discourages acts that harm "any animal, human and nonhuman." Animal rights groups in the United States, including ALF, have generally adhered to this mandate. A distinct but related group, the Earth Liberation Front (ELF), claimed responsibility for the arson fires set at a Vail, Colorado, ski resort in October 1998 that destroyed eight separate structures and caused $12 million dollars in damages. In a communique issued after the fires, ELF claimed that the fires were in retaliation for the resort's planned expansion that would destroy the last remaining habitat in Colorado for the lynx. Eight of the terrorist incidents occurring in the United States during 1999 have been attributed to either ALF or

> ELF. Several additional acts committed during 2000 and 2001 are currently being reviewed for possible designation as terrorist incidents.

The testimony demonstrated that the demonization of political activists was in full force, and the process became a great deal easier after the events of the following September. In the days after activists became aware of Freeh's testimony, RTS immediately thought it was another reason for delight. While many found it horrifying, others thought it was a reason to have a party. Yet the testimony presented what many understood as a very real threat. RTS was on the radar of the US government.

In 1994, RTS London had faced a similar crisis, as John Jordan recalls:

> The other context of the day was the Criminal Justice Act, which was an attempt to pretty much kill all counter-culture in the UK. It was targeting ravers, targeting direct action people, travelers, so there was all this very resourceful DiY culture that was already there, very involved in partying, all that stuff. So there was already a kind of everyday creativity, a rave community, that was one of the bodies involved in this campaign. There was all that influence coming in. There was a 100-foot tower built entirely from stolen scaffolding with a sound system on top. It was all that party protest stuff already happening. And that was the beginning of when it took off.

In many ways, RTS London gained strength by organizing against this law. Jordan describes how his group fought the new panic:

> It was one of those wonderful moments where the government tried to pass the act, yet it was an example of a law that created a movement. It doesn't happen very often. (Laughs.) And it really brought together all these different constituencies. There was art and there were these traditional forms of direct action. The law called all forms of direct action criminal. On the day itself that the law came in, we actually occupied one of the building sites. It was not only a party, but it was also a direct action itself because it was a criminalization of the body itself. All forms of direct action had become criminal. We produced hundreds and hundreds of people. We resisted it. That day, the day that the queen signed the law, we went on site. We'd produced just hundreds and hundreds of signs which said "criminal" that people just wore over their necks. And then we had traditional forms. But then Reclaim the Streets, after the law was passed in 1994, did some provocative stuff against it.
>
> There was really a movement that was produced by that law. We just were really lucky because the numbers were really big. And now when I look back on

> Reclaim the Streets, I think, how did we do it? (Laughs.) It was all the things that show how you need to keep protest in play and not get fixed in form, fixed in tactic. The police work out how to deal with tactics. Starting with the British police, what they are actually very good at, it's a very intelligent policing...And that takes time. It involves a lot of intelligence on the movement, and a lot of finding out about the culture of the movement. And then going, "Ok, right, we are going to kill this movement." Mostly they do it through using the press. And they pick out individual activists and really hassle them, and surveillance – very intrusive forms of surveillance. It's a very intelligent form [of repression] and it works very well. It re-enforces and puts the cops in the head, rather then hitting our heads with cops.

None of this is to suggest the process was not scary for those under attack. In 2003, Jordan wrote an essay entitled "Deserting the Art Bunker," in which he described his impulse to retreat from the public sphere when police surveillance of his work with RTS became intense. "There have been many times I have wanted to return to the safety and comfort of the art bunker," the essay began. These times included threats involving his personal life, such as "when plainclothes police officers spent a week following me everyday as I took my son to school, when special branch raided my flat, when I was framed for something I never did." The list of personal troubles is followed by larger struggles, "when the group I worked in couldn't recover from the vicious campaign of criminalisation by the British media and the state" (Jordan, 2003).

Through all of this ongoing repression and struggle, Jordan became ever more aware that play can be a profoundly effective response to such social controls. For example, when things got hot with the cops during the Quebec FTAA protests in 2001, Jordan resorted to a profoundly silly response to the police. "Witnessing a large medieval catapult firing teddy bears and soft toys over the fence erected around the summit of the Free Trade of the Americas in Quebec," Jordan wrote, he was aware that there could be different types of responses to repression. And this included different forms of play.

"Pulling the fence down and dancing on its back as it bends and buckles" was one form of game playing. The point was to play in a smarter, more clever fashion than the opposition. "Seeing the clouds of tear gas rise above the city, fired at the rate of one per minute for three days and nights, laughing as someone expertly hits the gas canisters back towards the police with an ice hockey stick."

For Jordan, this rambunctious engagement helped transform the world of protest and helped turn the streets into a living work of art. "It felt real to me," he recalled. "More absurd, more adventurous and often more dramatic than any theatre" (2003). It was also play. "[P]laying was always in the tactics," Jordan explains, especially his post-RTS projects. "The rebellion has to be pleasurable. If we don't make it irresistible, how the fuck are we going to get anything done? So, to me, it was always a tactic and a way of feeling language[??]."

The teddy bears flying through the air not withstanding, many observers were troubled by the almost militaristic tone of the protests. L.A. Kauffman recalled feeling that the protestors seemed to mirror the opposition:

> I had a big problem with the aesthetics of the Quebec City protest, and with the aesthetic drift of the global justice movement more generally. Our side was becoming more and more militaristic. All those people – mainly, but not exclusively, young men – dressed in black, looking all menacing and ominous, getting off on confrontations. They had unwittingly become almost a mirror image of the repressive forces that they were up against. And the spirit of carnival that had been so striking in Seattle, that sense of a carnival of resistance, was getting lost.
>
> A friend and I, as we drove back down to New York, starting talking in a culture-jam way about, What would it have been like if the people who were throwing back the tear gas canisters had been wearing pink ball gowns instead of black hoodies? Or if everybody were wearing pink ball gowns, would the police still attack them with tear gas? We starting talking about, okay, how can we make an aesthetic intervention into what's going on, influence the tone and look of the next big summit protest? And how might that affect the success of the event? (2004).

Yet others felt differently, describing the Black Block actions in Quebec as exhilarating.

Similarly, RTS New York started thinking about ways to organize a different kind of block, with a less militaristic presence at the next convergence action in Washington, DC, scheduled to coincide with the IMF/World Bank meetings in mid-September. Under the heading "Big Meeting! Traveling Carnival!" an email announced a meeting at the Charas/El Bohio Community Center to organize a carnival block:

> Please Forward Far and Wide
>
> Calling all RTSers, Anarchist Clowns, Radical Cheerleaders,
> YaBas, Marching Bands, Puppeteers, Masqueraders and other
> kindred anti-corporate globalization protesting freaks....
>
> Reclaim the Streets/NYC is hosting an open meeting this:
>
> Wednesday, September 5th, 7pm
> at Charas/El Bohio (E 9th Street just off Ave B in the East Village)
> Rm 114
>
> to plan for a large traveling carnival contingent to go down to
> Washington DC on September 29&30 to protest the IMF/World
> Bank Meetings.
>
> Who better than a bunch of clowns to make the point that the
> humanitarian claims of the IMF and World Bank are a fucking joke?
>
> Items on the agenda will include:
> Themes
> Props
> Costumes
> Transportation
> Housing
> ...and anything else you bring to the meeting.
>
> So please come with your ideas, your friends, your sense of
> humor, and most of all: yourself.
>
> See you there,
> XOXO RTS/NYC (quoted in Duncombe, 2001).

That day, September 5th, a crowd of nearly one hundred activists filled a room at Charas/El Bohio where we had met to organize so many other actions. I facilitated the meeting to discuss plans for the IMF protest. Kauffman announced plans for a concept called the Masquerade Project. The point was to decorate gas masks with sequins to bring a more of a colorful flair to the actions (Herbst, 2002). Others followed with a proposal to have a clown block at the action. "One of the most popular sites on the web is the 'Kill Clown,' one observer noted. "People actually like seeing cops beat up clowns." So they decided not to do a clown army, but instead would put out a call for a "Silly Block" with a time and a place to meet up in Washington. Many walked out of the meeting feeling good and productive. A work session was scheduled for the Masquerade Project, as was a fundraiser. The feeling as we left Charas/El Bohio that night was that a moment for play in a social movement had truly arrived.

The End of Play

We all know what happened the following Monday, September 11. It was as startlingly beautiful an autumn morning as I have ever seen. I was trying to get to Hunter College that morning for classes in the doctoral program at the School of Social Work. As I left my house in Brooklyn, someone ran up to me and screamed, "Did you hear? Someone flew a plane into the Twin Towers!" And I thought they were crazy. Yet the subway was not working well. And by the time I reached Union Square, I was forced to take the bus up to the school on the Upper East Side.

Angry that the city could not handle an accident that sounded like a little air traffic confusion, I took the nearest bus up to school. As more passengers got on the bus,

it became one of those communal New York moments. Different passengers brought different information. When a man walked up and proclaimed, “They also hit the Pentagon,” I stopped thinking it was an air traffic accident. “Now I’m starting to get scared,” said another rider, echoing what many felt. “Now I just want to go home.” I felt the same way looking behind me at the smoke rising from downtown. One woman on the bus was convinced Osama Bin Laden did it. And she was pissed. Having just gotten back from Istanbul, I scolded her for rushing to judgment. There would be a lot of rushes to judgment in the days and years ahead. Within the duration of the bus ride, both towers would collapse.

All at once, the movement of movements faced the end of play. Kauffman (2001) wrote a dispatch for her email column stating that “everything has changed” and the Masquerade Project was scraped and the organizers donated the masks to 9/11 relief workers. “It's now official: In the wake of the September 11 disaster, the IMF and World Bank have indefinitely postponed their planned late-September meetings, and the raucous street protests that were to greet them have effectively been canceled.”

That September 12th at about noon in Union Square, the day after the attacks, we all sat in the park. September 12th, a group meeting was called for many who had been involved in the actions. Some RTS people arrived; Jason Grote and LA Kauffman was there; Andrew Boyd, a few ACT UP folks, and some others who met in the grass at Union Square. There was a huge cloud of smoke coming up behind us. Everybody was shell-shocked. Kauffman had buttons she’d made which plead, “Our Grief is Not a Cry for War!’ We talked about not to blame Islam. Some talked about ways to get downtown to help, even if they were not wanted. They talked about being direct action [medica].

And Kauffman proclaimed, "The global justice movement has got to become a global peace and justice movement." It was the first time I'd thought of, wow, I guess this is where we are going to have to take this thing. Kauffman recalled:

> Yeah, I remember saying that. That was such a haunting meeting. A bunch of us – 30 people, maybe, or more – were sitting in a big circle in the grass, in a place that until the day before had been a prime spot for viewing the World Trade Center. The smoke from Ground Zero got closer and closer until that horrible stench surrounded us and we had to flee. We went and re converged in the back of the New York City Independent Media Center because you couldn't breathe.

I left the meeting before everyone reconvened at the Indy Media Center. LA Kauffman recalled:

> We were planning a fundraiser at a nightclub – we were going to have a gas mask fashion show and walk the catwalk showing off our fabulous creations. That fundraiser was scheduled for September 12. Needless to say, we canceled it. A day later, a call went out via the local media that the rescue workers needed additional respirator devices – and we immediately decided to donate our gas masks. One of my most surreal memories of that period was the night, I guess it was September 13, when a couple of folks and I sat up until something like four in the morning un-decorating the gas masks. We were prying off the rhinestones with kitchen knives, peeling off the paint, picking off the sequins, and then we took them down to somewhere on the edge of the frozen zone around Ground Zero and donated them to the rescue workers. We were quite aware of the irony: some of the gas masks that we had purchased to protect people *from* the police ended up being worn *by* the police, and that was okay with us.

A second meeting was scheduled for later on that night at Charas. I stayed home and had dinner in Brooklyn. Jason Grote attended second meeting. By that evening, many were aware that things had changed. The spirit of play, which had been capable of expressing so much of a critique, was no longer appropriate. Grote and I talked about the end of that spirit of rambunctious and playful possibility:

> I think that everybody was traumatized by September 11th in New York. I saw you that day (September 12) and people were meeting in Union Square and the smell was in the air. And the thing is, too, that the hair-shirt left never really went

> away. I think that the spirit of the movement was large enough and expansive enough that you do a lot.

There was always a hostility toward those of us who were not doctrinaire, who used play and pragmatism. This antagonism dated years before September 11th. . Yet, after the bombings uch of that doctrinaire dourness came roaring back. It was particularly on display at the September 12 meeting at Charas/El Bohio. Grote recalls:

> I think with a few years perspective I understand it now. People were grieving. People were in a fucked-up state. But at the same time, I think that a lot of the people that I got upset at were the people that always upset me but could be ignored. Like it wasn't a campaign that I liked. But part of what happened in the meeting that day, at the earlier meeting at Union Square, there was a mass shrine. Someone had put a flag of the earth in George Washington's arms. And there was a very active and vibrant peace movement happening there that was really holding the mourning, the grieving that was going on. Even there was debate there. There were American flags there. But it wasn't hostile. It was divided. It was very civil. People were talking and healing. Some people were taking photos and I understand paranoia, but it was a weird activist hostility. And I was thinking, here are people having a really constructive not hateful response, and these are the people who are supposed to be the left. And they are full of anger.
>
> The day that it happened I was feeling ambivalence too. Here we are fighting global capital, the WTO, etc. and here are two signs of it that are being taken down. And of course with a few days to think about it, it was totally barbaric and awful. At the time I had a really hard time figuring out my own feelings and fantasies of "smash the WTO" with this. It wasn't rational. It was a gut thing. John, who was involved with RTS, was asking people how they were feeling and he wrote to the [email] list saying, "let's not forget that we got into this because we wanted to alleviate suffering." And I needed to hear that. When you are going to the RNC or the WTO protests, you are thinking in a revolutionary 1968 kind of way. But when you are confronted with what we thought was like 10,000 [deaths], it's a really weird feeling.
>
> And the next day, there was a meeting about people's response to this at Charas. I think that the people that really upset me were the ones that I never really liked. But there was a lot of talk about what we could do in the face of a lot of helplessness and futility. And there were big concerns, but there was an effort to get lefty volunteers. That wasn't going to happen. But then it got professionalized really fast. Then there was a suggestion to go into Muslim neighborhoods and play watch out for vigilantes. And even John Ashcroft was on TV saying, "don't take this out on anyone." But really, in terms of U.S. history, the amount of the hate crimes was rather small, compared to other times in U.S. history. So there was this debate about patronizing white activists going into these communities. It was very academic. Like people were saying we don't want to

> make assumptions, that we have the right to do this. We want to do this. And then interestingly, a young Muslim woman got up and said "I'm Arab and I don't really care about any of this right now. All I know is that I'm terrified. I'm hoping. I want someone to be there for me." These meetings were run by consensus, which doesn't work. Anyone could talk or bring it to a halt. And no one acknowledged this. They totally ignored her. They did the same thing. I felt really outraged and angry about that. I think this went unsaid, but collectively what can we do? The strategy of play didn't seem to fit with this...That sort of humorless hair-shirt left came roaring back.

Grote would drop out of organizing for a while after the Charas meeting.

The week after September 11, Kauffman was in a frenzy of organizing. I was in my apartment with my sheets over my head. It was a horrible time. I asked her about that feeling:

> We all had our ways of coping with the initial shock. Mine was that I just threw myself into organizing, printing up thousands of leaflets and just handing them out on the streets for the peace vigils we were having in Union Square. That first week was such an extraordinary time in terms of the atmosphere in the city, in the way people related to each other in New York. People were devastated, and yet there was this amazing gentleness in people's demeanor. For me, I didn't want to be in my apartment looking at the television set, I wanted to be out on the street talking to people. I wanted to do something.

The closed in feeling of the apartment felt very limiting for those of us who stayed inside. All the while, Union Square was becoming a space for peaceful remembering with art and stories and pictures on the sidewalk to accompany the often poignant "missing" signs all over the city seeking information about lost loved ones who were probably not going to be found. For social theorist Marshall Berman, "The signs dramatized one of the central themes of modern democratic culture: life stories" (2002, p. 5). He continues, "Life stories were a crucial force in the culture of the New Deal and the Popular Front, a culture that insisted that every ordinary person's life had meaning and power." Kauffman remembers how that feeling was translated onto the street:

> There was an extraordinary protest shortly after September 11 that got virtually no media coverage. I think it was on the Friday night after the Tuesday attacks. It was a nearly spontaneous march that went from a candlelight vigil in Union Square up to Times Square. It was very emotional, and very non-ideological. It wasn't about the intricacies of interventions and imperialism, it was just all these people who did not want to see mass slaughter committed in our name as revenge for the mass slaughter that had just happened in our city.

Before long, though, the actions taking place in the streets stopped feeling as useful. Kauffman recalls:

> But then each succeeding protest became less interesting and compelling. It felt like all the nuance and emotion was drained out, as more and more people – people from the global justice movement, people from the anti-authoritarian left – pulled back out of ambivalence, and all that remained were the sorts of groups that have ideological certainty no matter the circumstances. Out came the boring old "Money for Jobs, Not for War" signs that you see at every fucking demo – I always paraphrase that one as "Money for Soul-Draining Wage Slavery, Not for War" – with fewer and fewer homemade or heartfelt signs.

I remember on October 7 – the day the bombing of Afghanistan began – we were at a march that went from Union Square to Times Square. Kauffman was getting more and more angry at the signs and the speeches, and she said, "I'm getting really bored with this knee-jerk anti-imperialist politics." And she just walked off. "Yeah, I was disgusted," she recalls. "I decided on the spot, I'm not going to another one of these things. And I didn't."

Public Panic

In the days, months, and years after 9/11, the tools used to change the rules fell out of favor. While the story of activism from ACT UP and Seattle was changing the structure of the game with pranks, zaps, stories, popular education, and creative play, the playing field was radically altered. Discourses linking protesters with terrorists, which before had sounded paranoid, gained credibility. The rules shifted once the USA Patriot Act was passed without much deliberation in the panic-like atmosphere shortly after 9/11.

In the Patriot Act era, civil disobedience and activism faced countless challenges. The powers-that-be had long sought to redefine protest groups that employ civil disobedience--such as Earth First! and Reclaim the Streets--as terrorists in previous years. The military/corporate/ entertainment/police/prison-industrial complex went into high gear as immigrants were detained and war coverage entered a 24-hour news rotation. The job [of repression] became that much easier. as funding for the military, policing, and security structures increased exponentially (Shepard, 2002c).

This pattern was nothing new. In periods of social and economic crisis and flux, such as after 9/11, panic triggers shifts in how protests are defined: from acceptance to surveillance, from tolerance to criminalization, from a liberal emphasis on equality toward a coercive emphasis on control. In the era of the Patriot Act, panic was been used to justify encroachments on civil liberties not seen since the internment of Japanese-American citizens during WWII. This panic has vastly limited constitutionally protected democratic political participation, including the right to civil disobedience. In this atmosphere, pranks felt less innocent. They were increasingly defined as criminal acts rather than forms of creative expression. The Patriot Act law may be remembered for restricting civil disobedience in much the same way as the Taft-Hartley Act of 1947 restricted labor activism.

Panic over public space and the movement of those within it increased, and restrictions on the public commons grew. "Perhaps the most dangerous element of the Bush Administration's current campaign against democratic rights has been the deliberate manipulation of mass public hysteria," Columbia University professor Manning Marable (2003) explained, pointing out that 1.9 million new prescriptions for Zoloft, Prozac, and

other antidepressants were filled after the terrorist attack. "The American public has been bombarded daily by a series of media-orchestrated panic attacks, focusing on everything from the potential threat posed by crop-dusting attacks being used for ‘bio-terrorism,’ to anthrax-contaminated packages delivered through the U.S. postal service" (Manning 2003: 9).

Thus, panic is used as a tool by the elite to control and manipulatepublic space and opinion. In most circumstances, these panics function as a vast distraction. "In service of the new militarism, all other concerns, including poverty and constitutional protections such as civil liberties and civil rights--indeed, the right to dissent from official policy--are not only subordinate to the advancing war machine,” Aronowitz and Gautney contend, “but have become suspect on patriotic grounds," (2002, FILL IN p. xxx). Recall December 2001, when Attorney General John Ashcroft claimed that those who questioned his approach to challenging terrorism “only aid terrorists.” It was part of a classic panic script used to justify encroachments on civil liberties. Within this context, the War on Terror replaced the Cold War as America's latest permanent threat.

As noted above, this process is not new. Panics, red scares, and public hysteria have long been part of American political discourse. "What happens when our pragmatic, commonsense, split-the-difference American politics turns righteous?" political scientist James Morone asked in his recent book, *Hellfire Nation* (2003, p. x). The answer is simple: checks and balances become little more than nuisances, and hysteria is used to manipulate public opinion. Compromise disappears; in its place, lynchings, witch-hunts, "get-tough" laws, and race riots follow. Protestors become "terrorists." Labels,

demonology, and zero-sum arguments win the day as political players are divided between "us" and "them," and panic takes precedence over reasoned discourse.

The process follows a familiar schema. In times of social flux, interest groups: 1) stir up a moral frenzy, 2) identify a demon, 3) mobilize interests, and 4) increase police powers (Morone, 2003). These "panics," which can be traced to the country's earliest days, "tap into deep-seated fears of socially dispossessed elements, such as youth, racial and ethnic minorities, and the sexually ostracized" (Shevory, 2004: xv).

In the Patriot Act era, protesters fit into a panic structure outlined by sociologist Stuart Cohen (1972). For Cohen, this collective behavior involves a distinct sequence of events that make up a panic script. A dramatic event is followed by a public outcry, "moral entrepreneurship," and the mobilization of control culture (p. xxiv). In studying the responses to the appearance of the Mods and the Rockers, two highly stylized British youth groups that ran free on beach boardwalks during bank weekends from 1964 to 1966, Cohen recognized that much of the anxiety surrounding the groups arose in anticipation of a potentially disastrous situation. People feared the shifting social mores, sexual licentiousness, and potential for property destruction that accompanied the youths' comings and goings. For the Mods and the Rockers, the result of the panic was a new set of control mechanisms to curtail their movements. Contention over use of public space often triggers such a response.

In the years after the 1999 WTO protests in Seattle , a similar type of collective anxiety came to accompany the expected appearance of so-called "violent anarchists" at convergence actions. This anxiety generated a similar level of public outcry. Moral

entrepreneurs--such as police, the media, and public officials--demonized anarchists as "terrorists" in order to justifying surveillance and the mobilization of control culture.

In Cohen's study, the folk devils were youth subcultures. After Seattle, the folk devil became anarchist protestors who inspired widespread negative reaction (Cohen, 1972, p. 15-17). In the days following the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the demonization and surveillance of those who were thought to represent a potential threat to public order became that much easier to justify. "Protest panic" is just the latest in a long series of red scares and similar forms of public hysteria, which occasionally bubble up from the primordial fear that too often grips the American psyche. These panics tend to follow a simple pattern. Interest groups stir up a frenzy using the media, identify protestors as violent and a threat to the larger good, and mobilize political opposition to all but the most staid and controlled forms of ceremonial protest, while increasing surveillance of dissent and justifying total control of those thought to pose a threat to the common good (see Graeber, 2004).

And social/political discourses shifted from an appreciation for play toward policies based on responses to fear. The right wing is scared of play,[QUOTE?] Jason Grote would explain. A culture of fear, Grote suggested has become “mixed with a strategy of fear and hysteria because of terrorism.” Such anxiety is not new. ““Puritanical thinking reduces joy,” Rebecca Solnit (2004) notes. “[It] seeks to inhibit it.” “Now, with the Christian Right,” Grote concurs, “there is a lot of fear of play. You find out that Starbucks does not support our troops so boycott Starbucks. The backlash is

even hitting these corporations, like Starbucks and Apple Computer that are associated with play."

As fear over terrorism captured the nation, hysteria became a driving force of national politics. "W and General Rove present the war on terror as Armageddon and World War VIII," New York Times Columnist Maureen Dowd (2006) recently explained. Her description of the mechanisms of panic which substantiate the Bush policies follow the pattern clearly articulated by Cohen (1972; 2002) and Jenkens (1998). "[T]hey're scaring Americans into supporting their power grabs by essentially yelling, 'They're coming to kill us!'" Dowd wrote.

Panics are all about power grabs in the name of safety. Robert Paxon's stage theory of fascism includes four elements: 1) the rhetoric of regeneration, 2) the appeal of emotion over rational discourse, 3) emergency is used to justify demonization of political enemies, 4) contractions of space and the right to expression and democratic participation (Paxton, 2004; 1998; Stille, 2003). The post-9/11 years in the US would include calls for the inclusion of religion in public life to clean the public sector of the decadence of the Clinton years, which echoed with rhetoric of regeneration. The Bush era "sky is falling" rhetoric Dowd describes certainly involved the appeal of emotion over rationality; the constant reference to 9/11 when the policy environment presents problems has become an unending source of jokes. "Who ya gonna call – 9/11" the *Daily Show* riffs on the Bush years, comparing the Bush policies to the comedy Ghostbusters, whose marketing slogan was "who you gonna call" for those who witnessed ghosts. Comedian Margaret Cho (2004) spoke to the absurd quality of the onslaught of anti-terror messages the public faced in the years after terror attacks:

> Then there is the Bush administration trying to keep us in a state of panic all the time, like raising the Terror Alert so that we're not at ease but always on edge. And it's always the most ridiculous stuff like, "An ATM was targeted in Midtown Manhattan!"
>
> But I'm so used to raised terror alerts, I'm unaffected. I'm like, "It's orange. Does that mean I have to take off my shoes?" Meanwhile, clog sales have gone through the roof. People think that it's Halliburton that's benefiting from all this; no it's Birkenstock. It's a huge clog/mule cartel conspiring. Slip-on shoes are the future. [SOURCE?]

The final two stages of Paxton's stage theory – emergency is used to justify demonization of political enemies and contractions of space and the right to expression and democratic participation – could be witnessed in the treatment of protesters after 9/11.

Reclaim the Movement: The World Economic Forum, New York City

Throughout the fall of 2001, RTS and other New York activist groups reeled. The group debated organizing another street party to celebrate life in the face of mass death. But many said it was not appropriate. William Etundi and Andrew Boyd would organize a candlelight vigil around the theme of hope downtown. Members of RTS New York, who were busy organizing for one final action to preserve the Charas/El Bohio Community Center, brought copies of a broadsheet authored by Steve Duncombe. "Reclaim the Streets says… Reclaim the Movement," the broadsheet began. It continued:

> Since 9.11 many of us are in mourning: for the victims of the terrorist attacks, for the victims of the US military retaliation, for our eroding civil liberties…. and for the movement for global economic justice that many of us have been building over the past few years.
>
> Immediately following the attack all our activist energy understandably went into keeping George "This is a Crusade" W. Bush from following out bin Laden's wishes and starting World War III. We built a Peace Movement. But the Peace Movement we've seen built is very different than the movement we had before. For all its faults – and there were many – the Global Justice Movement

> was flexible, anti-authoritarian, creative, fun, increasingly popular and thuseffective – not qualities one could use to describe an often alienating Peace Movement.
>
> Let's face it. We can't all agree about what to do with someone like bin Laden and kindred right-wing fanatics. Some would turn the other cheek, some would like to bring him to court, some of us would like to see him dead. But what we can all agree on is where terrorists like him get their popular support. It comes from desperation – a desperation born of extreme poverty born of global capitalism run amuck; income inequality generates few options.

In the midst of all this, a new convergence action was scheduled for New York City around the meetings of the World Economic Forum (WEF). We had to look for a new convergence space. Charas/El Bohio in the East Village, where convergence actions usually took place, finally lost its stay of eviction after its sale three years prior.

In the years between the building's sale and its final occupation by the developer, the space became a symbol of the hazards of neighborhood gentrification. In December 2001, in the days right before the city evicted community members from the space, RTS passed out flyers asking: "DO YOU EVER WALK AROUND THE NEIGHBORHOOD AND NOT RECOGNIZE A Fxxxxxxx THING?" Their broadsides continued:

> It's funny. There has been so much progress in the last decade that there is almost nowhere to go to organize a meeting, put on a play, or sit down without paying an entrance fee. In the days since September 11th, people all over the world have commented on the sense of common purpose, their appreciation for community of New Yorkers. So why is the city fighting to take away one of the bedrocks of the East Village community?

In response to the eviction threat, RTS threw a street party to defend the space and called for activists to contact the mayor to push for help. Yet more than anything, the street party was a final moment to enjoy what Charas had meant to the community. The broadside described the coalition supporting Charas:

> This rag-tag group of vagabonds, dot-comers, anarchists, newcomers, and old-school neighborhood hang-abouts is here to call for something simple: that we SAVE CHARAS. We're here to dance, make noise, and create a bit of the

> carnival of community Charas has always inspired. RECLAIM THE STREETS AND SAVE OUR COMMUNITY CENTER!

Charas lost its request for a stay of eviction on December 18. In response, its supporters began a 24-hour vigil. Charas had been sold, without competitive bidding, to a Giuliani campaign contributor back in 1998**.** By 2001, *The Village Voice*, in its "Best of New York" issue, dubbed Charas/El Bohio "the Best Place to Rally Around and/or Resuscitate." Noting that rehearsal space at Charas cost from $11 to $14 an hour, the *Voice* explained, "Charas serves the Lower East Side community, not the Big Apple Tour Bus, and that is why, partially, it is in jeopardy" (Sottile, 2001).

Charas and Lower East Side activism had a long history. Civil disobedience training for countless community struggles had been held at the former school. That made Charas a target. "Man of the year, get out of here!" protesters, squatters, garden activists, and requisite East Village vagabonds screamed (referring to Giuliani's recent award as *Time*'s Person of the Year), as they watched the NYPD shut down access to this space where much of the do-it-yourself spirit of their organizing and neighborhood had thrived. Charas had served as meeting spaces for marginalized groups. While the mayor had for years battled communities of difference who fought his agenda of privatizing New York's public spaces, September 11 neutralized much of the official opposition to his plan to evict the neighborhood community center where the enemies of neoliberalism converged.

After 9/11, narratives used to describe the movement of movements shifted from "global justice" to "terrorist." On January 15, shortly before the WEFwas to meet in New York City, the *New York Daily News* specifically warned activists, "you'll get your anti-globalization butts kicked" in an editorial that clearly demonstrated the demonization of political enemies to justify contractions of space and the right to expression and democratic participation. "Confab Welcome, Crazies Not" was title for this lead editorial. It continued:

> In an extraordinary act of solidarity with New York City, the World Economic Forum...will convene Jan. 31 a few miles north of Ground Zero. Alas, so will legions of agitators who despise free enterprise and whose demonstrations have a habit of devolving into riots. Message to protesters: New Yorkers have suffered enough of late. We're mad as hell and we're not going to take it anymore. You have a right to free speech, but try to disrupt this town, and you'll get your anti-globalization butts kicked. Capish?

"Bad Capitalist, No Martini!" that was the RTS slogan for the WEF actions. Not that the group was explicitly trying to put play back on the scene, but every vote and decision around the action involved a push to bring dance back into the streets after the tragedy. Meeting in a local bar across the street from Charas, floor votes were taken over whether to do a sleep in with the homeless who would be swept from the streets during the action or whether to organize a samba band for the rally. Overwhelmingly, the floor gave to the nod to the samba bands in solidarity with Argentina, whose neoliberal economy had crashed.

The press release for the action proclaimed: "dance on the ruins of the world! ...Tango and Samba to Protest the WEF…Come one, come all! On Saturday, 2nd February, at 11:30 a.m. in Columbus Circle, Reclaim the Streets will tango. And samba. And make a Considerable Din." It continued:

> RTS invites everyone—musicians, dancers, artists, flappers and fans of fancy footwork—hell, even the NYPD. Cops tango too, right? Anyhow, RTS invites the masses to come and shake their booty in solidarity with all those who get screwed by the McDonaldization of the globe (that would be everyone).
> WHAT IS THE WEF?
>
> Every year for the last 30, the WEF, a European conference organizer, has organized a five-day networking party for the world's power elite in the Swiss skiing village of Davos. TheWEF is where cabinet ministers, presidents, and top government officials retreat to rub shoulders with the bankers and CEOs whose agenda they protect and serve.

> This year, however, the Swiss government has refused to host the WEF meeting, after its last two gatherings attracted direct-action protests from tens of thousands of anti-globalization activists. Instead, WEF is coming to New York – a city still recovering from the effects of a terrorist attack that killed thousands.
>
> Since September 11, the city's economy has teetered, and countless jobs have disappeared. Yet, while incoming Mayor Mike Bloomberg presses for austerity and public-services cutbacks, he is preparing to lavish hospitality and protection on a gathering that is synonymous with the domination of government and civil society by multinational corporations and the super-rich.

The release ended with RTS's mantra, "People Before Profits! Public Space for the Public!" And with that, the group proclaimed the movement was ready to re-engage in activism again. But many others were not. The world had changed, and so had the context for protest.

When every "liberal" interest group, the unions, and countless other NGOs bowed out of participating in the protests, anarchists risked arrest and organized a disciplined peaceful protest attended by well over 10,000 people. Recall, in the wake of 9/11, New Yorkers had been told that the new patriotism involved going shopping. Yet RTS and others challenged this transparent attempt to wrap a political agenda around a crisis. And when faced with a police force that betrayed every guarantee it had made in prior negotiations with lawyers, the activists band maintained a joyous opposition, complete with a street samba band reclaiming beats and urban possibilities. My most joyous moment of the WEF protests was when, squeezed in by a phalanx of police, the crowd began to sing, "We all live in a Military State, a Military State, a Military State," to the tune of the Beatles anthem Yellow Submarine.

Faced with lines and lines of police ready to take on what many believed really might be a terrorist threat at the protests, the best of the actions involved playful

opposition to social controls. Starhawk, who was in town that weekend, remembers it as one of her favorite actions and one of the best moments with the spiral dance:

> I guess for me there's two actions that stand out as the most fun I've had. The first was in New York in February 2002 at World Economic Forum. We had done a Bridget Ritual in the Park. Bridget is an Irish goddess of witchcraft, poetry, and healing. And they held the WEF right on Bridget day. We had a big ritual in that park in the Village, Washington Square Park. There were lots and lots of people there. The next day after the big march, which was very frustrating because the police totally controlled the space, we all ended up in Grand Central Station. We were all eating in the food court. Some people said we want to do something, we want to do a spiral dance. We ran upstairs and started to circle in this big dome. Of course, police are so uptight there. They were wanting to arrest everybody. And immediately a security guard came over and said, "you can't do this performance here." And we kept spiraling and drumming. We said, "it's not a performance, its a religious ceremony." He went to get backup. We kept spiraling. I looked up at one point and noticed we had a perfect circle of riot cops.

Here, play clearly served as a useful response to the hyper-control of public space. Starhawk explains.

> That really worked with the spiral. We had the riot cops around us and we had an audience around all these stores and galleries and we had a great circle. So I think they were hesitant to really move in. But finally a cop walked up to us and said, "Enough."' I took that as our cue to do what we call waving a cone of power where we all throw our arms up in the air and ooooom. So we did that and I guess evidently our cone of power was strong enough that they did not move in on us. And then we moved down and someone sang Amazing Grace. They couldn't really move in on a whole group of people singing Amazing Grace. By the time that was over, I was pretty sure they weren't going to arrest us.

Throughout the weekend, the police advanced the notion that the protesters were dangerous. Years after the action, the police commanders admitted they used "proactive arrests" during the protests in response to lawsuits against them. The point was to keep things calm. And they suggested these approaches be used at other mass protests. Throughout the weekend the police seized and arrested those they felt looked like "obviously potential rioters." The police also confessed to using undercover officers to

infiltrate group meetings and protests. A report from the NYPD Disorder Control Unit also noted that the police have resumed covert tactics including sending “undercover officers to distribute misinformation within the crowds." This tactic, of course, had been rejected a generation earlier after the abuses by the police against anti-war and civil rights groups (Dwyer, 2006c).

By far, the most troubling piece of news from the police testimony was the reported thirty “proactive” arrests of activists with “pipes and masks” said to present, “an obvious threat” (Dwyer, 2006c). Eric Laursen (2006), who was involved in the WEF actions, would note, “Good article by Dwyer, but he doesn't note that the excerpts he quotes from the memos contain one very blatant and serious lie about what happened the day of the WEF protests.” Citing Dwyer’s (2006c) discussion of the police testimony that “plainclothes officers saw a group of demonstrators put on masks as they drew near the Plaza Hotel, then take out metal pipes and try to rush police lines,” Laursen noted that this description was “completely untrue.” He explains:

> None of these folks had "pipes," and none of them attempted to rush anything. In fact, they were bringing up the rear of the march and got separated a bit (let that be a lesson to everyone for future mass mobilizations!), opposite the Plaza Hotel, whereupon they were hemmed in and rushed by the police. The BBC and others videotaped this – I actually got a call at one point from a BBC reporter who was right there expressing her outrage at what she'd just seen. It's also worth noting that some of the arrestees were held for longer than 40 hours, the figure Perez cites. And this applies to some of those who were arrested on Sunday, as well as Saturday. What the business about the pipes and rushing police lines shows is that the NYPD 1) buries its version of the "truth" deep in its own internal memos for maximum deniability, and 2) that they'll continue to peddle these lies even after they're discredited in court – which is what happened with regard to the Plaza arrestees. As the Miami cops like to say, "You can beat the rap, but you still got to take the ride." And in the memory hole of history, they'll keep "arresting" you, over and over again (2006).

What occurred during the WEF and the actions that followed would amount to a series of competing narratives of protest. While the demonstrators called for expression, the police called for repression. Daniel M. Perez, a lawyer for a group of activists premptively arrested during the WEF, claimed that the police tactics "punish, control, and curtail the lawful exercise of First Amendment activities." The NYPD, on the other hand, would suggest that the police and the city have fought to protest both calm and the civil liberties of protestors and bystanders alike (Dwyer, 2006c). In response to mounting lawsuits, the police would document that the "staging of massive amounts" of police vans, armored cars, wagons, and buses for potential arrestees right in the full view of demonstrators, "would cause them to be alarmed" (quoted in Dwyer, 2006c). The point was to build on the culture of fear, which prevents activists from staying engaged in constitutionally protected free speech.

In the face of these intense new structures of social control, activists looked to old tools used by previous movements to address similar challenges. “I think that music and dance are ways of keeping cohesion, keeping your courage up when you are in a tense situation, of linking together,” Starhawk explains. “The Civil Rights Movement was brilliant at using those tools. Plus, they had songs you could actually sing, which is not always something you can say about the movement now.”

Thus, it was not surprising when police tried to coordinate, control, and stifle the play elements of the WEF actions. I was planning to drum with the samba band during the march. But once I got to Columbus Circle, a policeman from a phalanx of cops snatched my drumsticks out of my hands. He seemed very humorless about the situation. “So what do you have to hit the drum with then – your hand,” Larry Bogad observed with

a laugh when I related this story to him. “Amazing, cause you could stick somebody in the eye with that,” he noted, reveling in the absurdity of the approach. “What about umbrellas? They have to take your shoes too. They could take your shoes cause in theory you could take them off and throw them at someone. You could walk down naked but then you get arrested for walking naked.”

Only after the Republican National Convention in 2004 would I find out that stealing drumsticks was official police policy. Under the subheading, “Carrying Signs or Objects,” the legal guidelines for the Republican National Convention, dubbed “Operation Overlord II” stated:

> [L]eafletting, the carrying of signs or objects at a demonstration is protected First Amendment activity. However, where it can be shown that the object carried, i.e., a wooden pole with a sign attached or a bat, has the potential for being used as a weapon, the police may prohibit the carrying of the object during a demonstration. Persons who insist on carrying objects that are potential weapons should be directed to put the object down or to leave the area of the demonstration. If they refuse to do so and continue to congregate with others in the demonstration, they may be arrested for Disorderly Conduct (quoted in Doefner and Sweet, 2004, p. 5).

In a culture of fear, anything including a drumsticks can be viewed as having, “the potential for being used as a weapon.”

9/11, the Anti War Movement, and the Struggle against the Blue Meanies

In the days before and right after 9/11, L.A. Kauffman (2004) suggests, “that sense of a carnival of resistance, was getting lost.” Immediately after the bombings, Kauffman had made it very clear that she was against the knee-jerk anti-imperialist approach to protest. She was particularly concerned about distinguing the human rights work she had done with from some of the forces of the old left, which had never

renounced Stalinist violence. After the IMF meetings and accompanying protests had been canceled in September 2001, Kaufman,who was aware that the message of the rallies could have easily backfired, noted that some old left groups still planned to stage a rally:

> [T]he International Action Center – front group for the Stalinist Workers World Party, with a long history of supporting murderous dictators like Nicolae Ceausescu, Saddam Hussein, and Slobodan Milosevic – is planning to go forward with a September 29 "March Against War and Racism" in Washington. I suspect a lot of other groups may sign on, because there's a widespread desire to do something. But you won't catch me supporting a "peace march" organized by a bunch of authoritarian opportunists who have no problem with slaughter, so long as it's committed by their pet tyrants (2001).

Afterwards, the *New York Times* would cover counterprotesters who carried signs stating, "Bin Laden Thanks You."

Much of the vitality of the global justice movement ebbed after the 9/11 attacks. RTS NYC was not able to organize a second round of SuperBario Man actions on Mayday 2002. Instead of focusing on economic issues, activists set their eyes on the strange move toward war by the Bush administration. Many activists felt that the global justice movement needed to work with the anti-war movement to oppose the logic of the Bush administration's move toward a 50-year war on terror. The year after 9/11 (with the exception of the February 2002 WEF protests), actions seemed reminiscent of the Latin American solidarity protests of the 1980s, replete with staged acts of civil disobedience that felt like stagnant ceremony. Again, old chants were repeated at anti-war rallies. Again, speakers not seen in years droned on to the converted. Again, members of the crowd were separated from leaders. Heavy-handed, one-size-fits-all anti-imperialist analysis overshadowed pragmatism and sophisticated analysis. And along the way,

protest stopped being fun. Many of those who had hit the streets over the previous two or three years left the activist stage. Frustrated resignation took hold.

A core theme of interviews for this study was the frustration with the re-emergence of dour protest after the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Kate Crane, John Jordon, Joe Tuba, Marina Sitrin, and Matthew Roth all described their past work with old-school left groups such as the International Socialist Organization (ISO), International ANSWER, the International Action Center, and various Trotskyite sects, and how they contrast this old left politics with the politics of play. Crane explains:

> I think about ANSWER. International ANSWER, those boring sons of bitches. They organize authoritarian little protests, wave their uniform homogonous little signs and get their permits and make friends with the police. I don't want some creepy hierarchical structure where the grand leader tells me what to do.

Roth describes why the politics of play effectively engages people, in contrast to other forms of protest. For him, play involves opening up different kinds of stories, rather than participants which story to believe or participate[HUH?]. He explains:

> I think a big part of it in politics and play is to engage someone without prescriptions, to engage them by inspiring them, to engage through inspiration, to engage through narrative. There is something that I find so inspiring from authors that I read who I probably completely disagree with politically, or who have characters who I find absolutely repugnant. And yet by the end of the book, I'm in love. I've just been completely carried away on a journey that I was completely unwilling to be on. And that to me is captivation, captivating through narrative, through experience. So the politics of play, I think, approaches a message, 'cause it's about principle. It's about message. It's about issues. But it approaches you in a way where you are not pedantic. You are not sitting someone down and scolding them. None of this paternalistic "you need to do this because." It's not the negativity.

Thus, for Roth, play invites, rather then lectures. It seduces and entices rather than preaches. Roth locates an affirmative embrace of power within this politics of playful community collective action. For him, this politics is rooted in, Nietzsche's philosophy

that dealt with motivation, not via criminal codes, not via negative ideals, the aesthetic ideal, the negation of value, but through affirmation." He explains:

> In the *Genealogy of Morals* he [Nietzsche] really goes through the aesthetic ideals and destroys it in his logic. He never in any of his books really proposed a counter ideal – an affirmative idea. It's something that if somebody doesn't figure out how to write it, I need to write it. It's that anarchism in its true spirit and consensus organizing and politics of play in this real primal, from the streets, [ir?]resistible, no negative prescriptions, and whatnot is a formulation of his ideals.

Through this affirmation, a politics of play seeks to create new forms of collective action and power, mutual aid, care for others, support, and respect for difference (Newman, 2004, p. 122-4).

In contrast to the affirmative politics Roth describes, Joe Tuba encountered a rather bleak approach to community organizing when he tried to plug into activism in 1997. "I was kind of desperate to get involved with something. And the only thing that was on my campus was the ISO, which is a pretty personality draining, very boring and stilted and archaic kind of group." He described the group's routine:

> They'll go out every Sunday [to sell their newspapers]and even if you try to write something for the paper. I wrote something for the paper and I never heard anything about it. It just disappeared. And, like, they are just really centralized and controlled like that. So it's like all they really want to do is read a lot of books and decide what is the exact right thing to say. And push it on everybody. There is no interaction and there is no collaboration.

In contrast to the top-down ISO model, by 1999 Joe Tuba had found the Hungry March Band, in which an abundant cacophony of participants were invited to perform and contribute in any way they could. The first time I encountered the group, someone handed me a base drum and invited me to perform in a garden. Joe[TUBA?] describes his first encounters with the model of play, participatory performance, and carnival:

> It kind of just came around 'cause I was really desperate to get away from that kind of ISO paradigm. And I ran into some anarchist kind of people who were much more into that kind of thing – like the Gardens Movement and Reclaim the Streets. And they both were a really good fit. I wasn't looking for anything specific. But they both really worked out cause it was very much like you were directly doing exactly what you wanted to do – making a garden or taking over a garden or taking a street. You were physically, actually directly doing what you wanted to do and making it attractive to people who were not going to get involved right away. As opposed to selling a funny newspaper that's really kind of blatantly propagandistic and badly written.

Rather than a prefigurative model of community building, the ISO projects a model that is all about the future, rather than right now. The world they talk about creating in the newspapers they sell is not for today. Tuba further describes the politics of the ISO newspaper and propaganda:

> It doesn't accomplish anything. Their rap is really like, they basically want to assault you on the street and go, "You need this. You really need this." They are basically like Christian evangelists. They're like, "We know what we're talking about. We've studied. You need to take this home and take it to heart and join us." They just want to basically build their organization. And that's really replicating a lot things that I'd like to see done away with in our larger society. Anyway, they're not doing anything that is productive that I can tell at all.

Thus, rather than the horizontal approach of the carnival, the ISO offers a far more hierarchical organizational model. "[I]t's totally a top-down approach," Tuba explains. "It's a totally patronizing and infantilizing thing. It's this whole vanguard mentality. It's the same thing that the mass media works on."

Marina Sitrin is another global justice activist. She got her start in organizing with the Young Socialist Organization (YSO). She describes the relationship between the individual activist and the organization: "They always had answer. It was a hierarchical relationship." Thus, "I don't think play came up" within the YSO organization model, Sitrin reflects. They were more interested in ways to take state power. Yet it did not

appear they were getting any closer or using any new techniques to forward their message.

By far the greatest critique global justice activists had with sectarian top-down organizational model was the constant repetition of the same techniques over and over. The main critique of this organizing model was (and remains) its emphsis on heirarchy and lack of democracy. Larry Bogad explains:

> If you keep using the same tactics over and over again.... Like, here we have the signs that all say the same thing. And we're all chanting the old plug-in chants, you fade into the background already 'cause people are like the cliché. Your eyes skip over it on the printed page. When someone says, "he smelled as good as a rose," you don't even really read that 'cause it's a terrible cliché. And I honestly feel it's the same thing with protest. If you're doing a cliché or acting like a cliché, people just skip over it, like yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.

Thus, many global justice activists strive to battle against the cliché of routine protest. The politics of play is really all about ideas and stories building on themselves in inventive ways, using theater to help revitalize cycles of protest. As Harold Bloom suggests, there is "anxiety of influence." Just as classical poets reinvent stories of the underground from Virgil to Dante to T.S. Elliot, activists build on different kinds of protest stories. The aim is reinventing something, "being aware of what came before and putting your twist on it and throwing something else into that conversation," Bogad continued.

Such a theatrical model involves building on a dramaturgical tradition dating back to the days of Sophocles. Modern life is really the story of the re-invention of stories, such as Oedipus Rex, which have been around forever, yet found new expression with writers such Nieitzsche and Freud. "You have my favorite, Aristophanes, who's a total satirist," Bogad explains. And people continue to reinvent Aristophanes.

"Like with the Lysistrata Project before the [Iraq] war started, where the same day all over the world, people did his Lysistrata play, which is an anti-war play," Bogad recalls.

On March 3, 2003, in a wave of guerilla theatrics, 1,000 readings of the 2,400-year-old anti-war comedy took place around the world. Prominent actors worldiwde signed up to participate in this transnational theatrical performance (Cartright, 2005, p. 88). "The fact that everyone was doing this play was unifying," Bogad explains. In London, to name just one example, hundreds of performers staged the play in front of Parliament Square, in an action they described as a "mass Greek chorus of disapproval" (Cartright, 2005, p. 88). "Someone in Cypress, someone in Turkey, all doing this anti-Iraq war play," Bogad reflects. "They are making it into an anti-Iraq war now. Next time, it will be something else." Yet through the ages, the play is about women who refuse to have sex with their men until the men stop making war.

For activist artists, such as Bogad, the point of such work is to build on a genealogy of protest and aesthetic intervention. He continues:

> We don't wanna keep re-inventing the wheel. We're aware of our precedents. We're aware of our predecessors from the early 1970s, late 1960s. We're aware of their influences from the Wobblies, doing some fun outrageous stuff. We have this genealogy that we're trying to bring up because it gives us a sense of continuity in the counterculture even, if you can use such a term. But you don't want to come at it with the idea that we're the first ones to come out with carnivalesque protest. It's necessary to realize we've had people working on it in the past and we're going to put our own thing on it. We're part of a culture that crosses, hopefully, boundaries of identity and boundaries of race, class, gender. But also boundaries of generation. It's not just us against the world. We have our predecessors who can inspire us too.

Singing a New Tune OR A New Model

With the global justice movement, protest narratives seemed to shift away from the 1960s golden oldies narrative into a dialogue between generations. There stopped

being a generational combat mode. For some reason there was a generational conversation. While the process started with ACT UP, it came to full fruition with the Seattle WTO protests. Marina Sitrin remembers things changing in 1999. And much of this came with a recognition of joy and beauty in action. “Seattle was both powerful resistance and a celebration of life,” she remembers. “I saw beautiful protest. I also saw people organize where they were all listening to each other. It was a huge break. Joy and power in one moment.”

In Seattle, the politics of play found its fullest expression. Yet it found its vitality within an abiding respect for individual decisions, horizontal decision-making, and a renewed appreciation for the point that process counts. “Not doing it out of duty,” Sitrin explains. Rather, the aim is to build a community where the value of laughter is recognized and pleasure is valued. Here, the community activists are seeking to create is embodied in their organizing models. Here, a social movement helped build a community in which joking and expression and care are simultaneously a long-term aim and a part of the present-day organizing climate.“Well for me its [community] is very much a part of it,” Starhawk explained. “I’m trying to organizing in a model of decentralized direct democracy, make decisions that way, plan our actions that way and incorporate as much of a vision of art and play and culture as you can.

Brook Lehman suggested that community-building and achieving external policy changes are not mutually exclusive goals. “I think that ideally, we’d be working to create both challenges to the state within state power and outside of it by creating alternatives. And this is an ideal vision of going after power from the outside and the inside.” It’s not one or the other. Others concur. “Ideally its one and the same,” says

Starhawk, yet different circumstances necessitate different tactics. "[I]n CD there are two things, opposing and building," she elaborates. "On the one side is stopping what you don't want from happening, and on the other is building what you do want – like the gardens." Lehman adds:

> I think there is value in having progressives in government and there is value in having people doing street pageantry. What I'm most against is people throwing things out with the bathwater constantly. When they find out something wasn't the be all and end all, they want to throw out whatever they have been involved in.

Within this paradigm, rather than condemn different tactics, activists cultivate a movement culture in which different approaches are respected. "I'm looking for the ways for those different strategies to work together as long as they not in opposition – which is calling each other out and [dis?]respecting each other," Lehman[?] continues. "I think there is room for lots of different styles." And ideally, these styles complement each other. Martin Luther King said that the point of protest is to support the hand of those at the negotiating table.

The community element feels like it is front and center for these struggles. The simple understanding remains: groups that play together, stay together, those who do not, fail. Here, the theater, creativity and play work to effect change by fostering a civil society. The joy and fun are necessary for people to stay involved. L.J. Wood explains:

> [You have to] be able to confront the system and have the community that can confront that system. I always think of the revolution as something that's already happening, so I try to build the world we want to have into the organizing we're doing today. But at the same time, if you look at what we're doing, you have to confront the system. "

John Jordan describes how such a model of play, creativity, and community-building can serve as a viable alternative to traditional models of politics and organizing. "I think there really is a contrast," Jordan explains, adding:

> There is a way to see playful tactics taken by the more radical [activists]. I think play engenders enormous creativity. I think you can develop enormous community. On that level it is absolutely essential. It is way more attractive [than?]to other forms. It's compatible. It's the ability to create warm convivial spaces. If there was more play within those traditional models, they would benefit from it. It's always radical groups that are about creating space, that offer that unknown and unexpected. As a thing that opens up possibilities. It's much more exciting. It's harder to develop projects with bureaucracy.

Jordan's entry into such a politics began when he witnessed the transformative possibilities of a conventional rally turning into a liminal space. What he saw was, "the A to B march turning to riots, that was my first experience of playful protest, the space being completely turned on its head." Here, he began to see that "there are other ways of protesting and an importance of participation." Play opened spaces that he had not witnessed with other organizing he had seen. "The marches were so unparticipatory if they were not given a sign that was printed by the Trotsky groups and was deeply unattractice." In contrast, Jordan was interested in a politics that sought to seduce actors into a revolution of everyday life, that sought to bring aesthetic possibilities into action. "I was involved in making things sexxxy," he says. "How do you engage people?" The answer was with actions that felt desirable, with modes of interaction that inspired questions, that used "tools of system to engage the system with detourne and situations," Jordan explained, with reference to the old Situationist lexicon. "I would feel a high that was so wonderful."

In contrast, the old left groups opposed horizontal approaches or approaches which inspired laughter or even new kinds of questions or interventions. Ben Mauers, who tried to work with International ANSWER, explains:

> Well, the traditional protest groups like to play by the traditional rules, meaning that they want the barricades, they want the legal permits. They want everything legal. But being in protest there has to be a little danger. There's yelling and screaming. But the real point of a protest is to disseminate information. When you are stuck behind barricades or in empty marches where you know where the start and the finish is all the time, then you are not disseminating information. You're not able to talk to people, like you are when there are no protest pens and you are doing direct action.

Mauers recalls an emblematic moment with the group:

> I think it was November 27 or 28, 2004. The point was to heckle those shopping on the largest shopping day of the year. "Bombs are dropping while you are shopping." They stuck us in these stupid protest pens and we were waving banners and we looked like a bunch of freaks. Nobody was going to listen to us. If we are going to discuss these serious things and try to convert people or at least give them food for thought, you can't be yelling and screaming like that. They are going to turn off immediately. I had this interesting interaction with Larry Holmes. He's one of the big machas of ANSWER. That's a Yiddish word for leader. You've probably heard some of the obligatory speeches, "We're going to suck the system down!" Mr. Larry, where are you at any of these rallies? I'm sorry, you're in some air conditioned building. So I hear him talking and I hear him say, "We should knock them down, all these Midwesterners. They got all the money." And I went up to him and I said, "Excuse me?"… But I wanted to talk to people, not put them off, not to treat them like it was all their fault…More people listened to me than the usual stuff that was being spewed out on the mic.

Others have also had difficult times working with such groups. When this writer wrote about new approaches to community organizing and anti-war protest in a fashion that questioned the efficacyy of the International ANSWER approach, I was specifically called out in a series of emails to my editors and through posts to left-wing email lists such as "The Marxism Mailing List" (moderated by Louis Proyect) for advancing such a

politics, rather than adhering to the old left lowest-common-denominator, “get the most people out” type of protest model.

On June 23, 2003, Louis Proyect published a review that specifically criticized my approach. The exchange is useful, for it illuminates the view of an occupied space demonstration. Proyect quotes an essay of mine:

> Instead of involving itself in any of the exciting or fresh direct action stuff which involves not getting a police permit or lining up speakers to preach to the converted, ANSWER was doing their best ground hog day routine pushing for its third march in DC in six months.

Referring to a review of a work[BOOK?] by William Ayers (2001) that failed to condemn the Weather Underground, Proyect articulated his view of the use of a staged, permitted action:

> While Shepard is not as addled as the black block types, who seem intent on elevating "Days of Rage" tactics to a principle, he doesn't seem to understand the purpose of demonstrations. They are not designed to raise the adrenaline level of participants, but to convince others to take part.
>
> It was only when antiwar demonstrations [in the USA] reached a critical mass during the late 1960s and early 1970s that imperialism was forced to retreat from an all-out military solution. If none of the demonstrations seemed "exciting" or "fresh" to some autoworker watching at home on his or her television, this was besides the point. The whole point was to make it as *easy* as possible for them to participate. While tear gas and billy club attacks might make for breathless "I was there" type narratives in ensuing weeks, they are not calculated to win fresh troops for the cause. If anything, it was the exhaustion of tactical street militancy that led the Weathermen to opt for bombing attacks (Proyect, 2003).

The model Proyect advocates fails to inspire activists like myself. It is easily ignored and contained. On the other hand, “a politics of play that is engaging…is not just generative, it grows,” William Etundi explains. A politics that uses elements of play,

creativity, and direct action invites active, rather than passive participation. Mauers explains:

> I think that they are necessary to bring young people into protest so they can see protesting is fun. I understand that these are serious issues that we are talking about, but you know, we need to get the young folk into there. We need to get them interested. We need to turn them onto the issues…. It has to be creative. It can't be the usual stuff any more. It's out. We have to do different things, for the media to listen to us. To get people involved. We have to do different stuff.

Mauers suggests that such a form of protest offers a different way of seeing and being in the world. "I think play can be very important in protest, just to get to the creative part of the brain. We need to get creativity back." To do that, protest must remain fresh. "How was Abby Hoffman able to lure a lot of people?" he asks. "By doing creative types of stuff. We need to bring that element back in." Thus, Mauers suggests, protest must stay active rather than repeating the same routine over and over. "Its not just the same seven things all the time. 'Hell no, we're not going to…' To succeed, we have to get people to think."

Yet by 2002, it felt like much of the creativity and vitality of the post-Seattle organizing period was being drained from the movement of movements in North America, replaced with the old-left routines. L.A. Kauffman explains:

> The politics felt very cold, cerebral. And it made me sick. It made me physically sick to think that the movement that I was part of was merely showcasing the shrill and the simplistic, was dominated by people with cold and creepy politics. I had this very strong sense after September 11 that if you do not have humanism and a genuine love for other human beings at the core of your politics, I don't want to work with you. I don't want to be in coalition with you. If you could not genuinely mourn and grieve for the thousands of people who were slaughtered in our city, forget it. I am certainly not marching with you (2004).

So, rather then complain or resign herself to this, Kauffman started a new anti-war group.

An Absurd Response to an Absurd War

When I asked Matthew Roth what were his best experiences with the use of play and creativity in his work, he described a small anti-war group:

> The most fun I ever had in a single event was Absurd Response to an Absurd War, which you were in my friend. I remember that beautiful perm you had with the Perms for Permawar during the fall anti-war march in Washington, DC. We're leading up to the assault on Iraq and the drumming up of the weapons of mass destruction and the yellow cake power, whatever, everyone saying how Iraq is the worst terrorist threat there has ever been. Al Qaeda/Iraq. Al Qaeda/Iraq. All this stuff, if we didn't know, we felt was absolutely wrong and totally beyond logic. It was absurd. I don't know who came up with the terminology, "an absurd response to an absurd war," maybe it was Ben Shepard, it might have been Ben Shepard.

Absurd Response was the name for this affinity group. The group viewed the post 9/11 drive to war in Iraq as an absurd situation, so it attempted to create a funhouse mirror type of theater of the ridiculous. The aim was to mirror what many considered political lunacy with an equal image of what this lunacy might look like. Thus, the group employed chants including, "Start the bombing now!!!!!" "Start the bombing now!!!! "Two four six eight, we are people who hate, hate, hate!!!!"

Philosopher Slavoj Zizek describes why people engage in such ironic discourses. "The only way to signal you are serious is, at the level of form, to make fun of yourself (YEAR, p. ?)." Thus, Zizek gives a nod to Absurd Response's distinctly non-serious clownish approach to addressing serious issues through the circus-like carnival that provides a different way of approaching the serious. "This pseudo-Heideggerian jargon, we live in fateful times, the destiny of humanity is threatened blah, blah, blah – I think you cannot talk like that," Zizek explains (quoted in Clover, 2005).

Yet debate remained about why anyone would want to organize a cacophonous block of church ladies in drag calling themselves "Perms for Perma War" who screamed ironic chants at the formal, earnest crowds during anti-war marches. What was going on?

Different people had different explanations. But for most involved, the feeling was the world was witnessing an absurd situation – a "war on terrorism" a sitting vice president predicted could last 50 years – that required an absurd response. The *1984* slogans "war is peace" and "freedom is slavery" had skipped from civics lessons to the front and center of a national political consciousness. The notion that "ignorance is strength" had ceased to be seen as a cautionary tale, but was now considered an asset by the powers-that-be.

"When I was coming up, it was a dangerous world, and you knew exactly who *they* were…it was us vs. them and it was clear who them was," the future president explained on the campaign trail back in 2000, continuing, "Today, we are not sure who they are, but we know they are there." The 9/11 terrorist attacks were his salvation; now, the threat was clear. From here on out, pesky problems could be blamed on the new national enemy. For Orwell, it was Goldstein; for Bush it was Osama bin Laden and Saddam Hussein. Arguments about social democracy, increased social control, and other annoying distractions could be dismissed with the mere reminder, "Don't forget, Osama bin Lade" (Pilger, 2002). "Remember Sadham Hussein's weapons of aass destruction." "Weapons of mass destruction," Bush's National Security Advisor Condolezza Rice repeated over and over, plugging her case like a Madison Avenue marketing guru. There was a product to sell: Perma-War.

The job of activists was to spotlight the flawed logic of the nation's shift toward Perma-War. For many, the best way to do this was with guerilla theater, which illustrated the buffoonery. There have been absurd wars before, but, unlike the Gulf War of the early 1990s, the current conflict began with a mobilized movement already on the ground and running. As the global justice movement flirts with becoming an anti-war movement,

questions about theater and aesthetics have everything to do with political strategy and movement building. Politics of authenticity have to contend with the defiant absurdity of the carnival of the Seattle-era protest model. The following offers a series of impressions and examples of the increased utility of street theater, its shifts in plot structure from global justice to anti-war and back again, and how they[WHAT? STORIES? TACTICS? affect the activist stage. In the current political climate, righteous confrontation with police translates into almost certain political repression. As such, the need for colorful, festive, revolutionary theater, full of earthy vitality, joy, humor, and carnival, has never been more essential.

Why Absurd Responses?

The enduring strength of the post-Seattle activist project involves the joy and vitality embodied in the Mikhail Bakhtin (1965) model of protest as carnival. The point of this model is to create a festive energy that dismantles social hierarchies. We've all laughed along with a great joke. Everybody wants to be at a party where everyone is free to have a good time. The point of a really good joke is to punch holes in social pretensions. When all else is lost, we still have our sense of humor. After an entire year of the politics of mind-numbing seriousness, the possibility of a joke's capacity for catharsis was considerable. The first 9/11 anniversary marked this. Somewhere within our public life, some of the sentiment of the "better to laugh than cry" spoofs as witnessed on *Saturday Night Live* and the *Daily Show with John Stewart*, had to be unleashed. The liberating daring of satire had to [ONCE AGAIN?] become part of movement work.

The point of such protest would be to re-link protest with optimism and a feeling of possibility or rejuvenation. The festive atmosphere of a great action could be bridged

with the transformative aspirations of the carnival. Beyond the status-quo ceremony of the usual protest, the carnival could create the liminal in-between spaces, the *communitas* generated within rituals capable of shifting power hierarchies. We'd seen images of those protests during the anti-war movements of the past as well as the extreme costume balls that reclaimed streets throughout the previous five years (Boyd, 2002). The aim of an absurd response would be to create a brand of protest that merged the joyous ecstatic spirit of exhilarating entertainment with a political agenda of progressive political change. Within this festive revolutionary theater, progressive elements of political change would be linked with notions of social renewal. moving spectators to join the fun, to become part of the concrete action of social change. Spectacle is linked to practical shifts in people's lives (Ornstein, 1998, p. xiv-xv,6-9). Party as protest thus becomes an invitation to a possibility.

From the IWW dictum that "Direct Action Gets the Goods" to ACT UP's righteous anger, when activists took the streets without asking for permission, they produced results in peoples' lives. The lesson became that well-timed, creative street theater, could reshape power structures. And along the road, the dramaturgical lesson unfolded that good actions had to be good theater. In the years after Seattle, activists had worked to build upon this insight. While dramatic, the macho, quasi-militaristic posturing of the black bloc did not appear to be a long-term solution. Faced with force, police tend to use more force, in a game of "my weapon is bigger than your weapon."

Anti-War vs. Global Justice Strategies

In the months after 9/11, the dullness of hierarchical protest once again reared its tired head. Instead of a silly bloc at the IMF protests, the International Action Center

planned their own action, which few attended. The following year, I watched one of the ISO speakers pull out a bullhorn and scream for everyone to get in order as activists began the "Drop the Dept March" to protest the IMF in Washington in September 2002. The ISOers, who had been busy selling their cardboard signs and newspapers, lined up and marched off in a quasi-militaristic single-file. In a moment, what had been merely tacky became a replica of the worst kind of militaristic protest theater. It seemed a marked contrast to the global justice movement's carnivalesque coalition actions in which the participants were all free to be the leaders. Once again, sectarian organizations (IAC, ANSWER, etc.) were barking orders and protest was becoming ever more shrill.

After 9/11, the challenge remained just how far the global justice movement could go as it intersected with the aesthetics of the anti-war movement. There were many who had little interest in reacting to a war; local struggles required attention, war or no war. Despite itself, the movement continued. The January 2002 WEF protests succeeded in part because activists choose to create a large samba band instead of confronting police. After this, a focus on local actions took precedence as activists concentrated on the local components of the globalstruggles. By fall 2002, the Global Justice Movement once again flexed it muscles with a successful series of marches in Washington in September, despite the ISO and IAC's less-than-exciting theatrical protest. At these IMF actions, some 650 activists were pre-emptively arrested. They were acutely aware that the arrests took place not because of any "terrorist threat" to Washington, but because of their vocal opposition to the IMF, the World Bank, and war for oil.

Having lost the possibility of insurgent surprise after the 1999 Seattle WTO protests, the Global Justice Movement's cacophony of voices was nevertheless able to bring its message to the world through the theater of righteous protest. The evening news-cum-war pep rally was constantly interrupted that September 2002 with countless images of activists willing to be arrested fightig corporate globalization. One news segment showed a group of smiling activists stripping down to their skivvies in front of a GAP store accused of selling products made in sweatshops. Crowds of Georgetown University students chanted, "Take it off" in a back-and-forth with protestors. Here, the media was offered a good-natured theatrical display that highlighted a major problem. This they faithfully disseminated during their evening news show. "It must be spring," one commentator noted. People around the world saw the image of a group of light-hearted activists make an important point whileproducing a positive representation of the movement to a mass public.

Shortly after the IMF protests, the president won Senate approval for a pre-emptive attack on Iraq. Just when protesters thought they had successfully placed global justice issues back on the public's agenda, the call for war eclipsed their substantive advances. While the administration was prepared to spend $100 billion to rid Iraq of "weapons of mass destruction," it was unwilling to spend more than 0.2% of that ($200m) on the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria. There would be no room for "weapons of mass salvation" to fight for global justice if the administration's war plans were successful (Sachs 2002). For many in the movement, priorities became clear: the struggles against war had to be successful if activists hoped to push other issues back onto a public agenda. The question remained how?

Speaking to Multiple Publics

In the days after the September IMF protests, anti-war rallies in European cities witnessed hundreds of thousands of protestors. Of 400,000 protestors in London, only two activists were arrested. In stark contrast, 650 of 5,000 were arrested in Washington on September 27th (their offense was standing in a public park). These activists had made the message clear that they intended to engage in a street blockade. While certainly the police counteracted, if not upstaged, the anarchic protest with their own massive display of fascistic theater, the arrests should not have been a surprise. Since Seattle, RTS and the Carnival against Capital had regularly been talked about as "terrorist groups." A movement whose hallmark was creative approaches to protest had begun to re-use tactics that had already been mediated, massively criminalized, and upstaged by cops. In the current activist climate, righteous confrontation with police translates to almost certain political repression. Part of what movement players were seeing was a stranglehold on public space, a rigid segmentation of the street corners, the parks, and by extension the public commons, for debate. This made it harder to get the message out. The challenge remained how to creatively speak to multiple publics.

If one of the strengths of the global justice movement was reclaiming public space through their DIY activism, these qualities appeared particularly necessary for an anti-war movement struggling to find its footing. Amid the mounting rhetoric of war, thousands converged in Central Park during the first week of October 2002 for a quiet day of speeches with little drama. The urgency of the anti-war struggle was lost within

the long speeches. For a number of us, the call for a less structured theater of protest was becoming paramount.

Irving Goffman (1959) writes that an underlying point of the presentation of self is to make a point. The same sentiment takes place within social protest. Movements are essentially constructions of countless performances. If the protest is stale and sterile, it gets bad reviews – or gets ignored. The gestures involved within protest can be understood as a means to influence other participants. To achieve a given goal, movements present themselves to at least six specific publics, all of which are capable of accepting or rejecting a given message:

1) potential recruits
2) those already working within the movement
3) movement fellow travelers, allies, and potential coalition partners
4) over-saturated media outlets
5) public opinion and good will (as opposed to those calling for restriction of public space)
6) public policymakers controlling state action (McAdam,1996, p. 339-40).

Successful movement strategy requires retaining the allegiances of those already involved, as well as working to attract those who may want to join or act as coalition partners. In order to appeal to the rank-and-file, as well as begin to make a dent in the policy public (understood as politicians, the media, and by extension the democratic public), an effective anti-war response would need to appeal to outsiders as well as be media friendly. For many of us, the best way to speak to so many publics simultaneously was to cultivate a far more festive brand of protest than we'd seen in recent years – a protest with a sense joy that could be seen on the faces of all those involved.

Forms of Protest

In the days after the staid Central Park rally, activists from the old Lower East Side Collective, RTS New York, and the NYC Direct Action Network began quietly meeting to discuss ways to foster the possibility of just such a politics. The time seemed right for a shift in the movement. A national anti-war rally was scheduled for October 26th. Many of us from this coalition-in-formation would usually skip actions organized by ANSWER, a post-9/11 offshoot of the International Action Center. That group's their leadership, after all, had supported the Chinese government during the Tiananmen Square democracy protests of 1989, held rallies in support of Saddam Hussein during the first Gulf War, and supported Slobodan Milosevic, the deposed president of Yugoslavia (Goldstein, 2002). The IAC embodied everything wrong with an American left that reflexively supported any government willing to stand up to American "imperialism." Yet a wedge was developing within the movement. Our thinking was that we could create a joyous, less righteous, even ironic response – an alternative to the wing-nut response. Our first meeting produced a simple commitment to organize a festive feeder march to join the larger ANSWER anti-war march. By the end of our second meeting, the group had agreed to create "An Absurd Response to an Absurd War" to counter the potentially alienating ANSWER march.

Two years prior, in the days after Bush succeeded with his Supreme Court 5-4 election shuffle, RTS New York had formed Students for Undemocratic Society (SUDS), a satirical play on the 1960s group Students for a Democratic Society (SDS). Dressed as campus preppies wearing "W" hats, we drove down to Washington for the inauguration on January 20, 2001. "Tell Us What to Think - Obey!" would be our slogan. As we

chanted, we offered both a lampoon of the old left slogans as well as a commentary on the new plutocratic regime: “Whose Street? Wall Street?”, “No Justice, No Problem,” and the crowd-pleaser “What do we want – fur coats? How do we want them – full length!!!” When a counter-protestor chanted at the Absurd Response, the group would counter or agree with them. When a group of actual collegiate right-wing preppies sang “nah nah nah, hey hey hey goodbye” to President Clinton, SUDS interjected with “democracy.” At the time, SUDS received a great deal of attention and media coverage.

Instead of campus preppies, the October 26 action would highlight a group of patriotic ladies with bouffant permanent hairdos who supported the war. “Perms for perma-war” would be the slogan. In the spirit of SUDS, our collective drafted a call to action. It stated: “The Jaded and Converted and Dicks For Dick invite you to Washington October 26, 2002.” It continued:

> Break out your beehive, your two-tone shoes, your cardigans! Too hip and cynical to pin a flower in your hair and hold hands with strangers? Well then, you are invited to join A.B.S.U.R.D. Response and Party for Perma-War for a festive, ironic, theatrical march that will eventually feed into the anti-war rally in DC. For the real fun, assemble with DICKS FOR DICK at the BIG DICK (aka the Washington Monument) at 11 am on Saturday, October 26.
>
> Because everyone from James Baker III, to Nelson Mandela, to CIA director George Tenet has said this war is absurd. In the tradition of the first Absurdists we will create our own Theater of the Absurd as our Idiot Boy King continues his relentless drive to pitch the world into a state of permanent warfare.
>
> The festivities will commence with a ritual "Bowing Down To The Mighty Phallus," followed by a "hoisting of the balls of war" presided over by Reverend Billy and the Church of Stop Bombing Gospel Choir.
>
> Bring costumes, Bring INSTRUMENTS, Bring posters and banners. Bring lots of friends. Be prepared to mock the Axis of Oil and Defense Funding without mercy. Please do not bring "No Blood for Oil" signs or Mimes. NO MIMES. Party for a Perma War is brought to you by LESC, SUDS, RTS-NYC, OPP, The Converted & Jaded, Billionaire Liberation Front, Future Veterans for War, and You!

Spoofing the practice of legitimizing protests through organizational co-sponsorships, every time Absurd Response offered a new draft call, we would add on more groups. The suggested slogans built on themes from Orwell's *1984* and a lampoon of bad anti-war theatrics. We began with the old John and Yoko street billboard:

> Peace is Over, If You Want It (signed by Blood and Iron, Dick & W)
> ExxonMobil: These Colors Don't Run!
> War Is Globalization
> We (heart) Harken
> God Bless Boeing
> Pre-empt The UN
> Ignorance Is Strength

The slogan "OBEY" embodied much of what the group felt was being said by the current administration.

The message was simple and silly enough. As I explained to one reporter at the time:

> Basically, this war frenzy is so blatantly short-sighted, so focused on supporting the narrow ends of Lockheed and the General Dynamics Corporation and other defense contractors profiting on the war. Very few in power are considering alternative ways of creating energy or sustainable development without raping the environment. War is the answer, war is the answer. Twisted times, deserve twisted responses. After a year of memorials, many of us felt it was time to get a sense of humor back. War is not going to get my sense of joy. An absurd war deserves an absurd response, a response capable of shifting power hierarchies. We have to be effective at drawing attention to alternative ways of building sustainable communities. The carnival is a great way to do that.

The Limits of Play

The question was, exactly how far the Absurd Response should go with its silliness? The feeling that many in the current administration were thinking with their little heads instead of their big ones inspired the ironic calls for "Dickheads for War!!!" A friend had just held a party at which he handed out a bunch of dildos he'd recently liberated from a garbage dumpster outside a porn shop in San Francisco. The idea was for

activists to show up in Washington dressed in corporate drag, a suit and tie, with a plastic dildo on their head. Like the US military does with its missiles, prominently painted on the side would be the words such as “USA” or “Fuck You Saddam.” But for those not familiar with the tradition of the clown and its buffoon-like confrontations with social and economic oppression (Ornstein, 1998, p. 3), the message was confusing and even off-putting. For others, the phallus was seen as a source of oppression – understandably not something fun.

For us the point was to offend the banal. Kate Crane, a local[NYC OR DC?] media activist, drafted the first version of the press release. It concluded: “Also on hand will be the Dickheads, a posse of gender-bending miscreants best known for parading about with dildos for head-gear. ‘What’s this war if it’s not about the size of the Bush-family dick? When will this country stop fucking the rest of the world and learn that size doesn’t matter?’ cried P. Neil Emplante, a Dickhead member.”

Theatrical protest has many detractors who see its goal as not political, but as artistic. Abbie Hoffman was accused of developing a fan base as opposed to a coherent political stance and structure. Yet ACT UP helped us learn that with good media work, research, and a coherent organized message, guerilla theater can play an effective role in promoting a political message. Scenes are staged so as to be media friendly, characters learn their sound bites around particular policies in question, and audiences gravitate to good performances. People want to write about and interview the cast members, regardless of whether they are stars or not. Everyone has his or her lines.

The group spent the final days before the action pulling together slogans, making signs, and working on language for the press release. The issue over the possibly

> offensive nature of the Dick Heads forced us to struggle with a conflict between a lowest-common- denominator activism that was supposed to appeal to a mythic "people" vs. targeted protests that would generate strong emotions either for or against us.

Crane's second press release was a little less silly:

> The Bush Administration is drawing the U.S. and the world ever closer to a state of permanent war. Dubya's doctrine of preemption and expanding empire, outlined in the recently released "National Security Strategy of the United States," does away with strategies of deterrence and cooperation with other nations—not to mention the notion that war is a last resort. These strategies have formed the cornerstone of U.S. foreign policy since the 1940s. As the U.S. courts war without end, citizens are conveniently distracted from the tanking economy and the continuing exposés of corporate scandal.
>
> Leading Saturday's procession …will be the Bombshells in Beehives, a group of 1950s housewives who continue to cling to the bouffant and floral housedress even in 2002. Together, their bouffants will spell out "PERMA WAR."
>
> "It'll take weeks to get the glue and felt out of my hair," Myrtle Nejedlik, a 67-year-old housewife from Dayton said ruefully. "But what the hell! It's 'Perms for Perma-War!' The idiot boy king is out for blood (and oil), and we've all got to give what we've got to throw a wrench in the works. Me, I've got great hair.

By the third draft, Myrtle had been edited out of the release. After three meetings in just over as many weeks, Absurd Response was ready to converge on DC. In the end, only a few actually wore the dildos as props. However, a whole other contingent calling themselves the "Missiledicks," waving their deadly phalluses around to cheers throughout the day, gravitated to the Absurd Response convergence.

Play vs. Political Rhetoric

Half the group arrived late, donned our perma-war wigs, and some worshiped at the phallus, the Washington Monument. Members bowed down, a few even put on the

dickhead gear. As members marched and chanted, they passed out our palm cards to explain the point of the theater: “Are you ready for Perma-War?” it began. “Iraq is only the beginning. The Bush Administration is drawing the United States and the world ever closer to a state of permanent military engagement, So what do we do?” the front of the card asked. The back answered: “Throw a party!!! Activism doesn’t have to mean droning speeches, dull chants, and tired slogans. To sustain the growing movement over the long haul, we need humor, theater, music, flamboyance, irony, and fun.” The card helped bring a little levity to the confused day.

Joined by Reverent Billy and the Church of Stop Bombing Choir and calling themselves the Spirit of 1976 Gone Wrong, this rag-tag group of anarchist clowns jugglers, fire-eaters, strippers, puppeteers, drag queens and kings, and missile dicks marched from the Washington Monument to the Vietnam Memorial to feed into the larger march of disgruntled citizens. We were armed with our message, which was another great product to sell, like the pump hairspray we used for our perms.

Yet just getting everyone together to pull off the Absurd Response was a challenge. Matthew Roth recalls:

> That day I was a “Dickhead for Dick,” a dildo for Dick Cheney. I was actually kind of concerned when we first arrived. There were, like, four people there. And an hour later more showed up. But there were only maybe ten of us or twelve of us. And I was like, this is a really small thing to carry this concept out. And we had a couple of placards and this absolutely gorgeous banner, which said, “An Absurd Response to an Absurd War” in sparkly sequins, like bright. Then the wigs came out and people got made up. And then someone snappped a dildo on my head. Then the Reverend Billy showed up. And then I was like, these twelve, fifteen people, however many, it was a pretty small group, it suddenly had more energy and more excitement and vibe than anything I’d seen before. And ok, alright. I can go and march the march and feel good about this. In fact, the banner I’m holding up, I feel kind of comfortable about because its satire.

Two clowns dressed in red, white, and blue cheered and danced spastically to the call for war, screaming "tee hee," bouncing to and fro, calling for the crowd to join them. "'War makes me happy!!!' 'Peace makes me sad.'" Larry Bogad remembers the clowns chanting. "They were jumping up down and going crazy. "'Peace is stupid.' They were just really berserk, insane, absolutely sociopathic clowns."

"[W]e turned back to that carnival model," LA Kauffman explains:

> People loved it and responded really well to reintroducing satire, humor, color, dance, music into the movement. It helped that some of the satire was directed *toward* the movement: When we'd pass, say, an ANSWER sound truck, we'd switch from our exaggerated pro-war chants like "We need oil, we need gas, watch out world we'll kick your ass" to things like, "March march, chant chant, rhetoric rhetoric, rant rant."

When confronted with counter-protestors, the clowns joined the other side where they started yelling at us. Joining the other side is a particularly effective ploy for disarming counter-protests and the media coverage of them (we'd first used this tactic as SUDs at the Bush coronation). In this case, however, the counter-protesting pro-war Iraqis actually charged at us. The clowns' overture incited not a playful theatrical scene, but an agitated screaming and shoving match which could have turned violent. Having had our fun, we marched backward and onward toward another joke. The scene was more reminiscent of the old Monty Python "Run away!" schtick. There were other protestors out there who would better appreciate the message.

Amidst hoards of earnest protestors with their "How Many Iraqi Children Will Die?" signs, Absurd Response chanted: "We love bush, we love dick, all you peaceniks make us sick." To the drums introducing our perma-war kick-line, we cried "All war, all the time, Perma-War is peace," and sang the old anthems, "We Shall Overbomb"

and “All we are saying is give War a Chance.” There were chants of “Start the Bombing Now,” on the verge of offending the sensibilities of the larger crowd of 100,000. Roth remembers:

> I forget some of them. But I wrote them down in my notebook. But the things we’re saying are so absurd, they are as absurd as the motif we’re organized under, that I can’t stop but laughing the whole time. Every time I’m chanting, I’m cracking up. As part of this group when I started to engage people who were there and they were very earnest in their protest, like the IAC and ANSWER and a few others. And they are so earnest, life-long communists. Like they grow their beard in order to do this. Like the rings of the tree, they can say this hair started in 1968 when... anyway. It’s all these earnest... stuff that I can’t get into. I take parts of the message and take parts of the issue. And I fully agree. But the delivery and the methodology are so stale. It burns me, it squelches me. It makes my heart hurt.

The day was full of rhetorical shuffles with groups like the ISO, with their reified chants of “Hey George Bush, you can’t hide, we charge you with genocide.” To these we replied, again, "We need oil, we need gas, watch out world – we'll kick your ass!" We directly lampooned the old lefty slogan “The people united will never be defeated” with “The people who chant this will never be creative. The people, bad slogans, will always be defeated” and “Power to power.” Bogad, who was also at the rally, describes the scene:

> They were going, “George Bush, you can’t hide, we charge you with genocide,” which is very original. Fresh like a summer’s day. Anyway, Leslie Kauffman, one of our wonderful friends, she made the point that this same group was being hypocritical with some of their stances [see Goldstein, 2002]. I don’t want to get too much into some of the sectarian politics of it. But they are being hypocritical with some of their stances. So we just came back with some of our chants that we prepared or brainstormed, some of which were brainstormed on the march. Some of which were pre-brainstormed, with things such as “Three word chant, four words are better.” That’s a call and response. “March, march, rant, rant, rhetoric, rhetoric, chant, chant.” “The people, bad protest, will never be successful” “Bad slogans, repeated, insure that we’re defeated.’

For Roth, the playful carnival is more inviting than the old left. The Absurd Response brings a different kind of energy, he explains:

> Andrew Boyd describes this a lot with the Billionaires. It's when you love that first moment, when you first saw that rabid Republican who you are standing next to and they heard what you are chanting, breathe in and realize, "wait a minute, they're not with us." It's this "aha." It's that humorous moment. That to me was taking performance and the politics of play to a different level. It was completely within the structure of a protest and yet the content was completely different. And we were still delivering a message that people still got and totally felt. It was this liberal crowd of anti-war protestors. They totally got it at the end. But it took a second and it was in that taking a second that they had to think for a second. It's like that moment when there's an answer that you're teacher is trying to get you to get and if you're teacher just tells it to you, you don't get it. If your teacher shows you and leads you to the answer, you're of course like, "So that's how long division works." "That's why you spell e for i," and that kind of thing. I think it has a similar effect in the mind when you use satire, when a person has to do a double take and think, "wait a minute…"

Roth further describes how this way of engaging shifted the storylines and updated the 1960s anti-war narrative:

> I remember this classic scene when we were marching around the Ellipse within a group of normal protestors and of course its infectious and they're picking up on it. We're coming up to this federal building on the left and it's like this classic thing. It could have been a poster from 1968 or '69 where this long-haired dude is up on top of this pillar overlooking this crowd of people and he's chanting anti-war slogans and they are all chanting back. And then we come up. And he hears this, "What do we want?" And we say, "War" and "Always." And from a distance, he just recognized the cadence of the chant. And he chants it. And then we get close enough that he stops to hear what we're saying with his fist raised up in the air and I'm looking up. It's just this classic iconography, this moment, if this were 1970, this would be an anti-Vietnam War [protest], this would be this radical movement here and we're him and he's us. And this second, his face just turned black, he was so pissed off, like, "what are they saying?!" And then he cracked up. And he went through so many emotions – woosh! And then he was just laughing and chanting our cheer. And his fist was up in the air again. And everyone around him is doing it. And they got it. They were completely engaged. They were pulled in by this form of storytelling.

Throughout the day, more and more people sang along and applauded to, “We shall over bomb,” joining us for the chorus, “Deep in our hearts, we do believe, we shall live in war forever.” The “W” stands for WIMP” chant calling for the war to begin ASAP also proved to be a crowd pleaser. “War is good for children, it builds strong bones,” followed by “Bomb Iraq, start the war, we don't need no peace no more.” With the crowd swelling, Absurd Response was joined by a group of George Washington University students and members of Reclaim the Streets Washington who led the crowd in a rendition of the perma-war hokey-pokey. “You put the money in, you put the money out, you put the sanctions in, and you shake it all about” as everyone danced. “What do we want – permawar! Why do we want it? – for higher ratings!” and with the drums and the improvisation, there ensued thousands of variations – the call and response felt like a bit of jazz.

“I’d have to say my favorite chant was, ‘Three Word Chant,’” Roth recalled fondly. “‘Three word chant, three word chant!!!’ And then ‘Four words are more! Four words are more!’”

In between chants, members of the Absurd Response invited others to participate in the anti-war hokey pokey and to sing along with an updated version of the childhood nursery rhyme, “If you are happy and you know it”:

If you're greedy and you know it, bomb Iraq (clap clap)
If you're greedy and you know it, bomb Iraq (clap clap)
If you're greedy and you know it,
George Bush will surely show it
If you're greedy and you know it, bomb Iraq.

If your equities are falling, bomb Iraq…

If the euro keeps on climbing, bomb Iraq…

If the GDP is shrinking, bomb Iraq…

If all your polls are falling, bomb Iraq…

If the GOP is hurtin', bomb Iraq…

If the talk has turned to Harken, bomb Iraq,

Are they checking Halliburton? Bomb Iraq…

If the pundits call you "moron," bomb Iraq

To divert public attention, bomb Iraq
To divert public attention, bomb Iraq
To divert public attention
From Enron stealing our pension
To divert public attention, bomb Iraq.

The point of the Absurd Response carnival was to open a space for different kinds of participation. Bogad explains:

> You know, I have my schtick about opening space vs. occupying space. They are two paradigms and there is no purity in this world, except in certain people we don't like's idea of race. So I don't think there is simply purely openig space and purely occupying space, but what I mean by that is that you can have a public demonstration action that is about taking over the space and occupying it for a certain political position. And there's nothing wrong with that. But it is a little more old-fashioned from our perspective. And so that's the "Hey, hey, ho, ho. Bla, bla, bla has got to go thing." It's pretty uniform often. But again, nothing is pure. There is no such thing as a pure thing. The open space thing is the more radical costume ball, participatory, come around a certain theme.
>
> An Absurd Response to an Absurd War is a great example. An Abusurd Response to an Absurd War, which I just really adored, I really enjoyed being a part of that, was as we were building up to the Iraq war, the pre-emptive war. We did a pre-emptive protest before the fight started. The idea of Absurd Response was ok, we're not going to preprint lots of signs for you to hold. And we're not going to lead chants that are the same as the old. It's just basically, here's the theme. And the RTS core had elaborate costumes. But anybody could show up with an absurd response to the absurd war. So we had a guy show up in a caveman kind of costume, with a club, doing the Neanderthal bang, boom, boom. A Neanderthal who likes bombs was his thing. We had a costume. We had a couple of people show up as war clowns, that was great.

People seemed to revel in the funhouse mirror quality of the actions. "Everyone's in drag, wearing these huge perms with dresses, just delightful. We start chanting and everyone is just electrified," Roth recalls. "They loved it. They start taking up the chants. There's this magnetic experience of, 'All right, I can be completely irreverent and say these satiric things' and it makes perfect sense. Everybody gets it. It's the aha." Part of the play was offering a mirror to the lunacy of the rush to war, to the Bush administration and the funhouse mirror image of the extreme right. Roth[?] continues:

> The funhouse mirror is just this idea, I'm not just going to duplicate you because why. I'm not going to reinscribe your stuff. I'm not going to reinscribe your position, 'cause that's a waste of my energy. But I will [WHAT?]. And it's not just going to be a simple inversion or a simple exaggeration. But it's going to be a cartoon of the positions we find reactionary and destructive. And so again, the Bombshells again are these glamorous upper-class women who just send these kids off to die for their fortunes. And they just dig it. So there they are.

The Perms were carrying hairspray cans with Perma-war product sprayed on them. The point was to compare one product line – hair spray – with another – perma-war. Bogad explains: "We think there could be a big future for Perma-war Inc. Keep that hair up. My hair is standing up already." Amidst the cacophony, Bogad was asked to be a director for that show. While the passion was there, the group functioned on the brink of total confusion and miscoordination. While the ridiculousness created a great deal of fun, none of the participants had training in improvisational theater. And there were moments when it did not feel like the group had it together. "That is true," Bogad recalls, adding:

> When you do the opening space thing or whatever you want to call it, a lot of this is improv theater folks. It's like, you know, we have a costume; we have a concept; we think about it. But things happen. And also we're interacting with reality. I'd say that we're riffing on reality. There's the rehearsal space and then there's interacting with a lot of people that are not part of your show, and you are

> making part of your show. But actually, you don't know what's going to happen. So when the stompenoid[??] people drive by with their sound truck, we didn't rehearse for that. We didn't know it was going to happen. Even within the movement, we didn't know those guys were going to go by. And then we were kind of interacting with them, by making fun of them that way.

By the end of the day, Absurd Response got 10- to 30-second news coverage on most of the networks, a predictably sarcastic story in the *New York Times*, and a cover story in the *Washington Post*. It declared "100,000 Rally, March Against War in Iraq." In addition, the group got its picture on the cover of the *Post*.

The Absurdity Continues

Is it a good thing if this ironic theatrical protest is the only representation of the anti-war movement that the public sees? Certainly the message was confusing. At one point, a person came up to me and asked if we were right-wing drag performers. Yet from the voices of the crowd, the embrace of the signs and slogans, and the media coverage, we had to assume that we had reached three of the six publics needed for a protest to be deemed a success. Absurd Responce won over our fellow travelers, recruits, and the media. The word "OBEY" and "Perma-War" made it onto the front pages of the *Washington Post*, and will perhaps become part of the larger cultural consciousness. Andrew Boyd (2002) describes the process of planting such infectious messages as "meme warfare." It remains to be seen whether the crowd that celebrated along with the spectacle by speaking out against the injustices of the right and the banality of the left will continue to destroy the stage directions of protests past.

In the weeks after the protest in Washington, more positive coverage of the anti-war movement followed. *The New York Times* changed their tune and followed the *Washington Post* line that the October event was perhaps the largest anti-war protest

since the Vietnam Era. “Rally in Washington is Said to Invigorate the Antiwar Movement,” read the *Times* headline of October 30, 2002.

Despite the controversy of the action, Kate Crane still felt the absurd response was an appropriate for that moment in history:

> In the summer and the fall when we were doing Absurd Response before the war actually started, that felt incredibly appropriate. We all knew back then that the reasons for going to Iraq were a lie. We knew that it was a sack of bullshit why we were going to war, that it was absurd. It was very compatible with Absurd Response. It was like, “Are you kidding me?” To use that idea was a better way for people to hear that it was bullshit.

Later in the week, I worked with ACT UP to bring the message to a visiting dignitary from the Bush Administration. "Money for AIDS, not for War," ACT UP members chanted as they disrupted the speech of Health and Human Services Secretary Tommy Thompson's under secretary to a group of AIDS service workers. The room of poverty bureaucrats stood up to applaud ACT UP. That same evening, we took the Perma-War message to the West Village Halloween parade, where the anti-war humor engendered widespread cheer.

Krane commented on how the Absurd Response effectively communicated a range of ideas that many were feeling at that time. Even the dourest of New York’s political culture was engaged with the Absurd Response’ playful politics. She recalls:

> I remember at that Halloween parade [in 2002] one of my dour ex-girlfriends was like, “you guys are the hottest thing in New York City activism.” She is, you know, dour. So I did see her, we went to the Dyke March this year. And she was cute. She wore these little pink hot pants, I mean little, and this little pink anarchist sailor cap. And the rainbow flag as a cape. She was like this anarchist dyke. And I was like, “Oh my god. I didn’t think you had that in you.” And her coolio friends, we bumped into them in the Au Bon Pain getting water, and her friends looked appalled and like walked out the door. They didn’t even want to acknowledge who she was. And I think sometimes it’s the idea that you can have the same idea and try to convey it three different ways. When you convey it in a

> way that can make people think, that can make them laugh, you can hold their attention.

For many in the group, the feeling was that humor was the greatest response to this strange convergence of events. We put together a small website calling for new recruits and highlighting our antics and calling for new members to join our weekly anti-war events email list. Here, the public was invited to continue to challenge the elite-engineered hysteria (Ornstein, 1998, p. 3). Whether this shifted the dynamics within the grand mystification is another question[??]. But throughout the fall of 2002 and early 2003, Absurd Response brought a bit of light-heartedness back to a theater of protest. They say imitation is the best form of flattery. In the weeks after Absurd Response started, hundreds signed up to join the anti-war direct action email[?] list. Members of ACT UP Philly, the nation's strongest ACT UP chapter, even started their own Absurd Response group for anti-war rallies. They came up with their own chants:

> This is what aristocracy looks like. Surrender Now
> Support Our Elites
> Shut Up Already
> In MY Name Baby
> Ain't no power like the people in power cause the people in power don't stop
> Say CASH!
>
> No Justice, No Peace, No Shit!
> Give Up
> Peace is Very Scary.
> Free, Free the Military.
> Whose Fucking Cops? Our Fucking Cops!

Throughout the country, the anti-war message was taking off. For Absurd Response, the challenge would be to continue to bring energy to the intersecting global justice and anti-war movements. The core message was that fun and freedom are essential tools for activists working to create a better world.

Back in 1965, in the face of threats of violence from the Hells Angels, Allen Ginsberg (1965) wrote a pre-action treatise on how to handle such potentially disruptive situations: “Demonstration or Spectacle as Example, as Communication or How to Make a March Spectacle.” In his surprisingly still contemporary tract, he offered a mind-body view of keeping cool and creating a theater of protest. His little essay, which suggests putting the Beatles’ *I Wanna Hold Your Hand* on the loudspeakers if you are being attacked, serves as an outline for the transformative potential that protest offers when we are critical of ourselves and joyful at the same time:

> If imaginative, pragmatic, fun, gay, happy, secure propaganda is issued to mass media in advance…the parade can be made into an exemplary of spectacle on how to handle situations of anxiety and fear/threat to manifest by concrete example, namely the parade itself, how to change war psychology and surpass, go over, the habit image reaction of fear/violence...This is, the parade can embody an example of peaceable health which is the reverse of fighting back blindly.

Perhaps that’s just it: the parade can be an example of another way of being right with others and ourselves. Attacks from the Hells Angels need not bring out the worst in us.

An abiding faith in the need to keep protest fresh propelled the Absurd Responce. “Our response was an Absurd Response to an Absurd War,” Bogad explained. “But it’s also a response to cliché.” In his criticism of clichée in literature, Martin Amis suggests, "Out there, beyond the foliage, you see herds of clichés, roaming free” (quoted in McLeary, 2002).

The effort to create a fresh street demonstration involves a struggle to create something vital within a limited vocabulary of signs and symbols, streets, and regulatory mechanisms. Yet those who give into cliché seem to have failed to even attempt to put their own generation’s stamp on protest structures; they have given little effort to creating compelling spaces or connecting their voices and passions to something vital. Instead, far

too many permitted street demonstrations feel like kabuki shows, with pre-ordained beginnings, middles, and endings. They make too much use of tired routine (McLeary, 2002).

"We put so much energy into these demonstrations, why ruin it by making it this lame cliché?" Bogad asks. "Why ruin, spoil all these good ingredients? It's like you had a food, you have all these great ingredients, committed activists, time, energy, etcetera, and then you ruin it by making it a cliché." Reified chants can deflate a good protest. "Too much salt could be like to much earnestness. Never trying anything new. Or it's just like mac 'n' cheese again" Bogad continues. "Yeah, I like mac 'n' cheese. But if you're serving the people mac 'n' cheese every day for five years, they're going to vomit. You can't eat it or you are going to vomit." In this way, bad chants are like the food at a big bland buffet. You make up in volume what's lost in substance. A really good meal is delicious because of the flavor, not the volume of food. "They[the sectarians] like to use big speakers and drown everyone else out. That's very monologic, obviously. Whereas we're going for a dialogue or multivocal kind of a thing," Bogad explains. It There is still a challenge to actually keeping an open space, a highly participatory model, relevant and effective. Bogad describes this challenge when he was directing the Absurd Response:

> Yeah, we want it to be participatory, but also to have an outside/inside eye, which is what they were trying to have me do, of saying, "ok guys, could you please not crowd each other. Here's the sign that says, 'An Absurd Response to an Absurd War.' I know you like standing in front of it. But, then no one can read it." So let the Bombshells do the bombshell thing please.

While the group sang, "We shall overbomb," the goal was also to let people see them singing it. "It kind of gets crowded. It can degenerate into a mush obviously," Bogad continues. When speaking to multiple policy publics without a clear aim, such a

framework can degenerate into a cacophony. Here, the danger is that protesters are simply speaking to themselves. When a group aims to speak to the to conscience of the king, that's one policy public. Another is itself and other protesters. "And there's passers-by who aren't politicized yet," Bogad explains. "And then there's the media, especially, the media. If they look at a bunch of people and say 'I can't film this because its not filmable except to prove these people are tripping over each other,' that's not the point." Thus, with st

> Keep all your elements. Simple does not mean lame. We had music. Have music. Have a drum. If you don't have an instrument, a drum is great, a gong. I was the guy with the gong. And whenever SuperBario Man came too close, I hit him over the head with a gong to show that we're all evil. We had the accordion maniacs. And then you want to have all these different characters. You want to have that. Maybe a great banner. Use every element, maybe in a simple poor[?] theater kind of way that's inventive.

"Better to Laugh than Cry"

The months of activism from February through March 2003 were some of the most exhilarating, depressing, riveting, and charged I can remember. If a mood became too intense—another bombing or a jump in public opinion—[WHAT?] shifted the political climate with a bit of relief or more bad news. The ground remained in constant flux.

After grieving for what felt like the loss after 9/11 of the global justice movement – one of the most amazing movements of our lifetimes – post-mortems proved premature. In the fall of 2002, the antiwar movement built on the infrastructure of the global justice movement to create a momentum unprecedented in any peace movement in history. I will never forget the roars [of the crowd?] at Reverend Billy and the Church of Stop Shopping's first 9/11 anniversary show. Kurt Vonnegut spoke about *Slaughterhouse Five*. People were hooting and hollering in the standing-room-only rally/service at St.

Mark's Church. Somehow, a year's worth of somber memories and frustrations were released.

In the months to follow, more and more citizens stood up to challenge the buffoonery of the notion that the most appropriate response to the slaughter of innocent lives was killing more of them. "War is so 20th Century," signs at rallies read. "Somewhere in Texas, there is a village missing an idiot," another sign proclaimed. Building on the lessons of the global justice movement, this new antiwar movement would be funny, full of joy, engaging, and entertaining at the same time. It would challenge the banality of the "bomb first, ask questions later" approach of the Bushies. And it would succeed in mobilizing people across the country to speak as world citizens in solidarity with people across the globe. Labor unions, church groups, civil libertarians, women's and queer groups would speak out about common fears of a loss of civil liberties and anger over the inequality-expanding economic agenda disguised by the war. The New York City council would pass a resolution opposing the war, as did numerous other cities. Within this opposition, a global peace and justice movement re-emerged, pulling in masses in ways it had never done before in North America. The following is a personal account of the peak months of antiwar activism, as a movement found its footing.

In the days before the October 27, 2002 demonstration in Washington, members of RTS, the New York City Direct Action Network, and the Lower East Side Collective organized to form Mobilize New York and An Absurd Response to an Absurd War. Together, we began to plan for a carnival block for the DC march. In addition to that march, Mobilize New York helped organize an email[?] list with thousands of members

to disseminate pithy weekly antiwar action alerts. Every time someone signed up for our mailing list, we gave them stylish pink and black “All War All the Time?” stickers, urging people to “log on, plug in, stop the war.” By December, these stickers could be witnessed on sidewalks, lampposts, bumpers, subways, and phone booths throughout the city. The group signed up high-school kids, parents, the usual suspects from direct action circles, and Upper West Side liberals. People from all walks of New York life signed up for the list, ready to speak out and take action against the impending war.

Activists chained themselves together in Hillary Clinton’s office the day she voted to approve the war. Increasingly, people were becoming aware that this war was going to happen regardless of whether voters wanted it or not. The President’s "National Security Strategy of the United States," submitted to Congress in September 2002, said as much: "The United States will not hesitate to strike pre-emptively against its enemies, even if it faces international opposition, and will never again allow its military supremacy to be threatened…. In the new world we have entered, the only path to peace and security is the path of action." War is peace. *1984* had ceased to be a cautionary tale. “Ignorance is strength” had moved from satire to serious. And people from all walks of American life sensed something was amiss. Just as the global justice movement had contended with the post-9/11 backlash, with military troops on the ground, the question remained: What was the appropriate response?

The Biggest Protest in History

In the years after 9/11, activists struggled against the ideological uses of the Patriot Act and its restrictions on movement in public space. But they often faced formidable

obstacles. A large new antiwar group, United for Peace and Justice (UFPJ), fought a fruitless legal battle for a permit for an antiwar march in New York City on February 15, 2003, only to see its request dismissed as a security threat.

Still, constituents ranging from religious, to labor, to arts, to women's and queer groups, as well as the city's many playful affinity groups, contributed to the mobilization against the war. When Bush spoke before the United Nations attempting to justify the war in Iraq, John Sellers of the Ruckus Society, as well as a few activists from RTS New York, rented a boat and sailed down the East River with a sign proclaiming, "Earth to Bush, No Iraq War." Many of these groups successfully articulated what was wrong with the war and ways to represent a better and more caring world in creative and thoughtful ways. Lisa Feathersone described Code Pink as, "not an organization but a phenomenon: a sensibility reflecting feminist analysis and a campy playfulness influenced in style and philosophy both by ACT UP and the antiglobalization movement" (quoted in Cartwright, 2005, p. 89). Code Pink's work was part of a wave of innovative feminist direct action that combines an astute analysis with compelling political theater (Cartwright, 2005).

During the week before the February 15 protest, things only got weirder. The Bush Administration sent attorneys from the federal Department of Justice to file a friend of the court brief in support of the City of New York's case that the antiwar march represented a security threat. After the Office of Homeland Security put the country on "orange" alert, on February 10 the *New York Daily News* ran an ominous black cover with the headline: "SHOW OF FORCE: Officials warn stepped-up security will jam city streets, crossings, subways". By Tuesday, the *New York Times'* cover showed a picture of

police officers with automatic rifles in Times Square (where some activists planned to converge after the rally) with the headline: "Alert on Terror." The paper reported that courts had rejected UFPJ's appeal for a permit, arguing that a "Stationary Rally Poses Less Risk." The same edition published the administration's guide to preparedness for a chemical attack – duct tape, plastic sheeting, and fresh water – in a message that seemed reminiscent of the Cold War warnings for school children to hide under their desks if the country was attacked with an atomic bomb. The following day, the papers showed long lines of people stockpiling duct tape, as hysteria took hold nationwide. In the meantime, Fox News ran "Homeland Security: Terror Alert High" graphics during evening programming about a new Bin Laden tape broadcast around the world, like silly putty in his hands.

As the week progressed, the news became more and more Orwellian. Plackards throughout the rallies before Feb. 15th responded to the sentiment: "We're already at war with Iraq. We've always been at war with Iraq. War is Peace!" Again riffing on 1984, another read: "Support the military tribunals. If you've done nothing wrong, you have nothing to fear." Countless others played on the duct tape warnings coming from the federal government. It was clear that amid the warmongering, a backlash was unfolding.

The night before the massive February 15th rally and marches, a group of culture jammers—many from RTS/Mobilize New York—organized what they thought was the ultimate culture jam moment: a completely straight, i.e., not satirical, response to the war. In the middle of the Times Square military recruiting station, the group laid out candles and posters reading: "Bring Them Home Now." The posters aimed to reclaim the icon of the yellow ribbon – a peace sign co-opted during the previous Gulf War. To really be

patriotic, the group suggested, Americans had to call on legislators to get the troops out of harm's way.

The following day was perhaps the largest worldwide protest in history, with over a half million people clogging the street of New York City, and millions more in streets around the world. Even before 'F15,' UFPJ was advertising the day as "the largest ever mobilization against war." Rallies were planned for some 180 cities around the world. The day of the rally, despite the state-imposed barriers, activists and non-activists from all walks of life descended on New York city.

By that day, the administration was acknowledging that their information about an imminent terrorist attack was not quite as solid as first thought, and was back-peddling that it didn't really wanted people to start duct taping their homes just yet.

Members of the RTS/Absurd Response Team called for a carnival block to meet at the steps of the New York Public Library with a press release stating:

> FAT SATURDAY FESTIVE PARTY FOR A WORLD WITHOUT WAR!
> SATURDAY, 2/15, 11:30 A.M, AT THE LIONS AND NY PUBLIC LIBRARY
> WHY – BECAUSE WAR IS SO LAST MILLENIUM
> BRING YOUR MARDI GRAS BEADS!!!
>
> NEW YORK, NY– A festively ironic, theatrical carnival-like feeder march to join up with the large anti-war rally/march on Saturday, 15nd February, at 11:30 a.m. at the Lions/Public Library. Celebrate Mardi gras, Reclaim the Streets says 'Give Up War for Lent.' And dance.
>
> RTS invites everyone—musicians, dancers, tap dancers, artists, sinners, wingnuts, even the NYPD. Anyhow, RTS invites the masses to come and shake their booties in solidarity with everyone from James Baker III to Nelson Mandela to CIA director George Tenet, Norman Schwarzkopf, and a majority of Americans who thinks this is dumb.

The release ended with the simple observation, "Protesters claim: 'Invading IRAQ is just so ten years ago!!!'"

The RTS/Absurd group would be part of the "red" bloc of activists, whose actions absolutely presented a risk of arrest. Members of the Absurd Response Team wore their feather boas and Marge Simpson wigs, and carried noise-makers. Signs included the ubiquitous, "All War All the Time?" and "God Bless Hysteria." in homage to the rainbow colors of the alerts Police swarmed through the streets. Absurd Response members overlapped with the remnants of the roving samba band from the WEF protests the year before. In addition, some old RTS/Complacent folks pushed a mobile version of the RTS sound system in a grocery cart. A woman dressed as a baby with a pacifier sat on top of the cart carrying the sound system. As usual, the sound system crashed two or three times before it stabilized.

By that time, many of us were separated. The plan had been to follow the marching band, but the streets were so clogged it was hard to follow anything. The activists got separated even more by the police blockades. Some Absurd Response members passed the time in the clogged streets organizing rounds of hokey anti-war dance routines with fellow protesters, while others rioted and fought through police barricades. As the police converged on protesters, actually pushing activists into 42nd Street and clogging others into dead ends, RTS/Absurd Response members reconverged with the folks with the now-working sound system. The group zigged and zagged through the side streets, avoiding police or being pinned into pens, dancing and drawing crowds along the way. The police sent horses to break up feeder marches throughout the city heading to the main rally at Central Park, sought to separate the crowds into smaller groups, pushed marchers off sidewalks with batons, and arrested nearly 300 people.

My father, a 66-year-old retired pastor who was in town over the weekend, observed, "We started out at 51st Street, then 57th, then 62nd, and then 68th up 2nd Avenue. At 68th Street, we realized we were being pushed out of town. Every time we'd try to turn down to go to the rally, the police would push us up away from the rally. It was perfectly clear that was what they were trying to do. It was crowded like a VE day. They brought out batons to push us and we chanted, 'Let us through!!! Let us through!!!' Every time it would calm down, the police would try with to stop us, yet most of us broke through anyway. I was just a citizen trying to gather with other citizens to have a conversation with the president. I was trying to communicate how I felt about this. I'm a citizen. I pay for this war. My friends are going to go get shot for it. I'd like to have a say so. I don't want to have my head patted or told what to think, being told my opinion doesn't count. Being told to pay attention to people who know what they are doing like Kenny Boy and Dick Cheney, the important people. We're going to war. Bush says, 'Trust me.' I've got a memory long enough to remember the last time a president said, 'Trust me, I have a secret plan.' Nixon's secret plan to get us out of Vietnam was to invade Cambodia. All Saturday, it was quite clear they were running the marchers out of the streets, like a defense used to run Tony Dorsett out of bounds. They were running people away from the rally." By the end of the day, this retired pastor had engaged in direct action, working with a crowd to push through a police line to get to the rally. And he was far from alone.

More than a half a million people marched through the streets of New York City that day, in coordination with protests in a staggering 800 cities and towns around the world; at least 750,000 mobilized in London, three million in Rome. All weekend long, the protests were the top news story. Many described the day as the largest day of

simultaneous peaceful protest in world history. Two days later, the *New York Times* cover story compared the weekend's mobilization with the Czechoslovakian Velvet Revolution of 1989 and the revolutions of 1848. "The fracturing of the Western alliance over Iraq and the huge antiwar demonstrations around the world this weekend are reminders that there may still be two superpowers on the planet: the United States and world public opinion. In his campaign to disarm Iraq, by war if necessary, President Bush appears to be eyeball to eyeball with a tenacious new adversary: millions of people who flooded the streets of New York and dozens of other world cities." Bush would later suggest the actions were like a giant "focus group" that he could safely ignore.

By the time then-Secretary of State Colin Powell made the case for war before the United Nations, he knew the information he was about to present was not entirely accurate. A heady cold winter wind blew through the streets of New York as Powell headed to his vaulted stage at the UN where he claimed, "Saddam Hussein is determined to get his hands on a nuclear bomb. He is so determined that he has made repeated covert attempts to acquire high-specification aluminum tubes from 11 different countries, even after inspections resumed" (quoted in Media Matters, 2005).

Michael Shenker, who was arrested both on February 15th and later on April 7th, in actions related to the war, reflected on his organizing and participation in these actions;

> And then George Bush says, "it's a focus group." And that's what you are, 'cause you are not going to disrupt anything. And the day of the march nothing is going to be open. It's unconscionable that we didn't confront Colin Powell at the UN. And we have a quarter million lives on our hands as a people 'cause we didn't make some kind of effort to confront the aggressor at the time. I'm not blaming the people. I'm blaming the hierarchical structures. On February 15th, a million people were on the streets. People were so highly motivated. If you want to manage a movement, you have to think a little bit. And maybe work with two hands. There are things that are the best that the movement has to offer. If we can get a million out on a Sunday, maybe we can get 75,000 out on Monday so maybe

> Colin Powell has to be brought in on a helicopter. So that a billion people do not have to watch, the streets of New York do not have to be clear as Colin Powell drives in to make one of the most egregious speeches in human history. I know the vibe at that point, a hundred thousand people could have come out at that point. The computers were clicking.

After Powell left the Bush administration at the end of the president's first term, his former Chief of Staff Lawrence Wilkerson claimed that much of Powell's UN speech was not accurate. "I participated in a hoax on the American people, the international community, and the United Nations Security Council," Wilkerson, who drafted and fact-checked the address, would later confess. "I recall vividly the Secretary of State walking into my office," he recalled. "He said: 'I wonder what will happen if we put half a million troops on the ground in Iraq and comb the country from one end to the other and don't find a single weapon of mass destruction?'" (quoted in Media Matters, 2005). Powell would later tell *Washington Post* reporter Bob Woodward (2004) that he had rejected Dick Cheney's chief of staff Scooter Libby's draft of his speech containg the weapons claims as "worse than ridiculous"; but although he later claimed he knew the information to be false, it still made it into the speech. Powell would describe the speech as the low point of his career. Libby would later be indicted for perjury and leaking confidential information. To this day, no weapons of mass destruction have been located in Iraq.

Within a week of F15, Turkey, praised by the administration as a model of democracy, voted to reject the American offer of billions in aid money for the use of their land for a northern front in the war. Later in the week, press secretary Ari Fleischer was laughed off the stage during a press briefing in which he denied that the US was trying to bribe foreign nations for UN votes.

"If Bush attacks Iraq, Protest 5:00 PM Times Square," said the pink and black Mobilize New York stickers designed by L.A. Kauffman. By mid-March, many activists were aware that day was quickly approaching. On March 20th, we received Kauffman's ominous email: "The war has begun; it's time to get out in the streets! However you choose to express your feelings on this sad and ominous day – through solemn vigils, loud marches, or nonviolent direct action – we urge you to take immediate and visible action." A special alert from Mobilize New York announced:

> Dear friends: The unthinkable is happening. Right now, the United States is bombing Iraq. Despite a brick wall of opposition, George W. Bush and his minions are pressing forward. This afternoon (Thursday), TAKE TO THE STREETS. Bring your rage, your grief, your love and respect for democracy and human life.

That dark afternoon, the skies poured with rain. The police restricted the movement of most activists on the ground, corralling and beating many. Yet, to a degree, they did the activists a favor, clogging up most the streets and creating highly dramatic scenes for the TV news cameras. Merely calling for a demo led the police to shut down Times Square for the activists and shoppers and commuters alike. News throughout the evening followed reports of demonstrations across the country. It detailed the rise of a new kind of patriotic anti-war activism, stories on Bush's failed diplomacy, the demo in Times Square, the Dixie Chicks against the war, those amazing San Franciscans, 1000 of whom got arrested for really shutting down the city's Financial District. Whether the Bushies wanted to hear it or not, a real debate about peace and justice was emerging.

In the days after the US invasion, a number of observers compared this time to that of Weimar Berlin. Jimmy Breslin quoted from Adolf Hitler's speech justifying the pre-emptive invasion of Poland in 1939. "As always, I attempted to bring about, by the

peaceful method of making proposals for revision, an alteration of this intolerable position," Hitler explained, but diplomatic measures failed. Certainly, these comparisons are the highest of drama. An executive producer of a CBS miniseries about Hitler's rise to power was fired for making a similar comparison. Yet the words remained eerily familiar and threatening. In an essay entitled, "Fear American Style," historian Corey Robin reminds us that the majority of the persecution that occurred during the McCarthy period was not carried out by the government, but took place in civil society through dismissals such as this.

Still, the question remained: What if we were living in an era not unlike Weimar Berlin? While the Bush administration did tend to issue color-coded terrorist alerts on days of anti-war actions, as well as jailing and wiretapping peace activists, few met the fate of the German students, dubbed the White Rose (undated), who were shot when they distributed a series of flyers in 1943 deploring Nazism at their school. And members of the German Red Army Faction were incarcerated and some killed in the late 1970s when they struggled against what they believed to be the signs of a new Nazism. For the RAF, armed struggle against forces it viewed as fascist could make up for the country's absence of armed resistance to the Nazis. The same question vexed the Weather Underground. In the midst of the basically disastrous Days of Rage in 1969, in which activists broke windows and provoked police through the streets of Chicago's affluent Gold Coast district, Weatherman leader Bernardine Dohrn rallied the faithful by declaring, "We are not going to be good Germans in a Fascist state," (quoted in Varon, 2004, p. 85). Yet few would argue that either the Weather Underground or the RAF's violent responses were successful.

Against this historical backdrop, many New Yorkers turned to a more generative response to the drive to war. In the days after 9/11, New York was filled with a creativity that many saw as the opposite of the drive to propel the war machine. At the monthly Critical Mass bike ride on the last Friday of every month, bicyclists in a collective moment rode by the police and fire stations to pay homage to those lost. Reverend Billy performed show after show after the attacks, presenting the stories those who were killed, who left messages of "I love you… I've loved the life we had together," on answering machines and in the cosmos. In the weeks after the attacks, the city's public commons, Union Square, "was like a Fellini movie there, artists of all kinds, painting, breakdancing, people arguing like in Hyde Park in London, a real culture-making center," Reverend Billy observed, imploring activists to continue the energy. Yet the "I kill you's" quickly replaced the "I love you's" as the Bush regime used the tragedy for its own ends.

Joyous Resistance

Once the war started, a spirit of activism and cultural resistance became perhaps the most important tool activists had. On March 22, just two days after the start of the bombing of Iraq, UFPJ had already scheduled yet another citywide rally for "Peace and Democracy." Once again, stickers for the event could be found around city. Yet unlike on February 15th, this rally had been awarded a permit. I showed up that Saturday expecting a bit of a funeral march. The war had started, the protests in Times Square made for film noir-ish sights of activists scuffling with police in the rain, as the ANSWER sound system, permitted by the police, droned on into the night. In the week before the rally, few in the normally festive RTS/Mobilize New York affinity group were feeling very

festive. It's hard to be ironic when people are really dying in the streets. We put out a call for a Funeral Bloc at the rally, asking people to come as pallbearers and hysterical mourners: "Bring your prayer beads and talismans. Wear Black. Grieve with Righteous Anger. And get ready to march for our ailing democracy... Reclaim the Streets Says: Mourn with Militance." The plan was to meet at the public library in midtown and join the rest of the march at Broadway and 40th Streets.

Strangely, that Saturday turned out to be joyous. Two nights before the rally, a call went out from a renegade RTSer calling for a "Baguette Bloc"[AS YOU CALL IT LATER] to protest the anti-French tide taking hold across the country, while thanking the French for their hard line against the war. What emerged was just what was called for: "A wildly militant march of folks celebrating everything French, wearing berets, blue and white striped shirts, smoking Gauloises, and pumping their baguette-clenched fists up and down in the air, shouting 'Tous ensemble! Tous ensemble! Oui! Oui! Oui!'" (a French anarchosyndicalist chant that means "All together! All together! Yes! Yes! Yes!"). Everyone was wearing berets and moustaches, eating brie, faking bad French accents, singing the Marseillaise, etc.

There was aprofound energy even after days and weeks of constant action. The day of the rally was bright and energetic. While I was not as ready to be silly, there was a certain ring to the "French kiss for peace" and "eat the props" chants of the affinity group as we munched on baguettes. The exuberance of the day was undeniable. The tranny brigade, chanted "We're queer! We're cute! Wwe're antiwar to boot!!!" Reverend Billy made peace with authentic protestors, while others screamed at the ANSWER folks: "March, march! Chant, chant! Rhetoric, rhetoric! Rant, rant!" The Glamericans wore

their feather boas and carried signs proclaiming: “War is Tacky, Darling” and “Peace is the New Black.” ACT UP members screamed “War is so heteronormative,” and so on and so on.

The action was striking. There are times when I do this work and feel so much like we are coming so much closer to imagining and actually even creating a far more caring world, that I am in awe. I just couldn’t believe how many people were out dressed to the nines, the Frenchies who spoke for all our "nausea," the Housing Works procession with their “Mmoney for aids, not for war” banners. The ACT UP call was clear: "Given the impact the war will have on innocent civilians and the outrageousness of the breach of international law, combined with the likelihood that human needs such as AIDS funding will be slashed, we urge you to demonstrate for an end to the war. Money for human need, not the war machine." Inevitably, the police tried to control the march. The result was a disaster, as countless activists were arrested for standing in a park. Still, all in all, a quarter of a million people marched against the war that Saturday; the rally was a great success. While we were not against the troops or “America haters,” it was necessary to tell the rest of the world that there were New Yorkers out there against the nonsense of war. And certainly, many of us felt that energy, despite the destruction happening in the world.

Yet the joyous resistance did not necessarily work for everyone involved with the ever-morphing RTS/Absurd Response Team. Kate Crane recalls March 22, 2003:

> The protest we did when the bombs had just started falling in Iraq, which was what that would have been March 2003, when we did the French Bread Bloc, where we carried the baguettes. When that happened we were going to do a Funeral Bloc. I felt like that was appropriate. That’s how I felt. That’s kind of how I’ve felt for the last two years. Our friends wanted to do a Baguette Bloc, with the pinstripes for peace. And it was fun, but I was like, I don’t feel it. I know

> that in this other part of the world I probably will never see, people are getting blown to bits and their houses are getting destroyed and their villages are being leveled and the government's lying to us. And I don't feel like being joyful. I feel like it's flippant. I feel like it's disrespectful to the devastation that's happening.

The Baguette Block bloc would be the last action of the Absurd Response Team.

Andrew Boyd, who helped organize Baguette Bloc also reflected on the use of carnival in the age of the war on terror:

> When you talk about the carnival thing, it was a great tactic. But then after 9/11 we couldn't use it. Partly our particular segment of the movement took a long time to recover and figure out with enough time passed that you could have a fierce joyous street carnival kind of thing, especially in this city. It was hard, it was really hard. And we, the movement, had become closely wedded to that energy and that tactic and that kind of display. It was hard to find a compelling, inviting, mass, organically shared sort of open architecture, easy to engage in kind of thing that wasn't based on play and carnival and celebratory kind of stuff when things were not celebratory.

Carnival notwithstanding, after a number of the large UFPJ anti-war actions, many were becoming weary of the large-scale actions organized by anti-war coalition groups. Michael Shenker, for one, was missing a space where individual input could have an influence:

> Well, I think that people are individuals, even when they join within collectives. Some kind of balance is needed between what kind of action creates the maximum potential within the collective and what are the needs of the individual to even join the collective. People want to be creative. They want to be a crusader. They want to go out on a journey of self-discovery. We're not getting paid. No one is being forced by anyone, except maybe by circumstances. People have different personal needs. Realization and utilization of individual potential. And then the joy of working collectively with other people so that that is recognized by other humans and esteemed by others and appreciated by the collective. And that in essence is non-hieratical. It doesn't mean that there are not structures in place. This is why I have problems with groups such as ANSWER and UFPJ. Seattle was an incredible inspiration for me. It appeared we were moving in a direction of popular brilliance of small collectives. And all of a sudden, when things get really serious… We have this war in Iraq, let's just turn things over to x, y, and z. You go to one of those marches, you feel like a cog. You feel like cattle. Then you get

> the recording at the end of the march, which says you've been photographed and counted.

At March 22 drew to an end, the police asked activists to disperse, informing everyone that they had been counted. They later clamped down and arrested a smaller group that remained after the action.

"We haven't stopped the war in Iraq," Starhawk reflects, yet she spoke for many when she noted, "at least I can look myself in the mirror and say I'm looking at a woman who has done her damnedest." For many, the stage the social and political actors were performing on was as much memory, and even history, as it was the streets around the world; the audience was as much the international community as it was the Bush administration. The waves of history are never easy to predict, and they should not be quickly demarcated. "The administration's deceit in justifying the war set the context for the political problems the White House began to face afterward," movement activist and scholar David Cartright (2005) explains. "The ways in which social movements influence policy are not always readily apparent. They often emerge in unanticipated form, or in future impacts" He continues, "While the antiwar movement did not succeed in preventing the invasion of Iraq, it helped to set the terms of the debate and exerted considerable influence on public opinion. The Bush administration rammed through its war policy, but it lost the more important struggle for hearts and minds (2005, p. 96).

Enter M27

In the weeks after the war started, activists continued on a small scale of direct action. As the political stage shifted, many worked to identify and work with the core themes that have made the direct-action global justice movement – with its emphasis on

diversity, flexibility, and deep democracy – so effective. In the first post-war days, San Francisco set the standard for the country, becoming a national epicenter for antiwar activism. The organizational force of the global justice movement's style of loosely coordinated affinity groups facilitated the goal of shutting down the city's Financial District. One small group after another swarmed in to block traffic with their bodies.

Not to be upstaged, New Yorkers from the direct action communities of ACT UP, and the more radical types within UFPJ, formed an ad hoc coalition to plan a massive nonviolent civil disobedience. The city was buzzing with action. On March 26th, a group of activists was arrested for chaining themselves across a downtown street. The seed for the action dates back to the days shortly before the beginning of the war. On March 16th, Rachel Corrie, a Jewish American peace activist, was killed by an Israeli soldier driving a Caterpiller bulldozer as she was helping defending Palestinian homes in the Gaza Strip. Ten days after the her death and some six days before the US attack on Iraq, a group of peace activists organized a civil disobedience action in the Diamond District of Manhattan. Under signs stating, "Witness to Israeli War Crimes" and a model of a Caterpillar bulldozer. This group covered themselves in fake blood and chained themselves down across 5th Avenue as they chanted, "Occupation is a crime, from Iraq to Palestine," After police cleared the scene, sixteen activists were arrested and charged with disorderly conduct. That night, stories from their action spread around the world (M26, Undated).

Decentralized, autonomous actions were scheduled to begin at 8 a.m. the following day, Thursday, March 27. The target of the action was the media/government collusion promoting the war for corporate interests. The goal was to stop business as

usual. The Rockefeller Center area was chosen as the target since many media companies and other corporations have offices there or nearby. The plan for the day was for a massive die-in on 5th Avenue at Rockefeller Center, with coordinated actions planned by affinity groups throughout the city. In between work, dwindling personal lives, and six months of antiwar activism, few within RTS/Mobilize New York would be able to participate in the day's direct action. The previous week, many of us had contemplated committing civil disobedience in Times Square, but the thundering rain, police presence, and lack of a coherent target made the proposition seem less appealing. Rockefeller Center, on the other hand – that was a tempting target. And the revival of the ACT UP tradition of the die-in was enticing.

I arrived that Thursday morning knowing I had only about thirty minutes to participate and then get the hell out of there. Yet I was certainly glad I made it.
The sidewalks from 5th Avenueto Rockefeller Center were completely clogged as activists milled about and chanted within police pens. 8 a.m. came and, went and the police, who had blocked the entrance to Rockefeller Center, stood around not knowing what to think. Suddenly, a horn went off and activists pushed over the police pen, lying in the streets. Crowds of protestors roared with approval as chaos literally took hold. Traffic stopped. The police struggled to reestablish control, trying to push back up the pens that had divided the protestors from the streets. Cameras, journalists, and police were everywhere. Always the media whore, I mugged for several of the cameras as I cheered the activists, hoping to see my photo in the next day's news, only to realize the paparazzi I was oozing for had no press credentials. They were police, recently legally released to photograph activists (Powell, 2002). Still, the energy of the action was electric. As bodies

filled the streets, the air filled with more and more chants of "No Blood for Oil." News stories of the theatrically dead bodies on the streets of New York appeared around the world.

On the less creative side of the antiwar spectrum, International ANSWER was planning yet another march in Washington for April 12. Their stickers promoting the action proclaimed, "STOP THE WAR, SURROUND THE WHITE HOUSE," in light blue, black, and white fonts with the ANSWER website listed below – not unlike those designed by L.A. Kauffman for Mobilize New York and UFPJ. Instead of involving itself in any of the exciting or fresh direct action that doesn't involve getting a police permit or lining up speakers to preach to the converted, ANSWER was doing its best to make protest routine, by doing the same thing week after week, pushing for its third march in DC in six months. There is riveting activism, and then there are the blogs that take everything creative in their path, ingest it, and rehash it in its own image.

Back in January, Mobilize New York had received a great deal of heat for promoting the ANSWER antiwar march in DC by referring its antiwar bulletin subscribers to ANSWER's own position statements: "For details on how you can attend the event, and background on the group sponsoring it, visit this humorous and helpful new site: AuthoritarianOpportunistsWhoCozyUpToGenocidalDictators-forPeace.org." The site included articles by ANSWER members about their support for dictators from Serbia to North Korea (Goldstein, 2002). Mobilize New York got countless calls from people thanking us for informing them about the group; others suggested we were "red baiting" for publicizing ANSWER's own position statements. Yet rather than engaging in sectarian conflicts, Mobilize New York looked to other groups, including the

Glamericans, which included members of the Circus Amok, which had a similar appreciation for the carnivalesque and playful rather than dour responses.

On the Right Track: Protesting War Profiteering at the Carlyle Group

In the week following M27, the amalgam of anti-war groups that organized the civil disobedience actions continued to meet. The coalition was bound by three central points: calls for additional massive nonviolent civil disobedience during the national day of action scheduled for April 7th; respect for decentralized, autonomous direct-action affinity groups on this day; and a corresponding legal protest to stop business in New York while people die in this war and money for the future is bombed away. On April 7th, the M27 coalition planned to target the Carlyle Group. If ever there was a time when I felt like I was on to the right on target, April 7th was it.

"War == $ == freedom," was one of the *1984*-style slogans for the day. The plan for the day was pretty simple. RTS was working with the Glamericans and and Circus Amok, a queer performance art/free circus, to create a bit a bit of an aesthetic intervention in the often dour antiwar protest scene. The Glamericansorganized a call for protest just the week before. At our one joint meeting, we all agreed that no one wanted to get arrested. Sadly, in order to even have a crappy apartment in New York, you have to get a real job with responsibilities and accountability these days. At first, we considered going as all things French, to protest the xenophobic "Freedom Fry" movement. But as we talked about protesting the war-profiteering Carlyle Group, we decided to go as mock billionaires.

The Carlyle investment fund was making billions buying cheap defense contractors and watching its stock prices climb as the war continued. The group was run by a group that included Bush 41, with his Scretary of State James Baker as their counsel, and former Tory leader John Major, Bush's main ally during the first Gulf War I. Some have even noted that the Bin Laden family was part of the group. The Carlyle Group had done quite nicely with their connections to the Bushes and the Saudi Royal Family, along with their investments in munitions and oil companies to the tune of $14 billion. The scenario was simple enough. The protestors would converge at the Carlyle Group offices on Madison Avenue between 58th and 59th as the emblem of the war-mongering profiteers. "War is about making money," American socialist John Reed said during WWI, and we were repeating the mantra.

The Glamericans did the heavy lifting, made the signs, wrote up the call, which was sent out everywhere, including to the New York Billionaires, who forwarded it to their lists. "Looks like RTS is also joining in as Billionaires," one of their email posts noted. The Glamericans call read:

> GLAM ALERT #1: BILLIONAIRES SELL-ABRATE THE WAR! MONDAY, APRIL 7: As part of the National Day of Direct Action we are amassing our weapons of mass distraction and coming out to help our president in getting his message across – MORE BLOOD FOR OIL! So we say – celebrate this paradigm of capitalism! Join Glamericans, Reclaim the Streets, Circus Amok, and other fabulous protesters in our mock pro-war stance. We're talking over the top and we need you to help make it over-the-topper…We called for activists to come in corporate drag – business suits or fancy dress. SLOGANS: "MORE LIVES TO THE GALLON" "WAR IS GOOD FOR YOUR PORTFOLIO" "STOCKS AND BOMBS!" "STOCK AND AWE!"

The demonstration was supposed to start at 8 a.m. Monday morning. I was running late, as usual. It took a while to find the top hat I'd used the last time I dressed as

a billionaire during the WEF protests the previous winter. Running down from the F train at 63rd, I'd lost the exact address of the protest. So I just followed the roars of the crowd and the riot cops I noticed running through the streets. The police lead me straight to the fabulous, decadent looking billionaires, dressed in gothic vampire makeup most appropriate for sucking the blood out of local economies. But the civil disobedience across the street blocking the entrances to the Carlyle building had just ended.

"We started off about 8:15. We all had some nice banners and …" Ben Mauers recalls, noting that things were going just fine. But the, "the police did a pre-emptive scoop of everybody on that street." Around 8:35, the police, who had surrounded the entire group, started squeezing in. "They're going to arrest us," a few people started saying. "Nah, I'll go talk to them," I responded. "Can I go to class? I have class at 9 and would love to leave," I told one cop. No comment. A few of us busily called in to work or to cancel appointments as we watched the police start arresting the protesters. I grabbed the one other RTSer nearby, we stayed close, mugged for the cameras, and got locked up. The group was never told to disperse. We were just arrested. When asked on what charges, one policeman said they'd figure something out later. Slowly, the police then began arresting random people standing on the sidewalk exercising their First Amendment right to protest the war in Iraq. "I got there at ten of eight with my donut and my coffee," recalls Tim Becker, who had just arrived when the arrests started. "And it was, like, no time at all. (Laughs). Like I wasn't even full. And I remember asking my arresting officer: 'Why are you arresting me?'" All in all, some 115 people were arrested.

The arrestees were taken down to 1 Police Plaza, where the activists commiserated and conspired. A short history of New York activism could be read in the

stickers throughout the cells; fading "Mayday is Jay Day" from the Million Marijuana March of 1999 and Spanish "Silencio = Muerte: ACT UP Wall Street" stickers were everyone. The cells even had a few old RTS stickers for the June 18th, 1999 protest, where the police immediately arrested the only people who had any idea of what the plan for the action would be.

Within the confines of the holding cell, the consensus was that the police were once again squeezing out dissent, making it all the more intimidating for us to even put in an appearance at a protest. Of all the protests we've done outside of corporate targets, I'd never seen the police move in so fast. It was most certainly on a call from higher up. And the police seemed fine with doing the war contractor's bidding. For the Carlyle Group, there was certainly little interest in a story getting out about the war profits Bush 41 is making – and which 43 stands to inherit. I was out of jail by 6 p.m., which wasn't bad. Others were in until after 11 p.m. Our charges were disorderly conduct and failing to disperse. Yet the police never gave us an order to disperse; I had barely arrived before I was arrested.

The news that night was dominated by more information about Saddam Hussein possibly being shot and there perhaps being weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. The Bush administration was supposedly fighting to plant a democracy in Iraq, while taxpayers were being arrested for speaking out in the streets of New York and activists were being shot with wooden dowels, "sting balls," and bean bags at the port of Oakland, where they were protesting shipping companies involved in the war effort. As New York University professor Steven Duncombe, who was also arrested that day recalls, "I've been going to legal protests in New York City for more than a decade and I've never seen

anything like this. They arrested us for peacefully standing on the sidewalk and with no warning. Is this what's happening to the Constitution in this country?"

The following day, New York activists shared their accounts of their experiences of being been arrested. Many had been interrogated about their political associations. Later in the week, the *New York Times* reported that the NYPD said they had ceased using the "demonstration debriefing form" (Rashbaum, 2003). This was not the experience of those inside the jail, who had been questioned for much of the day.

The Carlyle Group protest was another one of those occasions when activists ran into the limitations of the play model. We went there intending to play Billionaires in support of the Carlyle Group. Yet as Tim Becker points out: "They [the police] made you wear that makeup all afternoon long." I did not even have time to take off my Billionaire top hat before we were swept up. Yet this might signal that the group had actually hit a real pressure point. Could it be that the theater hit exactly the right target? Becker ponders whether this was the case:

> Yeah, I think that's what it was. I don't think the theater made any difference that day. I think that was just an extra point thing. ... But there is no real way of knowing. There is all conjecture. That's like seeing yourself in history. And how much are you really cooking up. But without talking with someone on the other side, we don't know....There was very little support, I felt at that time for the antiwar movement.

Andrew Boyd, who was at the planning meeting before the Carlyle action, explained that before 9/11, such approaches were great tactics. But afterward, they became weakened. Yet Mauer, despite experiencing his first arrest, was able to find some success in the actions that day. "The most important thing is that we are getting the message out to people," he says. "When we did the Carlyle protest, we had mainstream TV actually cover what the Carlyle Group is."

And this point does seem to be accurate; before the Carlyle action, knowledge of the Carlyle Group was limited to conspiracy literature (Briody[BRODY?], 2003). After the April 7th action – and similar protests in other cities – the Carlyle Group's role in the war has become a central point of contention for even the most mainstream critics of the Bush administration's policies. By 2006, the Carlyle Group's interest in the project was one of the factors that sunk the Dubai port deal. Most of A7's critique found its way into a recent story by *New York Times* columnist Maureen Dowd (2006): "The creepy John Grisham-style Washington firm called the Carlyle Group, suffused with Arab connections and money, and seeded with Saudi money (including bin Laden family until after 9/11), even gave some thought to investing in the ports." For Mauer, who worked on press releases and did media work to move the A7's counter-public critique into the public sphere of national debate, coverage of the Carlyle Group in the mainstream press represented a major success. "It's about getting the information out there. I think that the theatrical forms of protest are one of the last legitimate forms of journalism in many ways," he explained.

The wave of anti-war direct actions continued into the next month, with three days of actions at Federal Plaza from May 5-7 called "Operation Homeland Resistance." Some 83 New Yorkers from all walks of life – including teachers, mothers, and students – were arrested for civil disobedience actions. Chanting "No more profiling, no more war," they linked arms and blocked the entrance to the federal building before they were arrested and dragged away by police. As with M26, the activists involved faced harsh sentencing. Looking back on the wave of actions, Mauer suggested: "I just think that we

need to use the First Amendment as Americans before the Bush cabal eliminates it permanently."

"Spin, spin, spin," That's how the Mobilize New York alert read the week the first phase of the military campaign wound down:

> One clip of a toppled Saddam statue shown again and again does not a victory make. We appreciate the corporate media's attempt to package this as a tidy, glorious finish. (So considerate!) However, in the past three weeks, this war did a lot of murdering, maiming and orphaning. In addition to the happy Iraqis dancing on CNN, there are a great deal of thirsty, hungry, homeless Iraqis.

After the whole media circus around the statue being torn down, the Canadian website Global Search (2003) reported that it was a staged media event. "Does this scene look like the fall of the Berlin Wall?" read the caption of a Reuters photo of an empty square with a few US troops, reporters, and US-friendly Iraqis.

That wasn't the only fib. If recent months suggest anything, it was that we live in the era of the big lie. Beyond the fabricated story of soldier Jessica Lynch's rescue, perhaps the greatest deceit was the administration's condescending opinion that no one should really care if no weapons of mass destruction are found in Iraq – or even be bothered by Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz's confession that weapons of mass destruction were, "just a convenient excuse for war." Tax cuts don't equal deficits (equaling some $44 rrillion, according to former Bush Treasury Secretary Paul O'Neil before he got the booted). War equals democracy and peace, and so on. We live in the era of pastiche. In a 1939 essay entitled "Avant-Garde and Kitsch" cultural critical Clement Greenberg suggested that commerce intersects with cultural and political forces with the grace of a used car sales drive. "[A] great sales apparatus has nevertheless been created

for it, which brings pressure to bear on every member of the society. Traps are laid even in those areas, so to speak, that are the preserves of genuine culture,." he explains. "It is not enough, in a country like ours, to have an inclination towards the latter; one must have a true passion for it that surrounds and presses in on him from the moment he is old enough to look at the funny papers."

I have often wondered what drove us to reject the politics of authenticity and embrace a brash, bratty absurdity during the antiwar mobilizations, especially after the war started. "Camp and tragedy are antithesis," Susan Sontag (1964/2001) once explained. "The whole point of camp is to dethrone the serious. Camp is playful[ly?] anti-serious." Instead of frothing with anger, this engagement allows us to maintain, "a new more complex relation to the serious."

Meanwhile, in the Rest of the World…

Even as public space was being restricted and hyper-regulated, the global justice movement of movements continued to find traction around the world. In September 2003, WTO meetings were held in Cancun, Mexico. Through out the week of protests, activists succeeded in propelling their message, even as they struggled with the tragicomic dimensions of life at the summit, including the suicide of a South Korean farmer activist to protest unfair trade policies. "Well, it was very heavy when Kun Hai Lee killed himself," Starhawk recalls. "But when you are in actions like that, each day feels like a year. By the last day of the actions, it really felt like that had happened years before." In that time, the activists had already convened a memorial. "The day before, we had

marched up to the barricades and pulled the fences down, which was also fun, and then we sat down and had a memorial for him," she remembers.

Starhawk notes that a range of direct actions – including playful tactics such as a group that mooned all the delegates, and those who shut down the spaces outside the meetings – offered a lighter flip-side to the tragedy. And in many ways, the movement message prevailed. Here, the movement's playful energy helped advance the movement's policy goals. Starhawk reflects on the play element within the movement: "I think in some ways, it's just a way we can sustain doing it. I think that we are seeing that around things like the WTO and G8, that although they are still wielding enormous power and they are still winning, they don't have the kind of assumed legitimacy that they had before." After all, she concludes, "The WTO talks collapsed at Cancun."And the movement's message continued to find converts, even if the protesters themselves did not. Reviewing Joseph Stiglitz's new book on the persistence of global poverty despite global trade, Robert Reiche (2006) concurred with Starhawk's sentiment. He notes that while over two billion people live on the equivalent of less than a dollar per day, the trade talks that were purportedly intended to alleviate these conditions in Doha, Qatar have made few concrete advances.

The success in Cancun was not repeated during the protests at the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) meetings in Miami later that fall. To the labor, AIDS, and global justice activists that converged to oppose the meetings, the FTAA appeared to be another trade deal that could only weaken the hand of labor, hurt the environment, and reduce public services including health care and education, while curtailing the rights of

indigenous people across the Americas. In response to their grievances, the thousands of activists who gathered in Miami were met with a phalanx of some 2,500 riot cops from 40 law enforcement agencies, coordinated by the Department of Homeland Security. Protesters were doused with pepper spray, shot with rubber bullets, hit with batons, and shocked with electric tasers and shields. "They can beat the rap, but they can't beat the ride," a Miami police officer explained.

For activist Beka Economopolis (2003), who was at the protest with UFPJ, the police response "sums up the emergent strategy in this country for dealing with dissent. It involves a pattern of high-profile clashes in the streets, bogus arrests, trumped up charges, excessive bails, and subsequent civil suits and dismissals in courts." The implication was simple: activists would be arrested and removed from the streets regardless of whether they were innocent or not. Economopolis was certain that the illegal arrests and bogus charges could be easily beaten. She was not, however, convinced that these police practices did not discourage others from participating. "This chilling effect remains: civil liberties are trampled, lives are disrupted, and a deterrent is delivered," she writes. This aggressive policing approach has since come to be known as the Miami Model of protest control. The Miami episode cast an ominous shadow over the protests planned to coincide with the Democratic and Republican national conventions the following summer.

Limits and Crackdowns

If the story of the Carlyle action and the Miami FTAA talks suggest anything, they highlight the point that activists [reached? Learned?] limits of carnival in the

post 9/11 organizing environment. As William Etundi noted, after the terrorist attacks he could not have spent so little time in jail as he did after his Buy Nothing Day action in Fall 2000: “Post 9/11, it would have been a different situation,” he explained, looking back with satisfaction on his satisfied prank. Urania Mylonas concurred: “9/11 is a weakness.”

This realization dawned on activists almost immediately after the attacks. The City of New York almost immediately took a less tolerant approach. The stakes seemed to have shifted. An example at Union Square is illustrative. Well over a year after the attacks, a student from New York’s School of Visual Arts posted 38 pizza boxes with the word “FEAR” throughout the Union Square subway station. The *Daily News* reported the action was “unnerving” for “straphangers dealing with the threat of a transit strike and the ever-present fears of terrorism. The station was shut for five hours (Donohue, 2002). The *Daily News* titled its report, “'FEAR' boxes
just an art attack.”

While the *Daily News* reaction, which compared the gesture with an assault, was not unexpected, one would not have expected ironic urban hipsters and bloggers to mimic this reaction. Critics reflected the social anxieties of a city with little tolerance for critical debate or aesthetic intervention. Shortly after the incident, the webzine Gawker (2002) noted:

> Some enterprising person taped 38 black cardboard boxes with the word "fear" emblazoned across them to various parts of the Union Square subway station yesterday, shutting it down for 5 to 6 hours while police gingerly disassembled them with bomb-squad equipment. Thank you, Mr. considerate guerilla art-installation person for forcing a few hundred thousand people to completely reroute their daily commute, making them late for meetings, late for work, and late to pick up their crying kids. It was also very nice of you to use NYC police

> resources and tax money. We were all so moved by your display, and that made it totally worth it.

The writer went on to condemn those at the scene for not calling for police to arrest the artist. "Thanks also to the hundred or so people that had to have seen the person in question taping the boxes to various parts of the subway station and felt completely unmotivated to report it. Kudos all around!" In New York City, it was strange to watch the alignment of cultural workers and the police department in their call for silencing dissenting voices, especially those speaking about the role of fear in the era of terror.

This lack of tolerance for expression was also evident in approaches toward dissent. By 2003, the NYPD had secured permission from a federal court to water down protections for civil liberties for activists. Civil liberties lawyer Norman Siegel spoke with *New York Times* reporter Jim Dwyer and Amy Goodman on her show, *Democracy Now*, on December 27th, 2005 (Democracy Now, 2005). Their dialogue situates this erosion in civil liberties:

> JIM DWYER: One of the things that happened when the Police Department went into the… when the city went in after 9/11 and sought different kinds of guidelines about the use of undercover officers was that it asked specifically that the distinction between undercover officers and plainclothes officers be eliminated from the guidelines that were put on them, and the court granted that request. It may still be that the function is, as Commissioner Browne says, entirely different, but that -- not to get too semantical on anyone.
>
> AMY GOODMAN: On this issue of Handschu, for people who are not familiar with this agreement, I'd like to bring in Norman Siegel, long-time civil rights attorney. Explain what the Handschu Agreement is in New York.
>
> NORMAN SIEGEL: First, it's Barbara Handschu and other political activists in the early 1970s, went to court on the premise that they were engaged in First Amendment-protected activity and that the police were engaged in surveillance, spying on them, in violation of the First Amendment. In 1985, an agreement was

> entered into with the City of New York and the Police Department that, in effect, was a traditional check and balance on the Police Department, so with regard to video cameras at First Amendment activity, the police could turn on the video cameras when illegal activity was taking place or, in fact, someone was threatening or that there was imminent activity that was going to lead to illegal activity. There were also provisions in there with regard to when an undercover could engage in undercover, and it was basically a check.
>
> There was a three-person commission that was set up that was supposedly independent of the Police Department that would review complaints by political activists with regard to surveillance, and they would put out an annual report. And, as Mr. Browne has stated, after 9/11, the Police Department and the City of New York went into the federal court and were able to lower the standard, and one of the concerns that I and other people in this civil rights community have is that we don't think the traditional check, the accountability that we need in a democracy, over our law enforcement people is present. And with the lowering of the standard, I believe that this activity has increased and will increase in the months and years to come.

In the years the Handschu Agreement was in place, 1985-2003, great acts of civil disobedience took place and social movements thrived in New York City. ACT UP/New York thrived. The global justice movement found traction. Here, the politics of play found its expression. With the erosion of Handshu, this freedom vastly contracted. Mark Harrington and others involved during ACT UP's peak years noted in interviews that they could never have done what they did to push for effective AIDS policies without such a space for protest and direct action. While there had been a push to criminalize dissent before 9/11, the Patriot Act era and the erosion of Handschu further limited this possibility.

There is no better example of this new lack of tolerance for dissent than the sentencing for those involved in M26 civil disobedience to protest Rachel Corrie's death in 2004. This action included many old ACT UPers. Shortly after the March 26th direct action, New York District Attorney Robert Morgenthau's office asked for jail time for the eight activists with "previous contacts with the criminal justice system." Most of these

"previous contacts" cited by the DA's office included cases that had been dismissed or sealed; many included previous ACT UP cases from two years prior. The call for the use of dismissed charges by Morgenthau's office was unprecedented. Many suggested the DA was seeking to look tough before the Republican National Convention (RNC). Others suggested Morgenthau had a vendetta against a number of the activists dating back to their days with ACT UP. That group's approach to non-violent civil disobedience, which helped serve as a catalyst for the global peace and justice movement, was just the type of threat that Mayor Bloomberg and Bush sought to silence. Twelve of the 16 activists received one-year discharges, which included community service and court fees. The final four, Steve Quester, Kate Barnhart, Eustacia Smith, and Lysander Puccio, were the activists whose previous records were unsealed; they faced jail sentences (M26, undated). The *New York Times* editorialized that the action of the district attorney's office would set the tone for the actions expected during the RNC the following August (Purnick, 2004).

In order to set the terms for the RNC protests, civil rights attorneys from the Center for Constitutional Rights (CCR), a nonprofit legal organization based in New York, filed a multi-plaintiff federal lawsuit on behalf of protesters who were illegally arrested during the Carlyle Group antiwar rally on April 7. The suit charged that the NYPD unlawfully arrested peaceful protesters and detained them for excessively long periods of time at One Police Plaza.

"The Carlyle arrests are part of a pattern of NYPD harassment in which lawful demonstrators are arrested and jailed with the short-term goal of clearing them off the streets and the long-term goal of deterring them and other New Yorkers

from participating in future demonstrations," said CCR's Nancy Chang. Plaintiffs and lawyers hoped this lawsuit would help to break the pattern of intimidation as activists prepared to protest the RNC.

All the charges against all the plaintiffs involved in the Carlyle case were dismissed. One plaintiff, Sarah Kunstler, was held for 12 hours and charged with two counts of disorderly conduct. "It was frightening to learn how easy it is to be arrested without warning and hauled away for peacefully exercising your free speech rights," she said. Aside from unspecified monetary compensation, lawyers sought a declaration from the court that the NYPD's actions on April 7 were retaliatory and unconstitutional. Likewise, the following year, some 90 percent of the charges against RNC activists were dropped once the Republicans left town, as police were often unable to substantiate their claims. In many cases, the police were found to have lied, omitted information, and misrepresented evidence (Dwyer, 2005). Currently, the New York District Attorney's office is being investigated for supporting numerous unsubstantiated claims against US citizens.

Patriots Against the Patriot Act

"WE ARE SO FUCKED!" was RTS' slogan in the days after 9/11; one of the group's countless bratty, "better to laugh than cry" screams as it held on for dear life as the 9/11 attacks were played as justification for more killing. RTS had used absurd responses to the situation as long as it could. After a while, we started to wonder, "Where do we go after irony ceases to be effective?"

By fall 2003, the RTS/Absurd Response affinity group faced the question of what was the most effective activist responses to the use and abuse of the narratives of the War

on Terror. The group initially devised an "absurd response to an absurd war," where activists deployed fresh, creative approaches to protest, while outlining the limits of the "straight" activist project by deconstructing the reified chants and outmoded protest structures. But as the "absurd" war turned into a very real war with real casualties, this response felt increasingly less savvy and inspiring. Facing the limits of camp, the affinity group struggled to actively fight the ideological uses of the Patriot Act by actively supporting the campaigns for Patriot Act Free Zones taking place all over the country. In the months before the RNC, the predominant cultural narratives of the War on Terror were used to justify curtailed civil liberties for the duration of what the vice president suggests could be a 50-year conflict. Irony recedes in relevance when political situations become too dire, when there is an urgent need to engage in dialogue with the political mainstream, and new approaches become necessary. The RTS/Absurd Response group responded to this imperative throughout the fall of 2003.

The Patriot Free Zone Campaign

"Patriots Against the Patriot Act," read the banner held by RTS members of as we stood in front of City Hall dressed in faux 1776-era garb on the morning of October 20, 2003. Others wore pins stating, "The Patriot Act Is Sooo 1984." We were surrounded by City Council members, a Manhattan congressman, members of the ACLU Bill of Rights Defense Committee, a few Green Party members, a handful of system-abiding liberals, and direct-action anarchist types better acquainted with the streets than the legislative corridors. RTS had joined the campaign to push the anti-Patriot Act ordinance, Resolution 909, , through the City Council. Harlem Councilman and Deputy Majority Leader Bill Perkins, who had sponsored previous hearings on police abuses related to the

February 15, 2003 antiwar march, introduced this resolution calling for the city to affirm civil liberties while opposing the Patriot Act. Cities from Baltimore to Chicago to Philadelphia had already passed similar resolutions.

How did this radical direct action group find itself involved with such a bourgeois, reformist campaign? RTS' support for Resolution 909 can be attributed to a number of elements of the group's history. First, the group was rooted in a global justice movement that recognizes the value of a diversity of tactics, depending on the situation, from nonviolent civil disobedience to incremental reform. In addition, group members were rooted in a long history of struggles for access to public space and debate. More to the point, members of RTS have endured countless illegal arrests over free speech issues. Throughout the mobilization against the US invasion of Iraq, activists including RTS members were swept off the streets and into the jails for protesting. Even before 9/11, the powers-that-be sought to delegitimize activist groups such as Earth First! and RTS as terrorists. (Recall Louis Freeh's testimony to the Senate that RTS members were terrorists.) This process of delegitimization became a great deal easier after 9/11. It felt like the whole movement was directly endangered and its unique cultural expression was facing state-mandated extinction.

For the Bushies, the best way to protect the constitution was to curtail it and bully those who sought to use it. In the months after the October 2001 passage of the Patriot Act, the law was used to prosecute long-standing targets of the right. By 2003, it was time to fight back. With the RNC coming to New York the following year, RTS realized that the work we did now would pay off during the protests surrounding the convention. Players from countless perspectives began joining the effort to turn New York into a

Patriot Act Free Zone. But there was no guarantee of success – the campaign needed a little push. That's where RTS came in; we hoped to bring a bit of sartorial splash to the effort.

The group started with a poster campaign calling on citizens from all walks of life to create Patriot Act Free Zones where difference was honored and profiling was rejected. These posters were hung up on the streets, in bars, in people's homes –everywhere. The group distributed a tool kit including the poster and a worksheet, "Ten Ways to Create a Patriot Act Free Zone in Your Own Community." The worksheet included simple steps along the lines of the old Syracuse Cultural Workers' "How to Create a Community" campaign. The first suggested step was to support Resolution 909. Another addressed the longstanding use of fear as a justification for control: "Remind yourself, freedom is about acts of freedom, not authority. Remember, the best way to defend freedom is with more freedom. The best way to protect democracy is with more democracy."

The group then organized a number of community events including a "Rant Off For A Patriot Act Free Zone" Resolution 909 fundraiser, where members of New York City's Bill of Rights Defense Committee mingled with Lower East Side wing-nuts to revel in the First Amendment. "To Live is to Rant, To Be Human is to Rant!" The guidelines were simple: one dollar per minute, three minutes per rant; those requiring more time would need the sponsorship of a financial backer. Between rants, we pointed out that Council Resolution 909 was a way to realize a Patriot Act-free autonomous zone. Throughout the night, we also ran a fundraiser for the RNC actions, shredding copies of the Constitution at $5 a pop with our battery-powered shredder.

At summer's end, RTS began working with the 74th Unwelcoming Committee, a group of recent New York University graduates, to hold a classic RTS street party to reclaim New York City as a Patriot Act Free Zone. Event propaganda stated: "With the RNC planning its latest convention in September of 2004 to coincide with the 9/11 anniversary, the RNC plans to turn a tragedy into their policy political convention." The party's theme was a citywide celebration of resistance to the Patriot Act and the "tyrants who brought us this Orwellian nightmare." The "unwelcoming party" for the RNC aimed to show that resistance to the Patriot Act was spreading. Our proposed alternative was to, "refuse to be cowed into submission and scared into silence! To create alternatives to the systems we oppose…"

On September 5, 2003, revelers appeared at Union Square. The crowd moved from the street to the subway, skipping out of Manhattan on the L-train, opening up carnival space. The party careened into Brooklyn and back out of the bowels of the city into the street of Williamsburg. We took over the corner of Bedford and North 7th Street, dancing, congesting the night with bodies in motion. The police just stood and watched as grooving people turned an ordinary Friday night into a night of resistance. The party embodied the kind of civil liberties-protected Patriot Act Free Zone we had hoped for. It also expanded our Patriot Act-fighting network.

Unlike Hakim Bey's *Temporary Autonomous Zones* which inspired RTS actions, the point of supporting Resolution 909 was to build something lasting – a city resolution. With the passage of the bill, we hoped to give civil liberties a bounce going into the election year. While there are certainly limits to this legislative model, it did allow for the direct action crowd and civil libertarians to find common ground and communicate.

Through our preliminary efforts, we had gathered a consensus for action, and people walked away with concrete information about how to fight the Patriot Act.

As summer turned to fall, Resolution 909 gained considerable momentum. Support from the City Council increased and hearings were scheduled. The hearings presented a telling challenge for RTS. When Bush was elected, activists had employed irony with the pseudo-paramilitary Students for an Undemocratic Society (SUDS). When Bush escalated towards war, the group morphed into Absurd Response To An Absurd War, playing with irony in the manner of the Billionaires concept. With both, we'd deconstructed traditional protest models, reaching the limits of play and camp. By the time Resolution 909 came along, the group was faced with the painful question: "What do you do after post-modernism? You can't live on irony alone; there is too little to show for it." The question RTS faced was a simple one: Why does work or not work? RTS member Larry Bogard suggests:

> Carnival is supposed to be a liberatory action, which means that we shouldn't be chained to it. It should be used when it best suits the movement or affinity group. In the same way, the use of irony is situationally determined. Depending on the context, irony can be either a post-hip cop-out or a challenging, effective way of engaging publics. Irony always includes the risk of a misfire in communication.

L.A. Kauffman (2004), an occasional RTS participant and one of the leading conceptual architects of the Absurd Response, suggested that it is easy for activists to fall into a rut in which they repeat the same approaches over and over, confusing a tactic with a strategy. The Absurd Response was a fun tactic for speaking to other activists. For speaking to City Council members though, it was not the most useful approach. So the group re-embraced a canonical narrative of "straight" protest.

RTS organizer Steve Duncombe suggests that in terms of pure politics, for many activists Bush and the Patriot Act appear so absurd that parody comes perilously close to reality. With Bush in office, ignorance really is strength. In the same vein, the Republicans appear so vengeful, angry, and frenzied over 9/11 and the war that many of them would likely agree with RTS' most outrageous, absurd responses: "All War all the Time," "Leave no Billionaire Behind," etc. Further, while the Absurd Response was a great way make politics fun, the political terrain was shifting. Irony works best as an inside joke to mobilize and appeal to a subculture. Yet Bush had polarized so many issues that there was now a realistic chance to reach a majority of people who think of themselves as thoughtfully ironic (and even some non-ironic) patriotic citizens. In the end, irony is good for critique, but is limited in its ability to demonstrate what kind of world we really want to create. If we are going to suggest that another world is possible, we'd better be able to suggest that this world is more than simply ridiculous.

In an essay entitled *Mass Action Since Seattle: Seven Ways to Make Our Protests More Powerful*, George Lakey (2002) suggests that actors heighten the contrast between protestors and police behavior. While sophisticated theater audiences might prefer complexity, shades of gray are harder to pull off in the street. "Our power lies in our choices," he writes. "We can choose to design our confrontations using appropriate symbolism so that the part of the public we most want to influence will see us as the people standing for justice." With this in mind, RTS members made a decision. We would play it straight, dressed like Colonial American heroes, carrying a banner reading "Patriots Against the Patriot Act" at the rally before the public hearings.

The October 20hearings for Resolution 909 offered a glimpse of the politics of

fear supporting the Patriot Act. Peter Vallone, Jr., the son of the former council speaker from Queens who was ousted due to term limits, was the only council member opposing the measure at the hearing. Vallone's opinion was that that New York City had not been attacked again after 9/11 because the Patriot Act was in place. For him, security from an unknown enemy was justification in and of itself. Fear propelled a zero-sum quest for security over freedom. At one point in the hearings, Donna Lieberman of the New York Civil Liberties Union explained that Jose Padilla, a Puerto Rican, had been detained in the US and held without access to counsel as an "enemy combatant." Vallone said he was comfortable with holding aliens without access to lawyers. Lower East Side councilwoman Margarita Lopez asked Vallone if he knew that Padilla was from Puerto Rico, and therefore a US citizen. Vallone did not, and backed down.

September 11 had created yet another enemy "other" to place in a long cavalcade of villains, from witches to communists to immigrants, demonized throughout US history. After 9/11, these "us and them" dynamics propelled a new wave of racial profiling as even US citizens were denied access to the US court system because they "looked like terrorists." Lieberman situated the Patriot Act's detentions historically: "I[I]f you read the history of these outrages, there is always a counter-narrative in which wiser voices respond to the hysteria," Lieberman testified. "To those who claim the times are so perilous and the risk of harm so great that we cannot tolerate democratic principles of freedom, there are other voices that say: we do not accept the argument that in order to preserve democracy, we must suspend individual freedoms."

Walking out of the hearings, RTS members knew where 909 stood on the legislative food chain and moved to act. In the weeks before the hearings, it had become

apparent that the resolution's fate rested in the hands of Council Speaker Gifford Miller, who could allow the measure to die in committee without ever letting the full council vote on it. After the hearings, the goal was to convince the speaker that civil liberties and security are not a zero-sum game, but rather that neither can exist without the other. In the following weeks, coalition members made use of the Mobilize New York alerts email list, wrote letters, and begged friends to beg the speaker to "Pretty Please Support City Council Resolution 909." Phone calls and emails to the speaker's office went unreturned. When activists finally reached his office, his staff offered political doublespeak. Miller supported both civil liberties and security, we were told.

RTS members sent out hundreds of letters stating, "There are 29 supporters out of 50 on the City Council who support the defense of our civil liberties. Please help New York preserve constitutional freedoms and civil liberties for our diverse communities by passing anti-Patriot Act Resolution 909." We collected some 500 signatures on postcards at the Critical Mass Halloween party alone. We sent cards to Miller all fall. Some days, the speaker's office took calls, other times they put calls through to message machines already filled to their limit. Miller's office knew something was in play. On December 2, in the midst of a snowstorm, coalition members gathered at City Hall for a "Rally to Defend the Bill of Rights and Pass Resolution 909"organized by the Bill of Rights Defense Committee. Once again, the patriots arrived, but this time their numbers were dwarfed by the large outpouring of New Yorkers from all walks of life that had been offended by the political misuse of 9/11. Speaker Miller even made a surprise appearance in which, using political doublespeak, he thanked everyone for coming, spoke out against

the Patriot Act, but somehow avoided mentioning his support for the resolution. Again, we inundated his office with calls.

By late December, some 33 of the council's 50 members had signed on to support 909. Throughout the final weeks of 2003, rumors whirled through the Internet that the City Council would vote on the resolution by the end of the session during the third week of December. Yet, for many, a tenuous feeling remained. December 15th, the date the resolution was scheduled to move, came and went. Nothing. Word from the council was that they wanted to hold off the bill's passage until news of the capture of Saddam Hussein died down, because they thought passing it concurrently would send the wrong message. But would the right message at the time of his capture be to oppose the Bill of Rights? Miller co-signed a letter with Perkins committing to bring Resolution 909 to vote at the City Council's first business session in 2004. And finally, Miller responded to the thousands of emails imploring his support: "Res. 909-A makes clear that the government's anti-terrorism initiatives can and must be undertaken in a manner that respects basic constitutional rights and liberties. We strongly agree with this proposition and we look forward to adopting the resolution with the support of an overwhelming majority of the City Council Members."

It would be almost two months before the resolution (renamed Resolution 60 with the new year) was scheduled for a vote. By that time, even Los Angeles had passed its own anti-Patriot Act resolution. Feeling the heat of the burgeoning Bill of Right's defense movement, the President defended the Patriot Act in his State of the Union Address. Yet the City Council moved forward. On February 4, a vast majority of the council passed Resolution 60 calling for government to uphold civil liberties. With the resolutions's

passage, New York became the 250th legislative body to pass such a measure, creating a patchwork of Patriot Act-free zones across the US.

Udi Ofer and Glenn C. Devitt of the New York City Bill of Rights Defense Campaign noted: “Given that the Council convened to deliberate on the resolution only a few blocks from Ground Zero, it was hard not to appreciate the historical significance of the vote. It's largely in the name of the New Yorkers who perished on 9/11 that the federal government continues to push through anti-terrorism policies which needlessly sacrifice our most fundamental rights and freedoms.” With the passage of Resolution 60, the city government caught up with the citizens who were already saying no more immigrant profiling and illegal detentions, no more harassing library clerks for the records of citizens, no more stifling free speech. Not in our name.

Riding home one night through the snow after one of our bi-weekly drunken RTS “meetings” and “planning sessions” in the midst of the campaign, a friend explained that even if the world she lived in was going completely to hell on a macro level, she still had to do something at home. Taking care of her own community was the only thing she could see doing. Few answers to bigger questions emerged. Irony and play would still be necessary and fun parts of the strategy to be used when they seemed tactically appropriate, and when coordinated with extensive research and political savvy. For now, street aesthetics had successfully complemented a legislative campaign to make one city and the US as a whole a little more free.

On February 4th, I sent out a final email congratulating everyone involved: “[T]hanks for all your amazing work, thanks to everyone who sent a email, signed a card,

showed at a rally, a street party, or a rant off.... thanks to all of you, New York City just became a Patriot Act Free Zone."

Leading Up to the RNC

"Let the Fun Out" was to be the theme for the upcoming RNC actions. Throughout the build up to the RNC convergence in New York City, activists sought to combine elements of invisible art, political performance, and humor as a community-organizing strategies. After all, play and performance had gone over tremendously well at the Bush inauguration protests.

"Tell us what to think!" the protestor screamed to a response of "Obey" during the protests against the Bush inauguration in 2001. Whenever this group of activists encountered Bush supporters, they screamed it again. "Tell us what to think – Obey!" Along the road, the chant disarmed most opposition as the crowd screamed about an inauguration of a president the majority of Americans had not voted for. (Grote, 2002). "Against the assault of laughter, nothing stands," Mark Twain once wrote (quoted in Sanders, 1995). Activists hoped the same playful force would be effective when Bush came to New York.

One of the most famous anti-Bush pranks took place in February 2004. It was 5 p.m., outside a political fundraiser in New York. "Four More Wars!!! Four More Wars!!!" a the "Billionaires for Bush chanted in anticipation of Bush's advisor Karl Rove's appearance on February 18th. As affluent supporters walked in, the "Billionaire" chanted, waved placards, and heckled opposing protest groups. "Buy Your Own President," they screamed at an environmental group deploying a more conventional

approach. Police scratched their heads, not knowing if the Billionaires were for or against the administration. At one point, a black car pulled up. “There is Karl Rove,” journalists screamed, spotting the evening’s speaker. Reporters, cameramen, and spectators swarmed the man. The police push them back, lifted the velvet rope to let him enter. But the would-be Rove walked over to the protestors and started shaking hands. The *New York Times* noted, “finally, again, this was seen as a joke. It was not Mr. Rove, but an actor playing the part” (Slackman and Moynihan, 2004). Yet within the satire, a potent critique about the influence of money on the democratic process found national coverage.

Throughout the months before the RNC came to town, activists throughout New York sought to bring a play element to the struggles against the president and his re-election coronation. One group that took the lead in this process was the League of Pissed Off Voters, a group of youth activists, mostly of color, who’d won [local?] elections from Oakland to Boston. In order to create a world with more democracy and less Bush, they organized a campaign that built on Boyd and Duncombe’s “put the party back in party” strategy.

Adrienne Maree Brown (2004, p. 20), an organizer with the League, looks to the possibilities of pleasure and fun as an organizing principle. Like many, her approach finds its roots in her experience in the harm reduction movement. “[I]t’s about breaking down barriers to pleasure. So I’m a pleasure activist.” For Brown, “It’s not really about politics at all. It’s about my life.” The group aimed to cultivate a sense of celebration, joy, and connection in order to bring new people, especially young voters, into the process. To do this, the group heeded Brecht’s advice to borrow from the lessons of a soccer game. In their call to arms, *How to Get Stupid White Men Out of Office*, they looked to

Puerto Rico, where elections are treated like the World Cup. The group aimed to create an emotional, inclusive party, which engages one voter at a time. As Jim Hightower (1999) explained: "Our events should feed the soul as well as the brain, and we should laugh and celebrate even as we speak the truth. As an old Yugoslavian proverb puts it: 'You can fight the gods and still have fun.'"

The core understanding is that if organizing, elections, and campaigns are about anything, they are about relationship building. Thus, the League of Pissed-Off Voters built on studies suggesting that the best way to boost voter turnout was peer-to-peer organizing. One way they did this was through connecting with "party as protest" groups such as the RTS New York offshoot Complacent, a culture jamming organization that throws very large parties and events. The League's July 2004 fundraiser with Complacent linked just this sort of cultural play with community building. A July 29 dispatch from Complacent reflected:

> Between the hookah pipes and the fire spinners—between the heat on the dance floor and the rock stars in the loading docks—between the Siccarus ride and the political poetry—between the nudists and the roving provocateurs—between way before dusk through far beyond dawn—something immense and incredible and indescribable manifested on the broken banks of Brooklyn.

The point is really to create a prefigurative politics encompassing interaction, care, creativity, joy, and generativity. As Brown (2004, p. 20) explained: "In fact, elections are important only inasmuch as they determine how we live our lives. Really, I just want folks to get along so we can all survive and, dare I say, enjoy this whole experience."

"That was definitely a good moment," Etundi said about the League fundraiser when I interviewed him. He continued:

> It took a lot for us to get to that moment. And it was a lot of background and a lot of networking to really learn how to fundraise huge amounts of funds that were going to be exclusively driven into community-based organizing. That was a very specific decision we made. It was the League of Pissed off Voters and NYC Summer, which was training young [activists] to work within local organizing groups and the I AM New York City Project. All three projects are based on things that were going on in the street, campaign work.

The July 29th party, like many of Etundi's Complacent events, included both aesthetic components, music, and dancing, as well as a distinct political element, the inspiration of which contributed to the pleasure element of the event. Many of these events are targeted by police, who crack down on the gatherings of activists and party people, politicos and artists, many of whom used to meet at Charas and crave a public meeting place. For many, Complacent events have an implicit political point as the group's supporters fight just to have these spaces; fighting the dance police becomes political. Here, the defense of pleasure against a new Comstockery contributes to the substance of the parties. Etundi explains:

> To say its explicitly political would be a stretch, but there is a very specific idea behind hosting pure parties that are fun. In New York City we are starving for any kind of common space, or community space. We have no real space to come together. We have limited green space. We have the parks; the community centers, they keep getting torn down. We barely have any non-Starbucks coffee shops to hang out at. So [we need to hold these parties] in order to have those spaces to have the random conversations that are really crucial to building any kind of community, any kind of movement.

Etundi works hard to cultivate a feeling of civil society. "In order to have all that stuff happen, the best space we have for that are these random roving parties in alternative loft spaces, warehouses, theaters, whatever we can find that we can use," he explains, referring to the subversive play elements of his groups coming together to create their

own mini public commons. “And they are not sanctioned or all the way legal all the time.”

Play is inevitably about reveling in the tensions and exhilarations of outsider status. But it’s also about combating alienation. “As far as creating energy, creating interest, and also raising money at the same time, and creating a space where you bump into someone you haven’t seen for a while,” Etundi elaborates. “They bump into you, have a conversation. It’s not a meeting. We’re not intending to talk about anything, but sometimes the most important ideas, connections, thoughts come out of that. Those spontaneous connections are crucial to any community.” Yet just having such simple connections in New York City is a challenge. “Most other communities have that in other ways,” Etundi notes. “New York City is challenged because our space is so commodified because it’s so valuable.” Here, the politics of play is also a struggle to cultivate civil society in an age when cities are considered growth machines constantly hungering for profit, rather than spaces which support conviviality and civil society. A lot of those spaces are being constantly shut down.

“Part of the politics of play is maybe just having good parties and building that sense of community on the inside as well,” L.J. Wood, from New York’s Direct Action Network, points out. “And hopefully not falling into a total subcultural thing where people cannot get involved.” For Wood, this pleasure element is about getting people involved. “I think people are being more open about saying regular demos are really boring. Let’s try to make this more fun for ourselves and then it will be more likely to get others involved in the movement,” she explains. “If recruitment is part of the movement,” Wood concludes. “The playful stuff would help, right?”

Thus, for many activists, the challenge was to rethink ways to have play compliment campaigns before the tactic becomes either subcultural or another part of the routine.

The Convergence Approaches

Jason Grote speaks eloquently to the competing strategies of play, the-cat-and mouse game that had started to accompany political conventions and occasions for social protest:

> If media and culture were not so important, the right [wing?] media would not be so ascendant right now. So I think it's essential that you need that side of it, but this is what I think always happens with power is that they develop a strategy. I think what we've seen over the last thirty years is almost like competing strategies of play. Especially since the 1960s, on the one hand if you look at the Vietnam War and the anti-war movement, or the gay rights movement in the 1970s, or punk rock, a lot of these movements were really cultural. Populations come up with ways of resisting. Power has a lot at stake and so they strategize. You see that. For example, RTS had a lot of actions that were really good and then there was the Wall Street action, but [the authorities] got really good at strategizing tactically [to shut the actions down]. That's when they started the whole anarchist antiblack bloc hysteria. Then in response to this in Europe, a lot of activists like Ya Basta, they would decorate themselves with flowers and bright colors so they would counteract the image and then the strategy was to marginalize the protestors as a bunch of crazy hippies with puppets. But I think that historically, this is nothing new. There is always this cat-and-mouse game. As the media becomes more important, so does the idea of perception. That's why it's become competing strategies of play.

As the RNC approached, competing strategies of play, of the cat-and-mouse game, the dance between police and protesters, only become more vexing, within the evolving politics, propaganda, and performance of the post-9/11 era. The activists stage was forced to adapt as satire became more and more complex. An example is useful.

There was a moment before the RNC when Boyd and the Billionaires for Bush traveled to Long Island to attend a Bush campaign event. They would regale those

attending the event—the Bush supporters—with chants such as: “Four More Wars! Four More Wars!”

At one point, a Bush supporter asked, “Do you have a real job?” And a Billionaire responded, “Work is for suckers.” Another heckled, “I live off my trust fund.” A woman named Theresa MacKnight shouted, “You’re talking in a character mode. You get all dressed up to get your picture in the paper. But what are the answers to our problems?” Whether willing to play along or not, the Billionaire response was more of the same: ”Never have so many sacrificed so much to enrich so few!” MacKnight asked again: “What are the answers to our problems? Was 9/11 a problem?” Irony recedes in relevance with the specter of mass death. It’s hard to be funny in such moments. “I had a cousin who was a firefighter,” MacKnight explained. “He perished in 9/11.” And the Billionaires did not respond. Silence followed.

Boyd, who had been leading the chants as his Billionaire character Phil T. Rich, tried to explain, “Ma’am, we’re not making fun...” “You sure are. Tell his widow and his two kids!” MacKnight countered. Silence. And Boyd put down his props; he took off his Billionaire top hat and put his cigar away. “I’m coming out of character,” he answered. “I’m sorry for your loss.” And the two started talking about Bush, politics, and the world. By the end, the *New York Times* reported, the two hugged (Hitt 2004). Looking back on his two political campaigns organizing the Billionaires and the hundreds of articles written about them, Boyd suggested that was perhaps the best article ever written about the group. “That was a great article,” he says. “The article was better than the actual event.”

Throughout the weeks before the RNC, the specter of 9/11 found itself in countless facets of public debate. It elicited multiple forms of panic, often concerning mass gatherings and protests. Over the past decade and a half, as activism moved from ACT UP to the global justice movement to the 9/11 backlash, what emerged was a series of competing urban narratives, embodying different views of reality, and suggested different strategy. In the fall of 2000, the following announcement was made: "Reclaim the Streets actions pose an arrest risk. Our style of festival is their style of disorderly conduct." Even before 9/11, authorities sought to link protest with panic. Grote explains:

> My favorites were the early Reclaim the Street actions back when the police didn't know how to handle it or if they should be stopping it. It seemed so harmless at first. I remember the first couple at Astor Place and on Avenue A. It almost seemed as if the cops were amused by it. But the threat wasn't. After awhile they started using the terrorist or anarchist black bloc hysteria. It's interesting. I ran into a friend who is a cop after the RNC. He said, "Are you one of the anarchists who were going to throw nails at us?" And I think that a lot of these rank-and-file cops are told this. And they believe it.

Under Section (o) "Projective Launches," the New York City Police Department Legal Guidelines for the Republican National Convention specifically listed, "Rocks, paving stones, bottles, batteries, ball-bearings, nuts and bolts, billiard and golf balls, hockey pucks, nail filled potatoes and other objects are used as projectiles, primarily targeting law enforcement officers" (Doefner and Sweet, 2004, p. 13, 17).

In the days leading up to the RNC, a similar type of hysteria accompanied the expected protests surrounding the convention. "Anarchists Hot for Mayhem," read a *New York Daily News* headline in August (O'Shaughnessy, 2004). The article reported that "50 of the country's leading anarchists" and their followers planned to converge in town for the convention protests. A similar story from the *New York Post* announced, "Finest Prep for Anarchy," (*New York Post*, 2004). This story included descriptions of "high-profile,

radical" activists. Immediately before the protests, ABC's "Nightline" and FOX News displayed photos of a number of activists – some of whom had already been mentioned in the *Daily News* story. The Nightline piece used the words of the police to describe activists organizing against the RNC, calling them "troublesome, even dangerous, anarchists who infiltrate other groups of demonstrators and then try to provoke violence" (Anderson, 2004). Here, the police and the media functioned as moral entrepreneurs to mobilize sentiment against the protestors, to demonize them, and to justify surveillance of their activities (Lichtblau, 2004).

The NYPD Legal Guidelines for "Operation Overlord II" specifically listed "Swarming/Critical Mass" and "Marching Bands " (Doefner and Sweet, 2004, 13, 17). Police were warned that, "Lacking supplies, protestors have resorted to the use of paving stones, bricks, mailboxes and road debris. Protesters may utilize devices such as wrist rockets, slingshots, large rubber bands, paint ball guns, lacrosse sticks to launch projectiles" (p. 17). Having done their homework, the police included a warning about an incident that occurred at the Quebec City FTAA protests in 2001. "Catapults have been constructed to hurl objects, such as stuffed animals, bricks and bottles over security lines and at police officers" (p. 17). The police spent millions to protect the city from flying teddy bears? John Jordan (2003) remembered that protest in Quebec. The point of the teddy bear launch was to bring some theater and color and art as into the discourse. But the police did not seem to appreciate the playful aesthetics of the flying teddy bears. "Our style of festival is their style of disorderly conduct."

Protest panic thus justified encroachments into space for movement and civil liberties and communities. “During the RNC, when we were having our big spokes council meetings, I picked out a cop a meeting,” Brook Lehman recalls. Other activists, such as Tim Dooty, recalled police parking outside their homes and tracking them throughout the weeks before and during the RNC.

Panic was a core part of the context for this surveillance. “People use panics politically,” explained Melissa Hope, who was involved in the SexPanic! struggle. “It’s hard to beat a panic,” she continued. “There was definitely a manufactured panic. I would say there is a manufactured panic about terrorism, in some ways.” Here, citizens are asked to give up their civil liberties in order to feel safe. “Let us open your bag in the subway,” she hypothesized about a policy that the city would eventually instate. “And if you have anything in there that you are not supposed to have, even if it isn’t related to terrorism, you will be arrested for it.” Panic is an ongoing response to the politics of public space. “I’m just not optimistic about confronting a panic,” Hope continued. “Like you say, it just unfolds and goes on and on. As a whole, people are only skeptical if something goes on for a while. Before that they are ok. But it makes a panic the most powerful political tool the powers-that-be can use.”

Yet despite the panic, the air in New York City brimmed with excitement and anticipation for most of the spring and summer of 2004. Much of the debate within the press was about the politics of play and anti-authoritarian protest. A Spring 2004 *New York Magazine* story on the protests noted:

> Four months away from the Republican National Convention at Madison Square Garden, activists are circling their welcome wagons, predicting “a battle for ground zero,” a “Burning Man festival for the city,” “a political disaster,” “a

> disciplined, organized protest," "a culture war"—five days that are "part blackout, part Woodstock," "worse than Miami," "better than Seattle," "our Chicago '68." (quoted in Hill, 2004).

By the one year anniversary of the Iraq war in March, an email from the RTS listserve calling for an "RTS Paul Revere 'The Republicans Are Coming' Patriot Bloc Saturday March 20th at NY Public Library."

> The Republicans are Coming! The Republicans are Coming!
>
> In the spirit of Revolutionary Paul Revere,
> members of RTS New York and the Absurb Response Team
> will meet on Saturday March 20th at 11:30 AM to warn the
> world that the Republicans are Coming during the Anti-War March!
> Please dress in 1776 Revolutionary Garb!!!
>
> What: Splendidly Silly Feeder March
> Where: the Steps of NY Public Library at 40th Street
> Why: To Warning that the Republicans Coming to Pimp Our Tragedy
> When: 11:30 AM on Saturday March 20th
> What to Wear: Revolutionary Garb (quoted in Shepard, 2004d).

As they did on February 15th, the police converged on the public library where everyone was scheduled to meet. But unlike the earlier rally where police repeatedly interfered with the peaceful assembly of activists (Dunn, 2004), this time activists were able to march and get their point across. Members of the ever morphing RTS/Absurd Response team wore 1776 gear to play the part of town criers running to and fro warning everyone, "The Republicans Are Coming!!!": I was interviewed during rally.

> This is like a pep rally at the high school gym," said Ben Shepard, a 35-year-old social worker and member of the Paul Revere bloc. "It's one-tenth of the burlesque and fun" that we can expect during the Republican Convention, he said. There, there will be "lots, lots more of this flamboyant fun, good times and high-jinks. We've got to change the narrative. A lot of us are out here saying there's another way of having a democratic participatory process" (quoted in Goldberg, 2004).

For many, the point of the rally was not only to protest the war abroad, but also the war against the public sphere, public services, and an the erosion of democracy in America (Goldberg, 2004).

But the big marches were still feeling tiresome and not very empowered. "We're tired, We're hungry and we have to pee!!!" was the affinity group cheer as a small group skipped out before the antiwar march was over to have a snack and go to an after-party later on, sponsored by the Billionaires for Bush. There, journalists converged along with movement activists, all trying to make sense of the spectacle of playful, theatric activism.

For many, the summer offered an opportunity to revel in the possibilities of playful political performance. By July 4th, pre-RNC activities were in full swing. Some members from the usual RTS/Absurd Response affinity group met at the steps of city hall with a group called Green Dragon to theatrically celebrate indepedence from "King George the Second" – not of England, but of the imperial USA. Members stood in their places at the foot of the George Washington statue in the financial district off Wall Street. But the actions did not feel playful. They felt overtly staged and unliberatory. They lacked a play element. Members of RTS felt compelled to battle the docile bodies that did not feel connected with the actions, the words themselves. Later that night, members reconverged at a BBQ for some dancing.

New York's Hungry March Band played along the Williamsburg waterfront the during the July 4th show in 2004, as the fireworks blasted. The silhouette of the city's buildings, its decay, and its looming gentrification overlapped, as the intersecting urban narratives of modernization mingled. But that was the point about Hungry March Band:

its best shows made use of the city's wonderful ruins and rugged undeveloped edges as their stage set, allowing spectators to contemplate the rich paradoxes of their urban lives. Later in the show, the band oversaw a crowd tackling a statue of King George the Second. The Reverend Billy chanted "Music, Sex, Direct Political Action" with the crowd as the band jammed. The band's shows created a participatory quality of performance, play, dancing, politics, joy, and sweating bodies, and a cultural activism which rightfully speaks to the hopes and possibilities of a holy American landscape, a world in which we'd like to live. If carnival is a theme of these movements, the soundtrack is often jazz/world music. Jazz's participatory improvisation is very much a metaphor for democracy into itself. There are times at their shows when it feels like the whole thing is busting at its seams, when the world seems to be turning "upside down with joyous abandon and to celebrate our indestructible lust for life" (Notes from Nowhere, 2003, p. 175).

Leaving the July 4th show, some members of the affinity group decided it was time for one more action. If there was not enough play in the [recent?] performances, we would create our own stage where play would open new kinds of liberatory spaces. When political performance becomes the opportunity for such a process, "your body becomes connected to something larger, breaking your body in new ways," John Jordan of London's RTS explained. Thus, RTS/Absurd Response would form a new spin-off: the Clandestine Insurgent Rebel Clown Army (CIRCA). Members of RTS New York had morphed from street party organizers (Duncombe, 2002) into guerilla theater performers who had staged actions such as the Billionaires for Bush and Gore at the 2000 RNC in Philadelphia (Boyd, 2002), the Students for an Undemocratic Society during the Bush

inauguration in 2001 (Grote, 2002), the SuperBario Man skit between labor organizers and sweatshop owners the next May Day (Bogad, 2003), an Absurd Response to an Absurd War once the prospect of war entered the equation (Shepard, 2003a, b), and later Patriots against the Patriot Act when it became clear the notion of total war would be used to restrict movement in public space (Shepard, 2004).

As the groups had done many times in the past when we ran out of new ideas, we again turned to the creative work of RTS London (Jordan, 1998). When RTS London planned a guerilla gardening action for May Day 2000, we followed suit, organizing our own gardening action the same day (Duncombe, 2000). Bogad, who'd had a teaching assignment in Birmingham the previous year, learned the clown shtick from RTS and performed it when Bush visited London in the winter of 2003 (Bogad, 2004). In the months before the RNC, a few of us felt there was not enough play or rambunctiousness in the preparations or possible theatrics planned for the convention protests. So Bogad was recruited to help the New York RTS chapter organize itself as part of the Clown International . We also put him to work writing our "Anti-Official Communiqué," which explained the role of the Clown Delegation at the Republican National (Clown) Convention:

> We, the clowns, jesters and tricksters of the Clandestine Insurgent Rebel Clown Army (CIRCA), are delighted to host the Republican National Clown Convention (RNCC) in our fair city of New York. We are so gratified that the Radical Right has brought their grand circus to our humble town, and we are eager to attend!
>
> We are particularly inspired by the Head Clown, DUBYA, a fool of globe-crushing power.
>
> DUBYA is a truly talented trickster; transforming his ruling-class-wastrel life story into a faux-farmer media persona; creating false WMDs and conjuring fake connections to Al Qaeda to justify the invasion of Iraq; doling out a plastic turkey to the suffering troops there for the news cameras; giving speeches before false

> backdrops of "MADE IN USA" boxes to herald the "comeback" of the economy he has despoiled for his inner circle's gain. And now he and his circus come to co-opt the memory of 9/11 and turn our city's trauma into their triumphalism. He's extremely funny, though we think he may be taking his tragic joke too far….
>
> The key moment for CIRCA was his fabulous flight suit appearance on the aircraft carrier, where he angled the cameras so the nearby shoreline could not be seen, where he converted his draft-dodging into pseudo-heroism, where he took the debacle of an unnecessary war and occupation and summed it up with "Mission Accomplished." What a fantastic clown! Bravo! Encore! Two Thumbs Up!!! We laughed, we cried, we continued to count the dead….
>
> CIRCA wishes to express its admiration for the horrific hijinx of Dubya the Uber-Clown by dressing in flight suits and strutting our thumbs-up stuff on the streets of Manhattan. We will imitate our hero by playing soldier, and playing golf, while Rome burns. If we also pretend to indulge in his narcotic pastimes of times past, it is only in flattering imitation of our Great Leader.
>
> Our credentials are clear. Our hearts are open. Our flight-suit crotches are bulging. We are here to attend the Convention and lovingly declare:
>
> MISSION ACCOMPLICATED!

The Clown Army had its premiere during the NEO-CONey Island Block Party in late July, organized by the NoRNC Arts Clearinghouse and the Change You Want to See Gallery, and a reprise later during the August 29 protest, to great reviews from all the local papers.

In the weeks before the RNC protests , activists planned for actions based on three core themes: First, where the police barricades and protest pens end, democracy begins. Second, political freedoms are not given, they are taken; if Constitutional protections cannot be used, they do not really exist. Third, free movement and direct action would transform the city into the kind of world activists wanted to see – a liberatory space in stark contrast to the sterile regulated protest pens, where movement space and free expression are fenced in. Even the New York police forces, which have long waited for a new union contract, experienced these political barriers. "We have been restricted with

frozen zones, forced to stay in holding pens and videotaped by members of the department," a member of the Police Benevolent Association complained (about tactics the police generally deploy against protestors now turned against them). "They threatened cops with arrests clearly trying to intimidate them," (quoted in McPhee and Lemire, 2004).

By this point, the theme of fences had become a central symbol for the Global Justice Movement. "For struggling for a better world, all of us are fenced in, threatened with death. The fence is reproduced globally. In every continent, every city, every countryside, every house" (Notes from Nowhere, 2003). And fences had been torn down from Quebec to Cancun to the Lower East Side of New York City. Starhawk explained why fences had gradually become a metaphor for the movement: "Well, I think it's a metaphor for what we're fighting against. And also it's something to do in that situation, another target."

Throughout the summer, lots of fences were erected – including between activists, where a play of spirit was conspicuously absent. Henri Lefebvre (1947/1991) said long ago that everyday life is the key to social knowledge. The point of the work, of course, is that all that happens on the streets, the patterns of friendships and organizing, are the important sources for social inquiry. The daily mechanisms of power, labor, and the reproduction of everyday life are rarely disrupted, even in moments of social protest. It does not matter which party is in power if they are going to use the same oppressive mechanisms to run the country or its politics. Thus, the lesson emerges that movement actors could do well to cultivate a caring process of respectful, open democratic exchange in which oppressive systems are rejected in favor of egalitarian engagement and playful

creativity. For social movements, this means breaking down systems of imagination-crushing domination, even within the movements themselves.

Building on such sentiments, the global justice movement actors tend to assume that how the movement organizes itself is as important as the results. Thus the emphasis is on organizing with affinity groups and loosely-coordinated “spokescouncils.” The aim is to support difference and exchange of ideas between appointed "spokes," people from different affinity groups empowered to make decisions about upcoming actions. In practice, there is nothing simple about this process. This spokescouncil model is often unwieldy. A small group can monopolize the process, despite the skill of the facilitator. It puts a premium on a great deal of time, more than many activists with families and long hours of work can handle. In his interview in *Movement of Movements*, John Sellers (2004) noted that those who stay the longest tend to wield the most power in this model. Thus, spokescouncils can become battles of attrition. They can also be disempowering. In the organizing for the RNC protests, for example, one spokescouncil facilitator asked those who were not nominated to speak for their affinity groups to distinguish themselves from the “spokes”; people actually described themselves as "not empowered" when they introduced themselves – not exactly the message the movement is trying to promote. In another case, male members of the crowd actively blocked certain women from speaking or having a place in the meetings.

On the other hand, a small and highly intelligent affinity group from ACT UP was able to garner as much, if not more, sustained media attention for their carefully tailored message than the hundreds who attended and participated in the weekly

spokescouncils for the August 31 day of action. Affinity groups of a small number of activists tend to be more efficient and often just as effective as larger numbers.

The concept of the affinity group dates back to the Spanish Civil War when it was used as the underground organizing structure for the Iberian Anarchist Federation, addressing both security needs and anarchist ideals of decentralized power and free association (Kauffman, 2002). In *Homage to Catalonia*, George Orwell noted that the anarchist militias were surprisingly effective in fighting the Fascist army during the civil war. Their democratic organizing ethos cultivated a high morale, which allowed actors to be very effective – even those with very little other training. Conversely, the repressive Stalinist army that ultimately replaced the militias was far less creative (Bogad, 2005a). In the years that followed, organizers continued to look to affinity group-based models as a way to maximize egalitarian, direct democratic approaches to organizing (Bogad, 2005b). The model was revitalized during the late 1960s before its renaissance with the advent of the global justice movements in the 1990s. Wood and Moore (2002) explain that the model emphasizes "intentionally nonhierarchical organizing mechanisms which date back to radical feminist, civil rights, antiracist, environmental, and anarchist movements." This approach is used to overcome the negative aspects of community practice, including sexism, racism, and other forms of domination, that often accompany the process.

To achieve this end, activists involved in affinity groups and spokescouncils are expected to be aware of themselves and the systems of power involved in their interactions. Some organizers actually make use of specific strategies designed to reduce domination and privilege. The *Global Activist's Manual*, edited by Mike Prohosch and

Laura Raymond, includes "Tools for White Guys who are Working for Social Change (and other people socialized in a society based on domination)," Chris Crass' list of tips for activists trying to alleviate these systems of power (Prohosch and Raymond, 2002, p. 96-7). The list outlines practical steps almost anyone involved in community practice can utilize to make their meetings more effective. The first five steps are listed below:

> 1. Practice noticing who's in the room at meetings – how many men, how many women, how many white people, how many people of color, is it majority heterosexual, are there out queers, what are people's class backgrounds. Don't assume to know people, but also work at being more aware.
>
> 2a. Count how many times you speak and keep track of how long you speak.
> 2b. Count how many times other people speak and keep track of how long they speak.
>
> 3. Be conscious of how often you are actively listening to what other people are saying as opposed to just waiting your turn and/or thinking about what you'll say next.
>
> 4. Practice going to meetings focused on listening and learning; go to some meetings and do not speak at all.
>
> 5a. Count how many times you put ideas out to the group.
> 5b. Count how many times you support other people's ideas for the group (quoted in Prohosch and Raymond, 2002, p. 96-7).

With these points in mind, activists are expected to check themselves and their own biases. The difference between groups in which this consciousness becomes part of the organizing and those where it does not is often profound. Groups that do use the model tend to make organizing a dynamic process, in which activists and groups grow together.

David Graeber (2003) explains that citizens access their own real potential as organizers, a point those in power hope organizers do not believe possible: self-organization in action. This philosophy assumes that leadership is a quality everyone has inside herself. Thus the model emphasizes a strategy of self-emancipation – in which

activists are liberated from the need for liberators – as an organizing ethos (Johnson, 2001). Here, a spirit of openness and willingness to learn from others presents a stark contract with humorlessness and self-importance, which dogged left-leaning community organizers and stifled movements for social change for a generation after the Civil Rights years. What appears to have been missing was a spirit of play. Yet, distinctions remain between authoritarian centralized and anti-authoritarian decentralized and the playful/ boring-serious dichotomy; while certainly anti-authoritarian groups tend to favor more play, nothing is hard and fast. There are certainly dour anti-authoritarian groups and the occasionally ludic authoritarian group. Thus, the lesson becomes that without a conscious appreciation for creative play, movements loose these necessary elements of refreshment, energy, insights, breaks, opening, and looseness necessary to remain vital. Yet this liberatory, open approach is not always a part of community practice. For many in the movement of movements, open spaces to imagine and play are an absolutely necessity if activists are to consider alternate realities and approaches to social change.

In a work on democracy in American social movements, Francesca Polletta (2002) highlighted the playful, "expressive, sometimes downright silly character" of social activists doing their thing (p. ix). While movement actors may be less inhibited than more serious policy professionals, the context in which this "expressive" playful protest takes place is within a joyous tradition of actors using every tool possible -- including friendship networks - to engage a democracy. In delineating the relational underpinnings of twentieth-century American movement democracies, Polletta highlights three categories: religious fellowship, tutelage, and friendship. For the purposes of this report, the skills involved in friendship are tools necessary for building truly democratic,

playful and creative movement cultures. For Martin Luther King to learn as a follower as well as a leader, he needed to trust and listen to the counsel of actors such as Bayard Rustin and Ella Baker (who has come to be an intellectual inspiration for the movement of movements, see Crass, 2004), while learning to be part of a network. Summing up the lessons of King's followership and leadership, Allan Johnson (2001) explains, "Leadership must be a collective, whether an organization or a network, composed of the large numbers of individuals… rather than being in a single charismatic or gifted individual" (p. 114).

In many ways, this spirit was challenged through much of the summer of 2004. By the week before the actions, the NYPD engaged in a direct threat to what was probably the best example of a leaderless collective: the Critical Mass bike rides. By the time of the RNC, the NYPD had begun targeting the monthly Critical Mass rides, where creativity opened a space for mass political and community participation. Matthew Roth pondered why the city would go after the rides:

> I remember talking with Steve Duncombe about Critical Mass and why it struck such a nerve last year [in 2004], why it made international headlines, and why everybody has some opinion about it – positive or negative. They tended to be virulently negative or virulently positive. There was nothing in between. He said something that kind of stuck with me, and it helped me deal with what I was dealing with. He said, 'Well this is the authentic experience. This is what people are trying to get through consumption, through all these other things.' This is the unmitigated, completely authentic experience of community, of bike riding, of confrontation with other powers that may not be sympathetic to you, its all these things at once.

Thus, authentic play was thought to be a threat. "They said it was too big for the streets of New York," Tim Becker said sarcastically, reflecting on the official explanations for a crackdown on a leisure activity such as a bike ride. After all,

Becker noted, “This is New York. If it’s something cool. It has to come from the Mayor’s office. It can’t be home-grown.”

Conversely, if such a community space is not created by the city, it is considered a challenge to the established order, the established rules of the game. As result, such spaces where civil society thrives are shut down constantly. Thus, struggles for places to play function as struggles against prohibitionist forces as well as notions of city as growth machine (Logan and Moloch, 1987). “I think the reason that our parties are so targeted by the police is because they realize the power of us gathering in masses, just to dance and hang out and talk,” William Etundi explains. “It really does create an energy. It really does further our whole movement and our whole lives.” Here, public play -- such as street and subway parties -- are viewed as subversive occasions for political possibilities that are usually stifled. Within such a repressive context, Etundi talks about the ways he continues to fight and thrive and build a community: “I think all these elements -- whether it’s in the street celebrations, or in these party celebrations – [the important thing is to] keeping that going. Keep talking to each other, whether it’s specifically talking to each other or just random moments.” Sustainability for movement action can comes in many forms. “Taking breaks, just taking care of each other in simple ways, going to the woods, the desert, wherever you need to go to,” Etundi continues. Yet it is also thought to be intimately connected to actual outcomes: “And hopefully winning some campaigns so we realize everything we do isn’t a lost cause,” he concludes.

Yet rather than fixating on scoring the goal, the core ingredient for anti-authoritarian politics is playing the game by different rules. Here, leaderlessness, non-

> horizontal action, and the acknowledgement of pleasure become part of creating the context for building a better kind of community in the here and now. David Graeber (2003), an anthropologist and frequent presence in anti-authoritarian organizing circles in New York City, locates this politics in a tradition that rejects formal political channels and leadership in favor of organizing from the bottom up. In this model, citizens access their own potential as organizers. Here, direct action involves "rejection of a politics of protest (which would appeal to those in power to modify their behavior) in favor of efforts to physically intervene against power in a form that itself prefigures an alternative to its very existence." Graeber suggests this approach offers an end in itself. For him, such an approach "emerges directly from the libertarian tradition." (p. 326).

But this liberatory tradition is more often than not viewed as a threat to the status quo. It is within this context that leaderless Critical Mass bike rides become targets, as [WHO?] explains:

> There's this authenticity and you're not being… I've said this lots and lots of times to reporters: Critical Mass does not have leaders. 'Well yeah, but you're on the press release; you must be a leader.' No, I work with a bicycle-environmental organization which has a means to do a press release. We're doing it out of our own pockets. And we have some infrastructure there to do that. And I hope I'm doing a humble and modest and good job of doing that. 'Cause that's what Critical Mass is about. As soon as I try to impose my identity on it, then I'm betraying it. And what will ultimately happen is I will be removed from it. Critical Mass is this authentic leaderless, organizer-less experience. And as soon as you try to impose your will on it, it's like grasping at air, grasping at water. You lose that. You lose that exhilaration and it won't be there anymore.

Thus, none of the bike activists sought to regulate, get a permit for, or control the amoeba-like structure of the ride. Instead, they sought to create a space where people played.

Throughout the summer of 2003 -- before the RNC became such a focus -- Times Up New York, a Lower East Side environmental group, organized around the concept of Bike Summer, with events and games such as bike soccer. Within such a space for play, bike culture and riding ballooned within the months leading up to the RNC. Roth explains:

> During Bike Summer 2003, there was an incredible amount of organizing going on. We started organizing thirteen months before the RNC. And by May, we found a space, which would greatly reduce rent for us. So we organized a Bike National Convention a week before the RNC. It was like the Bike Summer of 2003 within one week. And we had two or three events a day. It was similar to the Billionaires in that you create the nucleus and everyone can contribute to it. With the DNC [which took place in Boston the month before], we had the same events every day. And it just so happened that [the regular monthly] Critical Mass was the Friday before the RNC, the 27th. The big action for the RNC was on the 29th, Sunday, and the thing kicked off on Monday.

For many, whether they had come to New York to protest the convention or were regular participants in the monthly ride, they were there to play. And official hostility appeared to be attracted to this. Roth continues:

> All I think about bikes is that bikes are about adolescence. They're about childhood. They are about that first. You can play and you can run pretty fast. But when you get on a bike, when you are four or five or six, you get on a bike and it's just a totally different sense of freedom. It's a totally different sense of play. You are going four times faster than you did before – depending on how steep that hill is you are going down. This is play. This is that sense of freedom. And every single car commercial tries to mimic this... But children get it inherently. You get on a bike, that's liberation. You're on your bike, you're exploring, suddenly your neighborhood grew geometrically. Maybe you saw a couple of yards, now you see maybe four, five, ten blocks or more. So there are these very intensely, deeply rooted childhood memories associated to bicycles. And that is something that people still get.
>
> Even when you get on a bike in this ferocious city where there are no acceptable lanes, you are completely crammed in and cars are whizzing by you at forty or fifty miles an hour, there's still this sense of "Ahhhh (sigh) I'm on a bike. This is fun." It harkens back to something more innocent. Anyone who rides, despite all the sense of terror, you still sense that deep play. And when you get a hundred people riding together, a thousand people riding together, there's screaming, there's hooting, there's hollering. It is a playground on wheels.

> Roth is hardly the only bike supporter who feels this way. “I guess it connects with the playfulness and the child in everyone that you have to let go of to get a paycheck every Friday,” Tim Becker concurs. “That becomes more important to you. And people are torn.”
>
> Here, biking becomes a way of existing in the city [driving driven?] by something other than merely the means of necessity. Biking is part of pure pleasure in urban space. “There’s no way to go on a Critical Mass [ride] and not smile at least a hundred times,” Roth continues. “I’ve been in the worst mood and had terrible days and been run around and almost hit and knocked around and gotten bloodied knuckles, and then I go into Critical Mass and it’s the one moment, the one respite I have from the lunacy.” The ride is a space outside of the grind that wears on so many. “Its a moving autonomous zone. It’s a completely fluctuating, moving thing,” Roth concludes.

And because of that open character, the ride is often a target. In the week before the RNC, countless groups geared up for actions. Even members of ACT UP/New York and ACT UP/Philadelphia proved that their chapters had not lost a sense of humor during the protests. These groups captured headlines around the world with an action on August 26 that led to the first arrests of the RNC protests. A dozen activists stopped traffic in front of Madison Square Garden and stripped naked, exposing that when it comes to AIDS, "the emperor has no clothes." Slogans were painted on their bodies that read "Drop The Dept" and "Stop AIDS Now." The following day’s *New York Dailey News* cover featured a photo of the naked protestors and their slogans from the backside,

accompanied by the headline: “A New York Welcome to the GOP. Well, This is the Naked City” (Epstein et al, 2004).

Ann Northrop and Cindra Feuer helped coordinate the very successful media outreach for the action. Feuer, who worked with SexPanic!, describes what worked within this action, which she viewed as one of the best of her career:

> I have to say what worked best was that it was so easy to get media because it was about sex. Ultimately it didn’t have to be about sex, but we billed it as about sex. So it was so easy to get media. That was a big lesson for me. Then I used that lesson when we did the RNC naked action. When I did the press releases I used the word “naked.” That’s what gets them to come out. We’ve discussed doing it more than once. But once you do it, I don’t think you can pull that tool out [again], at least for a while. And a few weeks later, I was getting calls saying, “Should we do naked again?” and I was like, no. It works because it’s sensational. And once you start doing it again and again, it becomes annoying.

The point, as always, is to keep such actions fresh and vital.

The nude action was by no means relating[??] for those involved. “The RNC naked action, that was really nerve-wracking,” Feuer recalls “It’s horribly nerve-wracking. It’s not fun. It’s fun when it’s over and we can say, “Wow, that was great!’” Play is often characterized by tension as well as joy. The post-action press release that Feuer talks about was part of the fun. But there was little light about the action itself.

ACT UP was one of the most effective groups during the entire week of protests. Ann Northrop explains:

> Well, I was at the naked protest, which was certainly one of the most original things that happened there. The naked protesters were brilliant. I was there as sort of a support for them to negotiate with the cops and that was quite an original event. Then the same group essentially got into Madison Square Garden. Their breaking in there was again the most original event. It only took a dozen of them in each case.

Feuer talks about the hopes and limitations for such playful actions in effecting social change:

> It's going to break through all the media that you are bombarded with on a daily basis. It's going to somehow break through all of that shit. First of all, on a very logistical level, how do we get media to cover our event? No one gives a shit about girls who are going to lose their jobs or the Central American Free Trade Act [CAFTA]. So then, it's really about trying to come up with the most clever way to get them with their cameras to cover our message. And our message might be really obscure or sophisticated. But people are not going to see how it's relevant to them. But it's really, how do you cut through all this? So when you have a CAFTA action or you have a global health action, you have to use gimmicks to get it across to people. And so every time its like, Wwhat do we do this time? What hasn't been done? What's going to be sexy? What's going to be image? So then in the end, it's about what's going to cut across all the crap.

Terra Lawson-Remer of Operation Sybil, another RNC direction action group, agrees with Feuer's point about the need for new approaches to creative protest. Along with a small affinity group, she rappelled from the roof of the Plaza Hotel on August 26, the same day as the naked action, and dropped a banner reading "TRUTH" with an arrow pointing in one direction and "BUSH" with a second arrow pointing the other way, similar to the "WTO/DEMOCRACY" opposing-arrows banner witnessed during the Seattle WTO protests in 1999. "It was a personal risk, including the very real risk of getting arrested," Lawson-Remer reflected after she was released from jail. "It demonstrated that we were serious, that we cared enough about this that we were willing to risk our futures" (Kamenetz, 2004). And the action found its way out of its counterpublic, into a broader general public sphere of debate. John Sellers, who helped coordinate the action, explains:

> FOX news was reporting on the, "Truth/Bush" [banner] and it was in heavy rotation for at least a day. They were making fun of it, but the message goes through. And we spent a lot of time thinking about that image, so that we could call into question his veracity without backing ourselves into a corner as far as our message.

August 27: The Attack on Critical Mass

A helicopter whirred overhead as nervous activists milled around St. Mark's Church in the minutes after over two hundred bikers were arrested for participating in a community ride on August 27, the Friday night preceding the RNC. Earlier in the evening, some 5,000 bikers had formed a cavalcade through the summer night. The ride was the culmination of a near-decade of bike and public space activism (Shepard and Moore, 2002). After years of theme-based Critical Mass bike rides supporting community gardens, nonpolluting transportation, even a commemoration of lost firemen after 9/11, the summers of 2003 and 2004 brought thousands of new members into New York's public space/environmental activism. Critical Mass rides traditionally took place around the world on the last Friday of every month. Throughout the spring and summer of 2004, activists across the country recognized that the last Friday of August dovetailed with the RNC protests. Anticipating the RNC, riders careened across the FDR freeway during the July 30 ride -- the last of "the fun old days" of Critical Mass. By the next month, everything would be different.

By August, organizing efforts were met with government surveillance and attempts at total control of the monthly Critical Mass rides. During the last week of the month, police began making routine visits to the Time’s Up! space (headquarters of the local bike activist group), where they asked about the whereabouts of a number of organizers who were on their radar. Surveillance, such as visits to the homes and workplace of activists known to be effective organizers, was common during the days before the RNC.

Two days before the August ride, organizers were informed that they could not hold their planned after-party at the Frying Pan, a regular venue for political parties and

fundraisers, including many previous dance parties after Critical Mass rides. Apparently, the police, the Coast Guard, and others had flooded the Frying Pan owners with phone calls. Under heat from the federal government, the owners canceled the party. The Critical Mass rides and after-parties are events at which the roving activist social world converges on a monthly basis. Without opportunities to get together, these communities face the threat of oblivion. Once again, a community event was being attacked under the auspices of "zero tolerance" policing. That night, organizers distributed a flyer reading:

> Important Message to Our Community.
>
> Our beloved Critical Mass Ride is under attack!
>
> All threats, intimidation tactics and harassment, however, will not keep us from going forward with this amazing community ritual! We have worked hard to build this dynamic community and to advocate for the rights of those that use alternative modes of transportation! We have worked hard to reclaim our rights to public space in our city of New York!

The message implored ride supporters to come out in force. It emphasized community interrelatedness, play, and pleasure as responses to the impending panic, and specifically called on riders not to cave in to a culture of fear and intimidation:

> Tell all your friends. Bring family, neighbors, lovers and strangers. Bring noisemakers, musical instruments, face-paint, flowers, and your energy and joy. Bring things to juggle and to share and also your conviction that we have a right to converge and ride throughout this glorious city. Bring video cameras.
>
> We will not be intimidated!
>
> We will not be threatened and harassed!
>
> This is our city! This is our community!
>
> Let's make this the biggest, loudest, most joyful Critical Mass ever!

That Friday night, some 5,000 riders -- both locals and itinerant activists in town for the RNC -- responded to the call. It was the largest Critical Mass ride in New York City history. Those who participated encountered the brand of demonization of protest and community building that had become a typical feature of the Patriot Act era. Over 250 riders were arrested that night; another 150 bicyclists were arrested by the time the convention had ended, totaling over 400 bike arrests during the RNC week alone.

"Police hate to be upstaged," one observer involved in radical gardening and biking noted. Both community gardening and bicycling had become targets of government crackdowns because they seemed to advocate a vision of urban life in which care and connection with neighbors was prioritized over policing, security culture, and entrance fees. Both community gardening and biking challenged notions of the city as profit-making growth machine.

In the case of Critical Mass, the police appeared to be responding to the prefigurative "Yes" -- the community-building process and the spontaneous ritual of community -- that unfolded the last Friday of every month. Activists had created an image of urban life built on affective play: bike riding amongst friends and neighbors in a healthy sustainable city. These rides functioned as open-ended, leaderless democratic free-for-alls -- compelling spaces open for more and more bikers to participate. The police seemed upset that a group of citizens was not interested in asking for permission or asking them to play a role in helping organize their leaderless community. For many, the ride had become a sort of living example of noncommidified possibility. Thus, Critical Mass represented a powerful "Yes" to life, community, and authentic fun in a world of "Nos." While the police formed a security detail for the malling of Manhattan and the

suburbanization of NewYork, Critical Mass rides represented a form of community building that had nothing to do with citizenship as shopping endeavor.

Tim Becker, who participated in many of the Critical Mass rides, including the August 27th event, commented on the feeling among riders that the police were acting like they were out for blood: "I think they know they have this window in history when they can try to crush it." Much of the momentum for the later attacks on Critical Mass dates back to that August ride. "I guess it's the payback for 3,000[EARLIER YOU SAY 5,000] people going to ride during the Republican National Convention," Becker notes. "It was a sea of people. I couldn't even find anyone I knew. I went on the ride. It was like one of those Charlton Heston movies where he plays god and just wades out into the people."

Roth recalls the events that transpired that evening:

> So we put a lot of bikes on the street. The kickoff was before the RNC with Critical Mass. We had all these people coming. We thought it was going to be big. But we had no idea how big it was going to be. The police estimate was 5,000 so take that and it was, say, five to seven thousand. And before that, New York had never seen more than two thousand at one Critical Mass. New York, San Francisco, Austin, Chicago – they don't get them that big. Five thousand is as big as it's ever been at Critical Mass. By 7:15, Park Avenue was already blocked off because of people just standing there with their bikes and ready to go. And Union Square West was already blocked off. There were so many people going. They were starting to fill onto 17th street. There was no room. It probably took 45 minutes to get out of Union Square park. And the ride was… it was hard to imagine such a congregation of people, who were there to bike, there to protest Bush, there to do so many things.
>
> And this is what is so interesting about what happened later that night after all the arrests. People rode for a good two hours at least before the first arrest, an hour and a half before the first arrest at 8:30 or 9:00. People had been riding since 7:00 or 7:30. And despite all the crazy stories in the press about how the anarchists are coming to destroy the city and the bike riders are just going to be a part of this. They are going to break shit. And they're going to beat people up. And they are extremists. All this, and then when you were on the street and you saw that 5,000 cyclists were riding, chanting, singing, laughing, you realize, ok,

> this is not at all what they are saying. And if you have been on a bunch of Critical Masses, you know that that's never what its about.
>
> My personal feeling is the reason there was such a strong retaliation, that they arrested 264 people using nets -- these big plastic nets, wedging a lot of people in, beating them up, piling them on top of other people, on top of bikes, on top of... people were being impaled by pedals, and all this other stuff, cuts from their chain-rings and all this other stuff as they are being thrown down on their bikes. The reason there was such an intense reaction to it was because of how free-form it was, and how playful it was, and how fluid, and non-threatening, and non-confrontational it was. And what a celebration it was. Every time I have been on a Critical Mass, I have come away feeling like it's a celebration. I come away with energy that I didn't have before I started.

"The rule that long week was preemptive arrest," explained Eugene Karmazin in a recent story about Critical Mass (2005). "Simply put, anyone seemingly dissident was forcibly removed from the streets, effectively removing them from public discourse as well. More than 1,800 arrests where made during the RNC, more than at any prior Republican or Democratic convention in US history." This pre-emptive approach has become pro forma for policing public space.

After being labeled "bike hooligans" by the local press, Critical Mass participants endured a crackdown that would continue for the next two years. Says Barbara Ross, a 41-year-old human resources manager and urban bike commuter, "The NYPD has arrested me twice and confiscated my bicycle three times for the so-called-crime of bicycling without a permit."

August 29: CIRCA Enters the Stage As the RNC protests unfolded, creative playful action proved to be among the most effective ways to bring attention to a cause without putting protestors too much in harm's way. Not content to merely dress as clowns, CIRCA made sure unofficial gesture and play and motion were key parts of its act. During the large UFPJ march, we ran through the crowd, blocking our entrances with gestures of envy, love, and disgust; worshipped fellow clowns such as the president

and Ronald McDonald; pranced, mumbled jibberish, played on the theater of the ridiculous; and riffed on Nixon's internal dialogue with himself and his metal detector on the beach. (Surprisingly, few picked up on the reference.)

The shtick included a number of potty jokes about missiles and phalluses, including grunts of, "Saddam!!! Saddam" with hands down our pants, in homage to the Bushies' obsessive, almost sexual, pursuit of the former Iraqi dictator. Much of it was light absurdist theater, including a riff on the WMD search, held with members of the crowd, which included butt-sniffing and more mature, sophisticated forms of political satire, such as a mock Coke binge in homage to our Presidential Clown's celebrated past. The theater included improvisational moments, such as rushing to bow down in front of a blow-up doll of someone was carrying of Ronald McDonld, who we coveted as "Our Leader!!!" Or we paid homage to Bush's infamous "watch this drive" scene from the movie Fahrenheit 911, before screaming "PANIC!" as if bombs were dropping, and running into walls and telephone posts, and other clownish fun.

When this slowed, some members regrouped for further inspiration from a Bush "Mini Me" puppet held high aloft to be honored and praised; others continued with the theater of the ridiculous jibberish. The former took cues from the doll and repeated his Mao-like Bushisms, reciting these bits of wisdom with monotone, brainwashed revolutionary fervor:

> You can't take the high horse and then claim the low road.
> I know the human being and the fish can co-exist peacefully.
> Verbosity leads to unclear inarticulate things.
> I stand by all the misstatements that I've made.
> A low voter turnout is an indication of fewer people going the polls.
> It's clearly a budget; it's gotta lotta numbers in it.

The future will be better tomorrow.
I know how hard it is to put food on your family.

The message, sent from God to Mini-Bush, was repeated through us. Core chants followed in a call-and-response fashion: "Rarely is the question asked," said the first group…"is our children learning?" responded the second. Our clown leader Monica, a choir member with the Church of Stop Shopping, led us in a wonderful version of the Village People song "YMCA":

Young men, there's a place to be free
We said young men, you can bomb oversea
You can do that without much safety
Me? I'll be golfing at the ranch. Yeah!

We spelled "BUSH" as the rest of the group chimed in with the chorus:

Its fun to snort coke with B.U.S.H.
Its fun to blow cash with B.U.S.H.
Bombing families all day
Takes my worries away
Its a constant rodeo!

When the police arrived, we either cowered, sniveling and begging for forgiveness, or followed the Monty Python "run away" routine and sped off to the nearest subway. The thinking behind the skits was that as the architects of the War on Terror continue to use the Patriot Act to link protest with terrorism, such forms of playful, unthreatening, yet still subversive protest become a compelling model of political engagement.

The press lapped up the story. "Acts of creative street theater stole the show, with creative expressions suggesting that America's activist movement may have come of

age," one observer[reporter?] noted (Wheeler, 2004). As this writer described the August 29 clown shtick:

> Running helter-skelter down side streets perpendicular to the protest thoroughfare, the Clandestine Insurgent Rebel Clown Army played a virtual game of freeze tag with journalists and photographers before suddenly retreating in chaotic fashion. They wore dirty green army fatigues, fake passes identifying them as Republican delegates to the convention, and ridiculous clown paint on their faces.

"Our hero, Dubya, is in town for the Republican National Clown Convention, so we've got our credentials," Larry Bogad explained. "We're the Big Top delegation, from right between Kansas and Missouri. We're ready. We're just as big clowns as they are" (quoted in Wheeler, 2004). To explain the clown schtick, Herbert Marcuse's suggestion that true engagement between arts and activism offers a route to "aesthetic transformation" is instructive.

The spectable garnered attention worldwide. One journalist gravitated to Bogad, who was dressed as a clown wearing a faux Bush fight suit with the words "Mission Accomplicated" emblazoned on the back and performed a theatrical skit about the president with members of the old RTS group. "We're trying to find different ways to express dissent in the public space," he said. "We're trying to move in ways that are different and create a subculture, because I think it's important to create a culture instead of just consuming it."

For many in these movements, this spirit of cultural production and creativity function as a social intervention in itself. Given the right sense of fun and theatrics, these connections "represent... the prevailing unfreedom and rebelling forces, thus breaking through the mystified (and petrified) social reality, and opening the horizon of change

(liberation)" (1978, p. xi). Few of us -- or anyone else who saw the Clown Army in action -- could doubt its propensity to meet such a challenge. And, it appears, this is why CIRCA represented a threat. There was no telling how much of an impact the group might have. So it was no surprise that the police prevented us from reprising our skit during the day of direct action and civil disobedience planned for August 31.

August 31: When the Fun Stops

August 31 was to be the big day of direct action for the RNC protests. Yet after promoting their actions publicly, many activists were pre-emptively arrested before they could carry them out. Some 1,800 were arrested that day. I asked Starhawk about her experience of being one of the few arrestees who was arrested for actually doing what she had planned to do. "I'm not sure, but we felt very clever. We actually got arrested doing something that was illegal," she explained. "In the middle of the street, we sat and blocked traffic. We set up a little altar and did a quick ritual -- pouring seeds out for the new world that we wanted to create."

In many other places throughout the day, activists were arrested merely for being associated with the protests. A street party bloc was planned for Union Square. Joe Tuba later explained what unfoled at that action:

> The only time that instruments got smashed was with the Rude Mechanical Orchestra last year [2004]. That really upset me. August 31st last year, I was depressed the whole day. I stayed home. I wasn't going to do any of this shit. And finally I got off my ass. I took the train in. I got out at Union Square and I showed up just in time to see them playing in Union Square and take off into the street. It was the Infernal Noise Brigade right behind them and they went a block away and got penned in and everybody got arrested. Jeff Stark got arrested for the first time in his life. I lucked out because Andrew Boyd and little Emily were having dinner outside in some little patio and I was like, can I just cross over this little barricade and eat dinner with you?

The police were acting on specific orders to slow down the fun. The police protest manual for the RNA stated:

> “Marching bands” in the context of mass demonstrations refer to groups of protestors who are carrying and playing musical instruments. “Marching bands” and amplified music may be used to interfere with the police radio communications and to signal different messages to protesters. For example, increases in beat are used to indicate an attack, while decreases are a signal to withdraw. Persons marching or parading within the city without the[a?] permit may be subject to arrest under Penal Law, Section 240.29 Disorderly Conduct (quoted in Doepfner, 2004, p. 17).

That day, acts of political freedom -- public performances, bike rides, and old-school civil disobedience -- were targeted and restricted. Random acts of alienation-crushing fun were targeted and isolated. For me, much of the problem began that morning when I planned to participate in some street theater. The next day, I sent the following email message out to my affinity group, which I had not been able to meet up with for the August 31 actions:

> Well, yesterday was a weird day. At 10 a.m., I was walking to work in the Bronx and was pulled over by two plainclothes police officers from the New York Police Department. They told me, "Ben Shepard, there is a warrant for your arrest." I was driven down to the Chelsea Piers holding area, searched, and held in a chain-link and barbed wire holding area, where I spend most of the day in a solitary holding cell without seeing lawyers or being told what the charges were against me. There they confiscated my papers, a book, and some stickers to be put in the "evidence" folder"; my clown army stuff -- including funny hat, feather duster, silly toys, RNC Clown Delegation pass -- was put in another bag.

Back at Pier 57

"Don't look at me," a policeman groaned before he told me to take off my shoelaces and put me through the system. The process began at Pier 57, on the West Side of Manhattan. Here, police cataloged the "evidence" against me: a handful of stickers

declaring "A31: DUMP BUSH" ("graffiti instruments," as the city called them), a child's megaphone I borrowed from my two-year-old daughter, a feather duster, a list of locations for actions.

Most of the police officers thought the clown stuff was funny. What they did not find amusing was my copy of *The Civil Disobedience Handbook: A Brief History and Practical Advice for the Politically Disenchanted*, edited by James Tracy. Inside the book, the police noted the autographed dedication from the author, whom I had met at the previous Friday night's Critical Mass ride: "Ben, keep up the inspiring organizing and writing. We'll conspire again soon. Hasta La Victoria!!!" I'd forgotten the book was in my bag. Yet, I knew I was sunk when they found it. A bearded Henry David Thoreau was pictured on the cover. "What's this, anarchism?" several policemen inquired. "Is he one of those violent anarchists?" they asked pointedly. No explanation of Thoreau's take on peaceful civil disobedience would convince them otherwise. Paranoia reigned throughout the summer. Police instruction manuals issued before the RNC protests had warned that violent anarchists planned to take hold of the city using tricky, dangerous tactics, including releasing marbles to wreak havoc on police horses, using frozen balloons as weapons, and employing marching bands to lead the cavalcade of danger. No wonder the police were determined to keep a clown in a guerilla theater troop from hitting the streets during the president's coronation ceremony.

"What are you guys going to do when the president gets reelected?" one of the officers asked as I was being processed. "Well, you guys aren't going to get the new union contract you've been looking for," I thought, though I said nothing. Still, most of

the cops were innocuous and willing to talk about the weirdness of the day at the pier and their own difficulties with procuring a new contract (McPhee and Lemire, 2004).

Once the mishigas was over, I was alone in my cell. I had spent time in jail cells before, but never without other arrestees with whom to commiserate. I had expected to see others from the summer's organizing efforts. Instead, I was accompanied only by silence. With the exception of the police and about four others in the adjoining cell, the pier was completely empty. I thought about the Bader Meinhof gang members who spent years in solitary confinement during the 1970s and slowly lost their minds. By early afternoon, members of the FBI and the Office of Homeland Security came to interview me. They inquired as to whether I knew anything about the "violent anarchists" we had all heard so much about. "I don't know why you are here," one said. "These guys are all really flipped out about that book you have."

As soon as the feds left, my arresting officers came back to ask me with whom I'd done my organizing. Despite Police Commissioner Raymond Kelly's insistence that such tactics were no longer utilized, the questions followed the lines of the "demonstration debriefing form," which had been ruled unconstitutional (Rashbaum, 2003a,b). "Everything in your bag says 'A31,' did you work with that group?" he kept asking. Having tried to be genial all morning, I finally told them I could not speak without my lawyer present. Then they left me alone. And one of those weird moments that sometimes occur with police unfolded. When my arresting officer came back, he walked close to the wire fence and said, "I know this must have been scary, but you have been very cool about it. I appreciate it." I nodded and thanked him, wishing he'd just let me out. "We're going to get you out of here," he explained. Then they walked me to the car.

To the Tombs

"I still have not been told what I'm being charged with," I said in the car on the way from Pier 57 to Central Booking -- or "the Tombs," as local activists describe the cavernous underground jail under Center Street where many arrestees are charged and sentenced. "You are going to laugh when you hear what this was all about," my arresting officer replied. Part of the punishment of the Tombs is the tedium of the fingerprinting identification process, which can take hours. There seemed to be five policemen for every one arrestee. This loose-ends feeling creates a frat house type of environment for the police, who jovially chat among themselves and toss footballs -- sometimes over the heads of the "prisoners," as they called us -- while they herd one handcuffed arrestee at a time through a tedious litany of steps from pat-downs, to confiscation of shoelaces, pens, and other possibly dangerous property, through fingerprinting and other mundane details. There is a sense that the recent Abu Ghraib prison violations could easily occur in a context such as this. By far, the greatest duress of the Tombs is the boredom. "If I count the cracks on this ceiling one more time, I'm going to kill myself," the late Keith Cylar, a member of ACT UP and Housing Works, once related to me as we went through the same tedium. "Get me fuck out of here."

At the Tombs, I shared my holding cell with some Vassar students and some San Franciscans arrested for performing on a subway, and another group arrested for performing on the street. In a city where a day rarely passes during which a subway car is not transformed into a performance venue for some sort of hustle, the mere act of students lying down as if they were dead Iraqis was enough to invite the arrest of the entire group. Most were charged with disorderly conduct. At some point as I was being

processed, I injected myself into the banter of one of the officers with a particularly thick Long Island accent, who had been commenting on everyone's charges. "So what did you do?" he asked me. "I still don't know. I haven't been told a thing. I was picked up on the way to work." He looked puzzled and shuffled through some of his papers. "Oh yeah," he said. "You were the one arrested for stickering."

Given that I was one of the first arrested, I was also one of the first released around 9 p.m. Only when I met the judge did I first hear about the charges against me: four counts of criminal misconduct for "criminal mischief," "graffiti," and "possessing tools of graffiti." The alleged graffiti-ing was said to have taken place four days earlier. Apparently, an undercover policeman had seen me posting "A31: DUMP BUSH" stickers in Brooklyn and had followed me up to the Bronx to find out where I worked. But instead of arresting me at the time of the alleged "crime," the city apparently opted to wait until August 31, the day of planned direct action against the RNC. Later, many would suggest that since I had found the space for the A31 spokescouncil meetings, the police targeted me, as they had many of the other organizers during the week of actions. But the morning I was arrested, none of the other A31 organizers were at Pier 57. It was the strangest bust I had ever undergone. As I sat in the cell starring at the barbed wire, I thought about the $100 million spent on security for the RNC protests alone, the number of full-time cops it took to arrest me and put me through the system. And all this because of the content of a sticker.

From 11 to 72 Hours

Unlike many of the other RNC arrestees, I was in jail a relatively short amount of time -- maybe 11 hours. As the week wore on, arrest numbers mounted. Many would be

held for two or three days before they saw a judge. "Far too many New Yorkers were far too quiet," civil liberties advocate Norman Siegel proclaimed after fighting for the release of activists held for over 70 hours during the convention. "Our freedoms are not taken overnight, they disappear gradually." These long wait times would inspire New York Councilman Bill Perkins to introduce legislation before the City Council in May 2005 that would curtail these long sentences(Lombardi, 2005; Murphy, 2005; see also http://www.nybordc.org).

By the end of the week of protests, some 1,800 individuals -- activists and bystanders alike -- had been arrested. While some suggested that the movement was loosing steam and the calls for direct action were less effective, others, such as myself, looked with wonder at both the well-targeted stunts of small groups of AIDS activists who received front-page coverage for their work all week and those involved in the big direct actions willing to sit down in the streets and say "No!"

"In the history of political conventions, there have never been so many people demonstrating opposition to their government," former Chicago Seven member and California state Senator Tom Hayden told demonstrators on September 1--even as many remained confined on Pier 57. Hayden elaborated that the 1968 generation never saw the kind of preemptive arrests, control culture, and repression which had become common features of recent protests such as the RNC or the demonstrations against the FTAA in Miami the previous year (Slackman and Cardwell, 2004). My arrest was one of countless strange stories of overreaction by the police.

In the history of civil disobedience, the use of preemptive arrests of activists who police suspect will employ civil disobedience is a new threat. This model was first

really employed during protests against the IMF in 2000 and 2002 (Blummer, 2005). Many activists over the years have been brutalized during and after protests. But the notion of surveillance and pre-demonstration arrests of activists who police suspect might engage in disorderly conduct even before they have done anything radically alters the playing field. Eric Laursen, whose photo was featured in the ABC story about anarchists planning the RNC protests, explained, "I had not been charged with any crime at the time those photos were shown...I haven't since. [Showing those photos] inferred we incited violence. That's out-and-out character assassination" (Anderson, 2004).

Laursen was not the only organizer identified who suffered personal and professional repercussions during or after the RNC protests. Take the case of David Graeber, an anthropologist at Yale University who worked with Laursen and myself and a number of others to organize the A31 direct action events. Graeber was dismissed from his position at Yale the following academic year (Frank, 2005).

And certainly the changing rules were widespread. The precedent of activists being demonized, detained, and isolated before protests even begin has by now been adopted across the country.

Within the context of war, the attempted total control of space for social contact and democratic expression, and what felt like Republican hegemonic power, some activists fell into depression. Kate Crane published a daily diary about this period in her life. Her September 16, 2004 entry included a moment when she was getting her hair cut:

> Joe snipped away at eight weeks of hair, and, towel around my neck, smock draping past my knees, I moved between chatting and dozing. Mr. Best Dyke Haircut from a Gay Man has been extremely supportive of my time on the other team. Just wants me to be happy. I said, I'm terrified of disaster. What if, what if?
>
> He said, honey, that's not going to happen. It already happened. It's time for you

> to enjoy things.
>
> I squirmed; who wants to cry in a chic salon where everyone else is already more fabulous than you are, without tear-streaked cheeks?

For many, including Crane and her hairstylist, the point is battling alienation. Why do people play in this work? For Crane, it's about fighting the Blue Meanies, battling off depression that can be debilitating:

> Because if you don't play… I spend a good 40% of my life and work fighting depression. If you don't bring some light and goodness to this, for me, I'd never get out of bed.... If you spend too much time thinking about that [war, poverty, oppression] part of it, you know... Sometimes I don't know if things can change. But sometimes it's just putting the right energy out there. The choice is to sit at home and be depressed or go have a circus party with your friends and in that act, to be embodying the world you want.

September and October: The Legal Fight Intensifies

"We are not blocking traffic. We are traffic" is the motto of Critical Mass. Cars make up traffic, and so do bikes. Few people expect car drivers to ask for permission to clog the streets. Bicyclists were claiming the same space for themselves.

The arrests during RNC protests were only the beginning of a long legal fight between bikers and the police over the definition of a "procession." Police added a new element to the fight during the September 24 ride: cutting chains and confiscating 40 parked bicycles. In response, those whose bikes had been taken retained civil liberties attorney Norman Siegel -- who had successfully fought Giuliani over similar First Amendment cases in the 1990s -- and filed an injunction against the city. For many[ALSO NON-BIKERS], the debate about Critical Mass spoke to core constitutional rights, including the First Amendment right of the people "peaceably to assemble" and the Fifth Amendment right not to be "deprived of life liberty, or property, without due

process of law." Cases involving the Fifth Amendment are routed to federal court. Thus, the riders suing for the loss of their bikes learned that US District Judge William H. Pauley III would preside over their case.

In response to the bikers' lawsuit, the NYPD filed a counter-injunction against Critical Mass, demanding that the leaderless ritual obtain a permit for the next communal bike ride. The police asserted that Critical Mass was a parade without a permit. Issued just days before the next scheduled ride, the city's argument presented a number of questions and conundrums about the nature and definition of a procession. Was it possible for a community event without a leader or a sponsor to apply for a permit? If so, who would do the applying? Most important, how and in what way did the first, fifth, and fourteenth amendments to the US Constitution apply to specific New York City traffic ordinances? (Karmazin, 2005).

On October 28, 2004, the day before the next monthly ride, Judge Pauley ruled that the city had violated the bikers' right to due process by confiscating their bikes without charging the riders with a crime:

> By attempting to use litigation as its platform, the city has injected a slew of important and complex issues into this action. With only two days to respond to the city's application, the Plaintiffs are prejudiced, and the Court is short-changed. . . . Plaintiff's motion for preliminary injunction is granted in part, and the city's motion for preliminary injunction is denied. Specifically, the city and its police officers and agents are preliminarily enjoined from seizing bicycles used by participants in the October 29, 2004, Critical Mass bike ride unless said participants are provided with notice of the reasons for seizure or they are charged with a crime or violation of law (quoted in Karmazin, 2005).

With this victory in hand (Moynihan, 2004), the Critical Mass ride went forward the last Friday of October. The Halloween ride is usually the most colorful of the year. Without a

permit, police arrested 33 bikers that Friday, just days before the November 2 elections. Battered but determined, bikers and their friends danced the night away at an after-party held at the Time's Up! space on Houston Street. Outside, police circled the party, confiscated more bikes, and eventually raided the party.

November 2004: Buy Nothing Day in a Police State

A November 5, 2004, editorial in a New York City tabloid promoted the image of Critical Mass bike riders as "hooligans," providing a rationale for stepped-up surveillance (Storozynski, 2004). Such demonization, of course, justifies preemptive arrests of activists and others unlucky enough to be caught in the crossfire. Likewise, on May Day 2000, the NYPD had preemptively arrested a group of anarchists wearing black bandanas standing in Union Square even before the day's march began. L.A. Kauffman (2000) described the scene. "All around Union Square, the starting point for the march, the police amassed, literally by the thousands. Rows upon rows of cops in riot gear stood in military formation everywhere you looked. Some were carrying the suddenly ubiquitous canisters of pepper spray and tear gas; most had big bundles of plastic handcuffs hanging from their belts, as a none-too-subtle threat." For her, "This obscenely excessive show of force was intimidating." Yet it had its intended effect of demonizing those involved in protest. Thus, the chosen panic scapegoat of the day becomes a "folk devil" onto whom cultural anxieties may be projected.

The November Critical Mass ride was scheduled to take place the day after Thanksgiving. Many activists know the day as International Buy Nothing Day. The Reverend Billy sponsored a series of pranks and zaps throughout the day. Throughout the

summer, the Reverend had used the First Amendment like garlic to protect himself as he led thousands in reciting the amendment at Ground Zero (the former site of the World Trade Center). It seems the police have a hard time arresting a group of people reciting, "Congress shall pass no law prohibiting the right of people to peaceably assemble."

The same talisman was employed on Buy Nothing Day, but this time it did not work as well, and the good Reverend spent a night in the Tombs after his performance inside a Starbucks coffee shop. He would be joined by a group of 17 bikers later in the evening. After coming home from Reverend Billy's protest/ performance at TIMES SQUARE, I grabbed my daughter Dodi and we went to wish the Critical Mass riders well. Union Square, where the bikers usually converge before the ride, was surrounded by police. "White shirts," the commanding officers**,** talked with detectives. They all tried to look important, shuffling their jackets with their hands in their pants in such as way as to show everyone that they had badges and guns.

My daughter wanted some French fries, so we ran into a fast-food restaurant where several more police officers were also waiting in line. There must have been 25 patrol wagons surrounding the park. God knows much the show of force cost in police overtime pay. Dodi and I sat to talk and share fries with the riders. Gloom filled the dark night air. That night, Dodi learned the word "fuck"--an epithet repeated by many of the nervous riders after reading a flyer passed out by the police:

> NOTICE TO BICYCLISTS
>
> - THE NEW YORK CITY POLICE DEPARTMENT REQUIRES YOUR COOPERATION IN COMPLYING WITH THE LAW AND PROTECTING THE PUBLIC FROM HARM

- IT IS DANGEROUS AND ILLEGAL TO RIDE A BICYCLE IN A PROCESSION ON THE PUBLIC STREETS WITHIN NEW YORK CITY, IF A PERMIT FOR THE PROCESSION HAS NOT BEEN ISSUED BY THE NEW YORK CITY POLICE DEPARTMENT.
- NO PERMIT HAS BEEN ISSUED FOR THE A BICYCLE PROCESSION TONIGHT, NOVEMBER 26, 2004.
- IF YOU CHOOSE TO RIDE IN A PROCESSION THIS EVENING, YOU WILL BE ARRESTED AND YOUR BICYCLE WILL BE SEIZED.
- THANK YOU FOR YOUR COOPERATION.

We wished everyone well, hoping they would not face a night at Central Booking. While the police had not identified which laws the bikers were ostensibly breaking, this did not stop them from presenting on ominous show of force and eventually arresting 17 of the riders. As we left, we hoped to avoid police ire as we walked along the sidewalk to the subway entrance. Discussion on the Indy Media website that night involved images of a city that felt like a police state.

December 2004: Finally, a Win

As fall turned to winter, the police and the bikers continued to spar over the definition of a public procession. The struggle marked yet another in an ongoing series of skirmishes in what amounted to a class war over liberatory urbanism versus control of public space (Ferrell**,** 2001; Shepard, 2002).

The year ended on an up note. Judge Pauley threw out the city's counter-injunction over Critical Mass, suggesting that the conflict would be best handled in state court. Pauley, who was careful not to appear to support the bikers, specifically noted that the city had tolerated and even supported the rides in years past. "After allowing Critical Mass rides in Manhattan for 10 years without permits," he explained, "the police department has acquiesced to the very conduct it now seeks to prohibit" (Bray vs. The

City of New York, p. 20). Further, the judge highlighted the testimony by assistant Police Chief Bruce H. Smolka, Jr., who confessed that the NYPD "can enforce the laws without an injunction, but an injunction would be helpful."

Pauley rejected the city's push to require Critical Mass to apply for permits and wait for approval from the Parks Department before the rides. He noted that since there is no organizer for the event, the application for permits would not be possible for such an amoeba-like entity (Associated Press, 2004). Thus, the city's claim could not be sustained. "The City does not aver that it seized Plaintiff's bicycles on September 24, 2004 to redress violations of the special event permit requirement," Pauley wrote. "There is no logical connection between the claims, other than the fact that they both relate to the Plaintiff's status as Critical Mass riders. This is not sufficient" (Bray vs. The City of New York, p. 12).

Pauley specifically addressed the definition of permitted actions at the heart of the controversy. "[T]he applicability of the parade permit requirement has not been adequately delineated by any federal or state court decision," he wrote. Therefore, the judge concluded, "[t]he city's counterclaim presents novel questions of state or local law, which militate strongly against exercising supplemental jurisdiction" (Bray vs. The City of New York, p. 16). Pauley noted that the bikers were right to claim that they have the same right to use the streets as car drivers. Two bikes in a row is not a procession, it is traffic--exactly the argument Critical Massers have made for years. "We believe that the judge was legally correct, and hopefully the strength of his legal argument will deter the city from seeking to appeal," stated Siegel (quoted in Associated Press, 2004). But the

city said that it would appeal the decision. For the bikers, the final ride of the year, on New Year's Eve, was a thrilling victory lap with no arrests.

March and April 2005: Muzzling Dissent

As the winter turned to spring, however, there were more arrests. In March 2005, the city responded with another effort to control the Critical Mass ride, filing a new lawsuit in state court. This time, their strategy resembled the attack on stickering discussed earlier in this essay. They sought to prohibit primary organizers with Time's Up! from speaking out about the ride, thus muzzling those speaking against the city. The city's actions could set a precedent that would allow the police to set the terms for the number of people who could assemble in a city park. If the city won, the police would be allowed to disperse any gathering if 20 or more people are in attendance (Karmazin, 2005).

Once again, attorney Siegel responded to the charges presented by the city. "No court has said that it's unlawful to stand in Union Square Park without a permit," he explained. "If the City of New York succeeds here, it would have huge implications for social protest movements, not only in New York, but throughout America." Siegel continued, "For example, the idea that SCLC [the Southern Christian Leadership Conference], [and] Dr. [Martin Luther] King could not publicize and tell people to gather, to sit in at lunch counters, would have been unlawful at the time. People were challenging the idea of segregation. So the idea that you could not publicize the gathering to challenge unlawful laws is alien to what American history is all about and we will vigorously oppose that in the state court" (Siegel, 2005).

Eugene Karmazin, a Critical Mass supporter, wondered how long the NYPD could continue to battle with the citizens of the city they are charged with serving and protecting. "To suggest that the maintenance of a political prerogative justifies the NYPD's recent behavior would be insufficient," he wrote. "A more plausible logic might say that once defied, police forces will move to reestablish their authority, often with crushing force" (Karmazin, 2005).

"The last Friday of every month, the NYPD turns Union Square Park into a prison yard," Madeline Nelson, another ride supporter, explained in the midst of the crackdown. "They line the park and surrounding streets with scores of police vehicles and hundreds of uniformed and undercover cops waiting to scoop up anyone who happens to be there. Who is authorizing the use of taxpayer resources to suppress a public gathering?"

"Why are you doing this?" the Reverend Billy asked a policeman as he prepared to arrest a group of bikers before the March 2005 Critical Mass ride. "Well," the officer is said to have declared, "everything changed after 9/11." In the days after 9/11, panic over public space and the movement of those within it increased, and restrictions on the public commons grew.

> The following month, Assistant Police Chief Bruce Smolka confirmed Karmazin's thesis. Times Up! organized a rally called “Still We Speak” as a kickoff before the April 29th ride. After a string of testimonials from the Reverend Billy, Norm Siegel, and others on the importance of the First Amendment, Smolka's response was to personally and violently arrested a by-stander at the pre-ride rally. "You're riding your bicycle on the sidewalk," Smolka is said to have declared. "You're under arrest." *The New York Times* captured a searing image of the officer who had once presided over the Street Crimes Unit which had put 41 bullets into unarmed immigrant Amadou Diallo, and later gave the order to start the arrests at the Carlyle Group antiwar protest in April 2003 during an anti war protest (Fahin and Dwyer, 2005; Naparstek, 2005; Wasserman, 2005). From Diallo to the Carlyle Group to Critical Mass, the new “zero

> tolerance" policing paradigm became a threat to human life, peaceable assembly and, by extension, democracy itself. In the case of Critical Mass, after 10 years of relatively peaceful rides, the city's case spoke to a core questions about the use of public space, the fate of activism, and creative direct action in the era of the Patriot Act.

Breakthroughs in 2006

By 2006, the legal and political tools activists used against the demonization of dissent started to bear fruit. Video activists had been documenting police attacks on friendly community activities, including biking. Their work drew the attention of the *New York Times*, which reported on the aggressive and dangerous approach the police were taking in chasing down and arresting those participating in the Critical Mass (Dwyer, 2006b). One videographer actually filmed the NYPD's Smolka forcibly pulling Adrienne Wheeler off her bike without warning during one ride; CBS aired the video (Young, 2006). Throughout the summer and fall, Time's Up! continued to work with members of CIRCA to bring the light edge of radical clowning, aimed at defusing pressure situations, to their actions (Ferguson, 2006). The clowns brought a little lightness and festivity, helping the group weather what felt like a tough period.

As described previously, the New York CIRCA chapter did not receive lighttreatment during the RNC protests in 2004; while they were clowning, the police had no interest in playing along. Yet in the months after the police attached the Critical Mass bike ride, the presence of clowns had provided a needed lift. An exchange on the New York Independent Media Center eeb site offers a telling discussion of where play fits into a larger structure for movement engagement.

On August 20, 2005, Time's Up! posted a press release stating: "Cyclists declare Tuesday, August 23, Bike Lane Liberation Day." That Tuesday, a group of bikers wearing clown costumes started a bike ride at St. Marks Church in the East Village and

rode through the city giving cars parked in bike lanes fake tickets. Most drivers laughed and drove away; others engaged in a dialogue about cars in the city and the need for non-polluting transportation. When a few drivers screamed, the clowns generally honked their horns and rode away. The following day, an activist photographer posted his photographs from the action on the Indymedia web site (http://nyc.indymedia.org/en). The photos inspired a wide range of responses discussing the role of play in relation to social movement activity. On August 24, a person identifying as "biker" posted the following observation about the Bike Lane Liberation Clowns:

> I'm an NYC biker too but the nyc indymedia coverage of all things biking when there is a lot of shit going on in the world makes it come off as a ridiculous youth clique and totally irrelevant. Please report on, oh, I don't know THE WARS, not a group of tattooed twenty-somethings irritating traffic. As soon as real "bike liberation" tactics are used, I'll be interested. Ridiculous.

What "biker" was missing was that many of the bike clowns found it a compliment to be called "ridiculous." Others responded that Indymedia is open for anyone to post news. Still others said that they loved the ride. "Branford and chesterfield" wrote that they felt that the ride was, "lovely! oh lovely and so much lovelier!" They suggested, "send in the clowns—never stop clowning around." Another poster, called "g," began with an Emma Goldman-like sentiment:

> if fun is not part of the movement, it will die
>
> if laughter is not part of the movement, it will die
>
> if clowns are not part of the movement, than i want no part of it

From there, “g” reminded “biker” that those involved with New York bike activism had been arrested in the hundreds and sued by the NYPD since the RNC the previous year. Thus, there was nothing wrong with blowing off a little steam. He explained:

> your comments are valid, but i feel you need to chill out a little. we have been chased by cops armed with deadly vespas, helicopters, and a whole lot of intelligence and surveillance. It’s been a year and we need to be able to have fun. Yes, the clown brigade had its tattooed youth, but over half of the ride was past the age of 30, and with no tattoos. morale is a little bit higher because of the clown brigade. thank you for your conversation. please join us, you can help steer this movement too. get involved and ride.

Such invitations are a core part of the politics of play. Recall that in *Yellow Submarine*, John asked the Blue Meanies to join the celebration after he finished singing “All You Need Is Love” (the Beatles, 1968/2004). Yet neither the Blue Meanies nor “biker” accepted the invitation. The next morning, August 25, the debate about the “biker” post continued. In a message that began, “Great logic, biker,” another poster, “asdfasdf,” said: “I guess we should stop working against racism since the war is killing more people than lynchings, eh? Perhaps school lunches for the poor aren’t important because global warming affects more people?” “[A]sdfasdf” followed with a call for “biker” to follow the DiY ethos and “*do* something instead of sitting at your computer being more-radical-than-thou.” “[A]sdfasdf” then suggested that “biker” could always just join the Time’s Up! contingent for the court hearing for bike activists who’d been arrested for riding in public in the last year. Later that day, a final clown supporter responded to “biker’s” suggestions that riders get involved with something serious like antiwar activism. “[B]ent_rider” noted, “Maybe you have lost the connection between the wars and car usage, which the [Critical Mass] movement is countering. It’s all connected.” And “bent rider” reminded “biker” of the bike activist slogans: “No war for

Oil! Ride a Bike" and "Bicycling: A Quiet Statement Against Oil Wars." Thus, as this stream of posts suggests, bike clowning is a useful embodiment of the politics of play. After two years of police harassment and arrests, finally good news was around the corner. In February 2006, New York StateSupreme Court judge Michael D. Stallman ruled against the city's injunction against Critical Mass (Dwyer 2006a; Stallman, 2006). Stallman rejected all the city's arguments. Most importantly, he declared that there was absolutely no legal ground for the city to consider a group of bike riders a protest in need of a permit, thereby affirming the argument made by bicycle activists that rather than interfering with traffic, "We Are Traffic." To force the riders to obtain a permit would be like asking car drivers to get a permit to drive across the Brooklyn Bridge every day. Stallman concluded that New York City had "not met the three-part test for a preliminary injunction with respect to the pre-ride gatherings for the Critical Mass rides, advertising of the rides, or the rides themselves." The judge further concluded that the city had not demonstrated the applicability of the New York City Administrative Code sections at issue to the Critical Mass rides.

William DiPaola, Executive Director of Time's Up! and one of the named defendants in the case, expressed his appreciation for the decision. "We are extremely happy with the judge's decision. It's not only a big victory for free expression and the right to assemble, but also supports bicyclists' rights to continue riding in groups for safety," DiPaola said.

Attorney Norman Siegel, noted:

> The City's attempt to stop the Critical Mass bicycle rides was soundly rejected by Justice Michael D. Stallman of the New York Supreme Court. We are, of course, pleased by the decision. Hopefully, New Yorkers will be able to continue to ride their bicycles in the streets free of arrests, harassment, and hostility in ways that guarantee public safety for all New Yorkers.

While the city is appealing and the fight continues, it appears the unpermitted authentic community ritual has withstood the city's assault. This victory bodes well for many forms of community-building direct action.

In the End

Narratives linking protesters with terrorists and dissent with lack of patriotism seem to accompany a new form of thought control. As capital intersects with state power, the system appears more than capable of absorbing disruptions. Nevertheless, protest remains imperative. And when done effectively--with disciplined research, a clear target, a well-communicated message, and a winning strategy--it still remains effective. In the age of terror, the capacity of civil disobedience to disrupt the everyday mechanisms of power appears vastly restricted. For this reason, prefigurative, joyful, community-building protest is more essential than ever. If anything, we need this kind of activism to live, to feel pleasure, and to carry our work forward. In the tragicomic theater of contemporary urban life, we need as many playful responses as we can create. Between street parties and bike rides and playgrounds, advocacy and personal fun, the possibilities of public space -- and by extension democracy itself -- remain both paradoxical and as compelling as ever.

Afterward

The Limits of Play
Radical Clowning vs. Tomato Picking

> To be sure, the quality of clownishness and childishness easily appears to adhere to authentic acts of protest in situations where the radical opposition is isolated and outrageously weak while the Enemy is almost everywhere and outrageously strong. 'Maturity' - by definition - rests with the Establishment, with that which is, and the other wisdom then is that of the clown or the child. However, where the protest assumes features which are those of the Establishment itself, of the frustration and oppression released by it, this sort of protest is either disregarded, or punished by the authorities with good conscience and wide support on the part of the people - Herbert Marcuse (1972, p.51).

In the years since George W. Bush's re-election, activists around the world have re-examined their methods. Questioning the accustomed "lesser evil" electoral politics, the boring rallies, the bursts of direct action, and the frustrated tears, a new cohort of political actors have emerged with a new set of playful approaches. They have turned to a uniquely distinct form of community-building and performance. During the summer of 2005, from Edinburgh to South Central Los Angeles, the image of clowns running through the streets found its way into the public consciousness.

From South Central to Edinburgh

Clowns protested the G8 meetings in Edinburgh in the summer of 2005—and the clowns they suggested were running these meetings; other clowns were featured in David LaChapelle's thrilling documentary, *Rize*. In *Rize*, African American clowns occupy the LA streets where riots exploded in the summers of 1965 and 1992, and where urban life offers little but a generous dose of grief and oppression. *Rize* details a subculture inspired

by Tommy Johnson (aka Tommy the Clown), who started a new dance movement in 1992 as a response to the Rodney King riots. It involves a highly physical form of dance which modulates between timeless tribal and contemporary urban hip hop steps, offering an alternately despairing, angry, and joyous style of clowning.

As an alternative to the state-programmed default of gang life, drugs, violence, and prison, kids form troupes of friends who paint their faces like warriors to share space and to dance. What emerges is a series of rituals and competitions between groups of "clowns" and "krumpers," who perform, compete, and build community together. The film never turns its back on the despair of the circumstances that surround the kids; instead it emphasizes emotional outlets created by a cohort of youth who have grown up in a warfare state characterized by mass incarceration, HIV/AIDS, police corruption and brutality, and widespread loss.

Why Clowning?

LaChapelle's South Central is not the only place where social actors have turned to clowning as an answer to the neoliberal police state with its mantra of "There Is No Alternative." Clowns could be seen intermingled among the groupings of "flex, temp, full-time, part-time, casual and contortionist workers, migrants, students, benefit claimers, New Dealers, work refusers, pensioners, dreamers, duckers and divers..." who were invited to bring "drums, music, banners, imagination" to the actions against the G8 in Edinburgh, Scotland, in July 2005.. The point of the carnival was to simultaneously express resistance and assert "desires for FULL ENJOYMENT with fun in the city — and begin to make capitalism and wage slavery history."

In the center ring of this circus of resistance was the Clandestine Insurgent Rebel

Clown Army, or CIRCA. Organized by John Jordan of London's Reclaim the Streets (RTS), Larry Bogad of New York City, Jennifer Verson of Bristol, and others, CIRCA first emerged to protest Bush's visit to Buckingham Palace in 2003. The following summer, a group in New York City zapped the Republican National Clown Convention to thrilling reviews.

I asked Bogad, an active participant with RTS New York and the one of the organizers of CIRCA's zaps in London, New York, and Edinburgh, why his affinity group of seasoned activists from the Global Justice Movement had decided to make use of clowning as a technique at the G8 protests. He began with an initial caveat:

> First of all, it's just one tactic among many. Yet the G8 is this meeting among great powers. We see it as a grim event. The power of the state intersecting with the power of markets, getting together to make decisions for the next year. There is this euphemism, this power play/cover story—bringing debt relief, reducing pain—and yet the underlying agenda is the cost of this partial debt relief: a forced opening of markets, neoliberal restructuring, making whole geographies friendlier for the multinationals, extracting what they really want—but they are not telling the whole story.
>
> So what is the role of the trickster within this whole spectacle? How are we to confront that kind of incredible power and subtle pretense, that "We are the world," the "iron fist in the velvet glove"? You've got the world's leaders, wielding the greatest armed might, the fiscal might, the greatest economic power in the world. These eight men are gonna get together and make that policy. And yet it looks very benevolent.
>
> In the face of this, we wanted to articulate a radical analysis, to confront the media power, the euphemization, the celebrity power, the celebrities saying Blair and Bush were the John and Paul of the drop-the-debt movement. We figured it was a good opportunity for our trickster tactics—Bob Geldof went as far as to say he didn't want "a bunch of people dressed as clowns" coming and wrecking his Live 8 concerts.
>
> As usual, the movement was demonized in much of the press. During the protests, images of a policeman crossing clubs with a black blocker were seen on the front of newspapers around the UK. So we wanted to interrupt the flow of this imagery.
>
> Hence, a range of ridiculous and beautiful theatrics including the much-publicized gesture of a clown kissing a policeman's riot shield. We interrupted what I refer to as the *hegemonologue* coming from the media, which relentlessly

> depicted the protestors as terrorists and Bob G. and Bush as heroes. The point was to be disruptive but in a creative, nonviolent way, engaging people, opening up a creative and personally freeing space for ourselves as well. As opposed to just being angry and ulcerating, we were opening up a different, more engaging, playful space, with an energy that is more than sustainable, it's beneficial. It can reach police officers, passers-by, put them in a creative/interpretive/non-threatened space as well. Some may even pause and think: "They're absurd…but maybe they are both absurd *and* they have a point." That's the idea of the wise fool. Our press release stating that these debts were fundamentally illegitimate was quoted, even in some right-wing papers, because we were being such buffoons.

CIRCA's "Anti-Official Communiqué #8.86: Operation BROWN-NOSE," written by "Colonel Oftruth and General Confusion, Edinburgh, 30.06.05," addresseD the demonstrators at the Make Poverty History march:

> We are so proud of you, so in love with you, we share your compassion and desire to TRULY make poverty history. We admire your realization that the only real way to end poverty, in the global South or in the suburbs of Edinburgh, is to stop the Great Eight's amusingly antisocial habits—their rather nasty slapstick routines—kicking the poorer nations with war, arms sales, and bullying trade policies, manipulating their markets and plundering their resources while dangling the crumbs of "debt forgiveness." We know the G8, far from being thanked for "forgiving" these illegitimate debts, should beg forgiveness from the Global South for their ongoing crimes and depredations.

CIRCA's aim was to turn the pomp and circumstance of the G8 on its head. Geoff Hoyle of San Francisco's Pickle Circus has suggested that clown acts are often "about joyful sharing in attempting an insurmountable task" (quoted in Schechter, 2001). The Pickle Circus clowns are known as a rambunctious group, often refusing to leave the stage even when others think their time is up. In much the same way, CIRCA's anarchistic spirit contributes to a Global Justice Movement which refuses to leave the stage even days and years after the War on Terror was thought to have superseded it. What emerges within the dynamics of CIRCA's opposition is a different, more spontaneous, authentic form of political engagement and citizenship. Within such a

context, anarchist theorist Colin Ward suggests that, "given a common need, a collection of people will by trial and error, by improvisation and experiment, evolve order out of the situation—this order being more durable and more closely related to their needs than any kind of externally imposed authority could provide."

What emerges within this disorder is a different sort of coherence. CIRCA draws inspiration from the insights of Walter Benjamin and Abbie Hoffman. CIRCA's web site quotes Benjamin's *Theses on the Philosophy of History*: "The tradition of the oppressed teaches us that the 'state of emergency' in which we live is not the exception but the rule. We must attain to a conception of history that is in keeping with this insight. Then we shall clearly realize that it is our task to bring about a real state of emergency." Yet as the War on Terror becomes more and more of a continuous propaganda campaign orchestrated by the entire straight media—which has turned into a giant public relations department of the government—it becomes more and more difficult to propose alternative storylines. The imperative then arises to shift the paradigm, to create authentic and innovative forms of protest and community building.

John Jordan offered a short history of the group.

> Its one of those things when the book falls right into your hands. It was the right book at the right time. Hanna Arendt called them 'the lightning angels.' I picked up this old book that I had bought years ago and never, never read, which actually was called The Death Resurrection Show, looking at the relationship between shamanism vs. western popular culture. The repression of shamanic cultures in the period in the beginning of agriculture in the west, what was happened was that culture, the shamanic culture and the dynamics that were within it continued in clandestine form as popular forms of culture, especially with clowning, rock and roll. Really, really fascinating book. Somehow the clown bit of it just hit me. And it felt like just pulling together these many, many interests in my life. Years ago, I had thought of the idea of a clown army. And my partner at the time said, (Laughs). 'It's a shit idea John. Don't do it.' She was quite a formidable women.

> You may well know who she is. And then when she said, 'its shit' I kind of let it go. It was one of those weird things; I pick up this book; I go fuck, 'I really wanna do this clown army thing again.' I meet someone one evening who described a clown going to a check out counter with this box of napkins. Then blowing them and doing an action. I think it was the Philadelphia Clown Block. And then blew their nose with this box of hankerchiefs. And I found it extremely funny. As an image its just kind of burned into my imagination.

I actually went home that night and wrote the first communice of circa. Bush was coming to town. And thought, ok lets give this a go. And I sent out. And then Larry (Bogad) and jennifer, and a couple of the other clowns. this brings everything together. how what i had seen with activists... all seems worse once involved, then they start to build this activist armor. people stopped this conviviality. clowning stripped away that. stripped that armor down. opened up the vulnerability. stripping down to be this person in this context, who is open. that is the key. how do you have this process that is open again to feeling. it was a bit of a trojan horse, etc. there is a mix of clowning, under this umbrella clowning. it would replace the confrontation with confusion... not enough application... there is not the time and the dedication to the process. ...

Bogad elaborated on this history..

> The clown army began when I was in England teaching political theater and social movement performance at the University of Birmingham. And one of the guys who was a founder of Reclaim the Streets in London, where it first really started, sent out this call for clowns for the Clandestine Insurgent Rebel Clown Army, which didn't yet exist yet was going to form to muster and storm the palace when Bush came to town, to London, under the premise that we're upset that there's been no court jesters allowed in the palace since 1549. And we were so excited they were inviting another fool, but then we found out it was Bush. It was the wrong kind of fool. And now all these fools that we have marshaled into this basically clown army are going to march on them to show them how real fools should be. So we were going to speak, not truth, but mirth to power, 'cause he was the real abuser. So that was our point.
>
> And then John Jordan responded, got back in touch. It was again a thing about a social network integrating into a great action. And so we got down there and met in an old movement resource building, a little place called LARC, the London Action Resource Center. There was a van full of bobbies, of London cops, when I got there, so I knew it was the place. So again, what was great about being in the LARC—and it really all was a lark. As we were rehearsing, there were actually a couple of Americans there who I knew through movement stuff. Another example of the international dimension of the social movement network.

No sooner than the group had had their first actions, than dispatches were arriving for the group from parts unknown. In the Spring of 2004, a note arrived from Chiapas.

May 7th 2004

To the compañeros and compañeras of the Clandestine Insurgent Rebel Clown Army

Brothers and sisters:
"A clown army!" The idea was bewildering, even with my eyes shut I couldn't quite imagine it. All I had to help me was a message all the way from "The South east of London", asking me to write a forward to a "field manual ", signed "General Confusion".

"An army of rebel clowns?" Again I tried to picture it: red noses and machine guns, combat boots and cream pies, military marching and slapstick tumbling - what a ridiculous vision, far too many clashing opposites to make serious sense.

I turned inquisitively to my trusty compañero Durito. His hard black eyes rolled back in their sockets, and if one could hear an insect breathing, then a tiny yet deep exasperated sigh would have been audible above the patter of rain on the huts' tin roof. "You're trying much to hard" he whispered " stop thinking like a guerilla - start thinking like an idiot, it wouldn't be the first time." I took a deep breath, chewed the end of my warm pipe and delicately picked my nose (which I can assure you is not an easy maneuver when wearing a thick woolen balaclava). And like a bucket of cold water, it hit me, with crystal clarity, "The Clandestine Insurgent Rebel Clown Army!" I laughed out loud. What had initially been an un imaginable image, an unthinkable idea, suddenly became one of those baffling confusions which made perfect sense. A fighting force that exists between chaos and order, obedience and disobedience, reason and madness - how perfectly absurd.
That the world is absurd, we know. That to change the world requires as much, if not more absurdity, is less well known. "Serious" politics is often much too knowing to see its own folly whilst "Frivolous" politics is often ignored until the hindsight of history discovers the prophetic wisdom in its folly. Twenty years ago when we came to the jungle from the city, we had the absurd belief that with our guns and ideas we could convince the campesinos to join the revolution. In their wisdom they showed us something completely different - a different kind of life, a different way of seeing, of believing, of rebelling, of being.

The fools from the city, fresh from the reason of universities and revolutionary parties, met those who embodied the ancient wisdom of the land and the forests, who lived the knowledge gained from 500 years of struggle, and eons of myth making and magic. And the indigenous laughed in our face, and with that leveling laugh came a new refreshing logic, a logic that emerged from the chasm of absurdity that divided our distant worlds. A logic that refused to believe in a universe riven with opposites, but instead saw everything connected to everything else. A logic that created a world where there was hope even when hunger and death haunted the everyday - a world where the weak would fight the strong with

> words that were deadlier than any weapon - a world where power was mocked and not yearned for - a world where leaders lead by following - a world where the invisible people became invincible. This was the upside down universe of the Zapatistas, born from the laughter of a people in pain.
>
> "We are you" the Zapatistas declared and not so far away in the circus ring the clown echoes a similar sentiment, "I may be different - a poor scapegoat, a grotesque ludicrous caricature, an object of ridicule " he proclaims, winking at us and smiling anonymously from beneath layers of grease paint. " BUT - you - are - me." The audience laughs nervously, beneath their embarrassed smile they know his antics are honest reenactments of their own folly.
>
> "An army of clowns or a clown army" for I am not sure which is more deadly, is one of those beautiful bewilderments which merges things that one always knew were never really opposites. Perhaps it is something I once dreamed of (or was it one of those half remembered nightmares). Perhaps it is what we in the EZLN have always been, with our eternal hope, wallowing in the mud of this jungle. Perhaps one day when our guns become useless we will replace our masks with your red noses.
>
> Fellow clowns, rebels and combatants of CIRCA I wish you the indestructible luck of fools in your many struggles, wobbles, pratfalls and pranks.
>
> I wish you pockets filled with hope that never runs out and hearts filled with musical beats that build a future of life, liberty and dignity.
>
> Vale. Health to you, my friends. The clown's flower spits water, the protestor's flower blocks the barrel of a gun and the earth, meanwhile, laughs in flowers.
>
> From the mountains of the Mexican southeast.

The note, was signed by Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos. Yet, there were those who suspected it may have been penned by one of the rebel clowns themselves.

Bogad, continues, describing the group's use of play:

> First of all, again, in our making costumes together, in our rehearsing. It was absolutely about theater games. Like straight-up theater games, and then we kind of made up and riffed on our own theater games as well. So we'd do games of mime or gesture or playing with a deformity. That sounds pretty serious, but its serious play. One of the things we did was: now imagine you have a deformity, now make it something you are really proud of. Then you are all going around the room as these tragic clowns, these buffoons who are like

> outcasts. My character had been disemboweled in the war, so he was always holding his guts up.

David Solnit, who participated in the CIRCA actions, suggested the clowning helped diffuse the police presence at the actions. “Clowning puts them in a different space,” Solnit explained, referring to the police. “It dramatically shifted relations with the police. It kind of opened a space in people’s imaginations.”

Solnit has not been the only person to make this observation. In her famous essay about the Seattle WTO protests, Starhawk (2002) described the actions as “a celebration of life and creativity and connection, that remained joyful in the face of brutality and brought alive the creative forces that can truly counter those of injustice and control.” I asked Starhawk if play and humor had functioned as a response to social controls. She explained:

> I think it can be a very effective response because it’s not what they expect. In Scotland with the G8, just when the clowns showed up the cops started laughing. They didn’t know quite what to do. A bunch of guys show up with Molotov cocktails and sticks, the cops know what to do. They’re primed for that. And it’s very predictable. A bunch of clowns show up, now what do we do?

Jordanalso reflected on the question:

> Doing the clown stuff has really opened my eyes to that in a way that is so obvious. The clown thing involved play, and playing an enormous amount. And game playing, and politics, but touching each other and not taking ourselves seriously and learning to let go in the process. During the process, one of the old RTS people who is now involved in clowning in Belgium came up to me and said, “Can you imagine what it would have been like to play at RTS meetings? What it would have done and how it would have changed the social relations in that meeting?” [see Mike Smith essay points on ice-breakers in meetings IS THIS SUPPOSED TO BE LEFT IN HERE?]. And I have seen it. You do enter a space of trust; you enter a space which is more convivial. And for me, the key of any radical politics is trying to create an atmosphere which supports warm, convivial social relations.

If play is going to be part of the protest tactics, has to be part of the process. You see this with children. When children play, sometimes they do battle with each other. But there is also an experimenting with reality, within a space between work and leisure, which is a fantastical space. “Its also a space in which you learn,” Jordan reflected. As you see with children, they learn from play experiments what is real and what is not. Jordan continued:

> Now I look back on RTS, and what an irony that all these experiments with theater and pleasure and play and carnival, and yet in the process itself there wasn’t any of that. Even though we talked about prefigurative politics all the time. And with the clowns, my point was that if clowning was going to be part of the protest tactics, then it had to be part of the process. There was an awareness of how transformative a lot of the clown exercies were. And so we had transformative moments in the process and not just in the streets. Everyone has those moments of personal transformation during particular actions in the streets. But actually trying to get those in the process was actually really interesting to me. A lot of the clowning was very much about breaking down your kind of armor, letting go, a lot of quite intense exercises.

Jordan also reflected on CIRCA’s strengths and limitations:

> The clowns were interested in speaking to the media. The media really found it impossible to criminalize the clowns. They tried. But it was pretty damned cool. We saw people feeling some kind of empathy. Something interesting was happening, or simply finding it funny. It was that simple. In a way that they would not find with someone screaming and yelling at them, better than being yelled at... There were lovely moments. A friend of mine said for example that he talked with people watching in the park, who’d not really been political who said, “we saw the clown army and we understood for the first time what it was all about.” There were moments when we saw people in cafés who’d smile and would wave through the windows and just all of that in a way that they wouldn’t if it was the spectacle. But in their imagination, they have a reference point which was about pleasure, the circus, and clowns. And their reference point with the black bloc would be terror and violence. Suddenly you are opening a reference of pleasure, where people can smile and wave out their window. And there were funny moments. There were funny, funny moments.

Art, Creativity, and Victory in an Anti-Corporate Campaign

While Jordan left the G8 protests with an acute awareness that radical clowning advanced countless storylines, the model had limitations as counterpublic critiques

skipped from the margins to the center of the public sphere. Clowning was not able to provide "life rafts" for those with little else. Solnit, on the other hand, left the G8 meetings and continued with his work on a campaign he'd worked on for long time, which used play and helped provide people with life rafts.

The final campaign in this section offers another example of the use of creative direct action and community organizing, yet in a strikingly different context: the successful campaign by the Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW) for better pay from Taco Bell. Like the garden activists, this campaign made use of a prefigurative organizing model. Solnit, who worked on the campaign, elaborates on this form of organizing: "I think it's essential to think below the surface, from the gut; if we don't learn to articulate the core roots of the problems we face, we'll always be on the defensive."

For years, Taco Bell had neglected the CIW's simple request: an increase of one penny per pound of tomatoes picked for their tacos, with a guarantee that the increase go to the farmworkers. And it's no wonder: such slim margins translate into large profits. The demands of migrant and immigrant workers, such as the mostly Haitian, Latino, and Mayan Indian immigrants subsisting on subpoverty wages throughout Florida who constitute the coalition, are a low priority for companies such as Taco Bell who stand to profit from their labor. Poverty among migrant farmworkers saves consumers some $50 per year (Schlosser 2003). Thus, campaigns for increased worker wages face an uphill battle. At first, Taco Bell refused to even acknowledge the CIW's requests. But the company reached out after the CIW staged a guerilla performance/production of a mock

wedding between a ten-foot-tall Queen Cheap Tomato and King Taco Bell in the street facing their corporate headquarters in Irvine, California (Renz, 2005).

Fast-forward five years. Facing a mounting boycott and pressures from workers, students, and activists around the world, Taco Bell agreed to the core demands advanced by the CIW on March 8, 2005. The CIW could thus celebrate what amounted to a complete victory against one of the largest fast food corporations in the world (Solnit, 2005).

Solnit suggests that the campaign can be understood as a best-practice example for a Global Justice Movement facing a praxis divide. Through its use of guerilla theater, organizers involved in the campaign successfully bridged the movement's broad critique with an effective organizing strategy and messaging. This also helped bring new workers into the campaign. After all, Solnit suggests, "People join campaigns that are fun and hopeful. It's always been there—in the Civil Rights Movement, art helped shut down the WTO." This creativity helped highlight the social and economic issues involved in their campaigns in countless engaging ways. These involved combinations of art, research, well-targeted theatrics, and grassroots, non-hierarchical organizing utilized by the CIW.

Much like the Lower East Side Community Labor Coalition (CLC), which achieved victory for greengrocery workers in New York City in 2001 (Ness, 2002), the organizing done by the CIW brought together many of the same boisterous coalitions—including neighborhood, public space, labor, student, immigrant, and anarchist groups—that fueled the global justice movement's ascendance. As with the CLC and many of the most successful campaigns since then, those most affected—in this

case, immigrant and community groups—led the campaign. “We are all Leaders,” proclaimed one campaign slogan.

A vital part of this consciousness-raising included an engagement between art, playfulness, and creativity capable of inspiring action. The CIW explains: “By looking at the roots of the agricultural industry’s problem, we were able to come up with a strategy to change the problems that we face in our community. We do this through popular education: flyers, drawings, theater, videos, weekly meetings, and visits to the camps. We draw on the innate leader that exists in every worker” (quoted in Solnit, 2005).

Community building was also a vital element of the success of the campaign. The CIW worked from their local bases to expand a series of networks that allowed coalition allies to feel part of this community. These networks helped transform the isolated struggle of one of the least visible communities in the world into one of the most connected and well-publicized struggles in North America.

As with ACT UP and countless other movement groups, a consciousness of the global dynamics of the struggle helped cultivate a solidarity which invigorated the campaign. “[W]hen we came to understand that the root of our problem was located at a much higher level, we knew we would have to get our voices heard all across the nation,” (quoted in Solnit, 2005). And thus, the momentum steamrolled.

In many respects, the Taco Bell boycott built on the vitality of the global justice movement’s political agenda prior to the post-9/11 backlash. In the summer of 2001, before the terror attacks, the Harvard Living Wage Campaign galvanized the nation. U.S. Senators, student activists, and antiracism and poverty activists found common ground and worked together to fight for a social and political agenda that challenged the idea that

it is okay for workers to live and work in sub-poverty conditions (Shepard, 2004d). The CIW began their work within this same milieu:

> When we announced a national boycott of Taco Bell on April 1, 2001, we had no idea that this movement would grow as fast or as far and as wide as it would. We knew that we needed to get the word out about the conditions in Florida's fields to people all across the country, and so began to plan a cross-country tour. Through that process we came into contact with people all across the country who were already concerned with the issues of globalization, sweatshops, human rights, social justice, immigrant workers, etc. And in the different communities where the tour would pass, we gave the different groups who were working on these different issues an opportunity to get together to plan for a visit from a hundred farmworkers from Florida. When we went to these groups we weren't asking them to support our work or our campaign, we were asking them to become our allies and to take on the campaign as their own (Solnit, 2005).

Thus, in the same way that the Zapatista movement built an ethos that allowed anyone with a laptop computer to become part of their community, the CIW invited citizens from around the world to participate and feel part of their struggle. In this way, leadership and community emerged in bountiful ways. As the CIW explain: "Our network spread and grew like wildfire. And suddenly, wherever we would go and mention that we were from Immokalee, it would illicit the reaction, 'Oh, the tomato pickers' or 'Yo no quiero Taco Bell'" (quoted inSolnit, 2005).

Yet for the campaign to sustain itself through the years as much of the vitality of the global justice struggle was overtaken by a push for perma-war, the CIW built on an approach that broke down the struggle into a series of winnable goals, as described by Saul Alinsky. Certainly art and culture helped the coalition stay engaged and move forward. The CIW explains: "The corporations who we are fighting have multi-million dollar advertising budgets, we the farmworkers from a small and resource poor community don't have the same kind of access to the media," (quoted in Solnit, 2005).

What the CIW did have was a conscious appreciation of the intoxicating possibilities of creative play. Combined with a willingness to make use of the tools of popular education, story-telling, art, and joy, this spirit helped advance a winning organizing strategy. Solnit explains:

> We have to be creative about communicating our story. Art, images, and theater played a very important role. We were able to show through their use what the reality of our lives is really like. We were able to catch people's attention by making our marches and protests colorful and fun. And through the images and signs, we were able to more effectively communicate our message to anyone who might have driven by or seen us on the news or in the newspapers (quoted in Solnit, 2005).

The result of the campaign was a successful prefigurative "yes" to community and the rights of workers. The CIW victory is an inspiration, and a future best-practice model for those involved in campaigns for global justice.

Conclusion:
Reflections, Findings, and Methodological Notes on the Study of Play in Social Movements

For Johan Huizinga (1950), "The *fun* of playing resists all analysis, all logical interpretation. As a concept, it cannot be reduced to any other mental category" (p. 3). Despite such foreboding, this study offers a preliminary exploratory attempt at presenting a history and analysis of the play element in social movement action over five decades of community organizing for social change. The following summarizes the findings and offers a conclusion. Additionally, it is useful to review some of the methodological approaches used. After a brief review of methods and a discussion of rigor in qualitative methods, the rest of this concluding chapter will address the findings.

Review of Key Questions and Methods

To review, the statement of the problem for this study was: In recent years, there has been an upsurge in creative protest. From the birth of the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP) in 1987 through the rise of the Global Justice Movement in 1999, the largest day of protest in history on February 15, 2003, and the Republican National Convention (RNC) protests of 2004, and the Immigrant Rights Protests of 2006, the streets of cities around the world have been filled with a new theatrical model of protest. Elements of creative play are cornerstones of this new approach toward protest and community building. While some critics suggest protest is no longer useful for creating social change (Loew, 2005), advocates suggest the practice needs to be better

understood and analyzed. Supporters note that some campaigns that utilized creativity achieved policy wins (Crimp, 2002; Solnit, 2005); other organizing campaigns resulted primarily in community building. Thus, the question emerges: Can social and creative play/organizing bridge these two streams of social change practice? And if so, what are the best practices in this work? To answer this question, one must grapple with the question: Is creative protest useful for creating social change? In what ways does social, cultural, and creative play contribute to or undermine social change activism? Social change activism is designed to assist people by challenging social inequalities, while changing the customs, institutions, or culture of a society.

To answer these questions, I interviewed organizers about their experience and work as knowing practitioners. I asked respondents to consider the role of creativity, pleasure, and play in urban protest and community-building practice. I considered the history of creative protest, looking at how this practice has changed over time and why. Primary questions include: "Is success found through community building or achieving external successes or both?" "What are the strengths, limitations, and possibilities for the creative activist project born between ACT UP and the global justice movement?" "Is creative protest and community building a viable alternative to traditional models of organizing and politics?" and "In what contexts can creative, playful, fun approaches to organizing practices result in practical shifts in people's lives?"

The study builds on an applied research tradition, addressing problems important to society. The aim of this research was to develop an understanding of the strengths and limitations of play, creative direct action, and performance in the new community organizing.

As a definition of play, this work builds on anthropologist Huizinga's 1950 work, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture.* Here, Huizinga describes play in a way that encompasses many of the threads established in this opening discussion:

> Summing up the formal characteristics of play we might call it a free activity standing quite consciously outside the ordinary life as being "not serious," but at the same time absorbing the player intensely and utterly…
>
> It promises the formation of social groupings which tend to surround themselves with secrecy and to stress their difference from the common world by disguise or other means.
>
> Having its aim in itself and accompanied by a feeling of tension, joy, and consciousness that it is different from ordinary life (Huizinga, 1950, 13).

Today, many direct action groups revel in their "free activity" outside ordinary life. They find a vitality in the paradoxes of play, the struggle between tension and joy, anxiety and release. Their work vacillates between generative, sexual expressions in addition to darker, riskier forms of play (Mains, 1984/2002; Schechner, 2002). A rich, theoretical framework for an understanding of play exists within a number of distinct camps of thought. A few of these include writings on play from psychoanalysis (Marcuse, 1955, 1969; Reich, 1970; Winnicott, 1971; Sutton Smith, 1997), anthropology (Huizinga, 1950; Caillois 1958, 1979), performance studies (Schechner 2002; Boal, 1990; Orenstein, 1998; Bogad, 2005), social work (Addams, 1910/1998, 1914; Shepard, 2005, 2005b; Weissman, 1990),; labor studies (Aronowitz, 1973/1993), and the Situationists (Debord, 1967/1994; Vaneigem, 1967/2003).

In terms of social movement activity, this study builds on public sphere theory (Habermas, 1962/2000; Fraser, 1989, 1995; Warner, 1993,1999, 2002) and narrative theory of social movements (Fine, 1995) to consider a series of competing narratives. The

study considers the ways different tribes of players within counter-publics use play to interact and push their stories into the larger public debate (Brouwer, 2001).

For a study of social movements, public sphere theory is especially useful. For many, a primary component of social change involves the shift of movement narratives from counter-public space into the larger public sphere of debate, discussion, and policy change. While civil society is said to function as a place for citizens to meet to discuss problems and create solutions, there are countless barriers. Yet ideally it stands as an intermediary between the government and the market. When any one of these is lost, democracy is jeopardized. Public sphere theory assumes that a public sphere operates as a form of civil society. Activists seek to inject different points of view – different voices from subaltern counter-publics – into larger policy debates. Thus, a lively public sphere where diverse voices thrive becomes a harbinger for a successful democracy. Queer theorist Michael Warner (2002), after all, suggests that tensions over queer life, family, and public sexual culture can be understood as struggles between a dominant mainstream public sphere and a radical subaltern counter-public. Thus, for Warner, debates about public sexual culture function as contests over the nature of pluralistic democracy. In this study creative play was found to be a primary tool outsiders use to propel their own collective culture tales into the broader public debates of democratic life.

Research Design and Data Analysis

This study makes use of qualitative research methods (Patton, 2002). The face-to-face interview is the main research tool. Interviews were conducted about the play, work, practice, and organizing involved with activism. Data were organized and analyzed from

an inductive, bottom-up, rather than deductive, top-down, approach (Straus and Corbin, 1990). The study protocol offered a useful way for the researcher to compare the interview question responses from a wide range of interviews.

The primary data source for the study was information-rich interviews with those involved in social action-based practice. Community organizers, movement participants, and their organizations are the subject of analysis. I recruited knowing practitioners from the above listed groups. Each camp uses tactics that include playful, creative approaches to social change activism. Organizers were initially recruited through community-organizing email lists. After interviews were completed, interviewees were requested to provide the names of other possible subjects, following a snowball method (see Rubin and Babie 1993, p. 367-8).

Primary interview data was compared with additional archival data sources, which were compared with secondary data sources. The study made use of a constant comparative, inductive approach to data analysis (Butters, 1983; Straus and Corbin 1990) of the individual case studies (Snow and Trom 2002) as well as a search for historical themes and mediations (Butters, 1983). Here the themes within the study of play overlap with consideration of the historic context and data of each narrative collected (Grele 1996; Martin 1995). Data is presented within a historical framework and overarching historical narrative. The study of play in social movement activity cannot be divorced from the historical context in which ludic activity takes place. Different eras involve differing degrees of tolerance for "free activity standing quite consciously outside the ordinary life." Such a framework for the presentation of the case studies involves a trajectory of play in social movements that stretches over five decades and three

continents. While it is difficult to suggest that qualitative research can be considered generalizable, the scope of the study does offer conditions that indicate this is not a limited phenomenon.

Rigor and Relevance in Qualitative Research

Every researcher who conducts a qualitative study must somehow contend with the issue of rigor. Different researchers define and understand the term in different ways. At its core, rigor is the extent to which an investigation's findings can be viewed as valid and credible. Are these findings a contribution to the field? Did the methods used produce findings that can be viewed as authentic and noteworthy (Padgett, 1998)? Debates about rigor and relative merit, as well as criteria of qualitative methods, often involve debate about the very nature of social work knowledge (Goldstein 1990; Pieper 1994). Others, such as Epstein (2000), have suggested that the criteria for research method have more to do with a research question than the methodology. He points out that some of the most radical social work research (e.g., Piven and Cloward, 1993) has involved quantitative methods. There is no clear relationship between study method choice and political ideology. Thus, the choice of method for the study involved matching the reasoning of my problem statement with the appropriate research strategy. This study's open-ended exploratory question was best matched with a qualitative design.

At the core of the debate about criteria for evaluating qualitative research are different philosophical views of what constitutes social science; here positivism is seen to contrast with postmodernism. A brief consideration of these conflicts is useful. After all, this debate is rooted in a core debate about rationality vs. feeling. For a study of a form of

creative affect that has far more to do with poetry than linear, logical thought, this debate is quite relevant.

The roots of positivism are born of the Enlightenment and the idea of human mastery over a natural environment. Its champions included sociology's founder, Auguste Comte, author of *The Course of Positive Philosophy* (1830-42), who coined the term; British philosopher John Stuart Mill, who elaborated on these principles in *A System of Logic*; and Emile Durkheim (1982), who wrote about the idea in his seminal text, *The Rules of Sociological Method*. According to intellectual historian H. Stuart Hughes (1961), the term *positivism* has been used to describe the tendency to discuss human behavior in terms of analogies drawn from natural science. Much of late-19th and early-20th-century intellectual history is marked by a revolt against positivism. If positivism assumed a series of universal truths about the social scene, positivist critics point out, "The study of society they gradually came to see as a vastly more complicated matter than one of merely fitting observed data into a structure of human thought that was presumed to be universal…" (Hughes, 1961, p. 16).

As a corrective to this, social researchers started inserting a clearer stage of reflection into their documentation of their data. The result was a closer focus and acknowledgement of personal interpretation of data (Rainbow and Sullivan, 1987). A by-product of this shift a reconsideration of core assumptions of knowledge, 'a wholesale re-examination of the presuppositions of social thought itself," (quoted in Hughes, 1961, 16; also see Butters, 1983; Kohut, 1958/1979). The result was a new awareness of the subjective nature of social thought. Others described this as a shift toward a more reflective approach that acknowledges the use of interviewer as instrument in social

research (Myerhoff and Ruby 1982/1992). Yet this turn involved more than method. It involved core questions about what constituted a valid subject for social research. "Unquestionably, the major intellectual innovators of the 1890s were profoundly interested in the problem of irrational motivation in human conduct," Hughes concedes. "They were obsessed, almost intoxicated, with a discovery of the non-logical, the uncivilized, the inexplicable," (p. 35).

For a study of the role of play in social movements, the consideration of the irrational is of prime importance. The study of play in social movements is about both the importance of the logic of the presentation of play as part of external action, as the emotional importance of affective play in group process, banter, and development. Thus, the study of play involves a consideration of the importance of both linear social action and labyrinthine, frivolous ways of thinking and approaching social change. Such thinking is not unfamiliar within social thought. Even Max Weber (1946/68) worried about the lack of meaning in a bureaucratized, hyper-rational society. While Weber could see few options outside of logical bureaucracy, he did see reasons to consider the paradoxes of play, frivolity, and the irrational (p. 85-6). He sought to assess the complex limitations as well as the necessities of a rational view of social action. While less organized or coherent forms of thought tend to be displaced within bureaucratized societies, the craving for emotional outlets remains. Within social movements, the study of play is part of a search for meaningful, fulfilling social action.

Concerning the effective study of this effort, Pagent (1998) offers six strategies for enhancing rigor in qualitative research: prolonged engagement, triangulation, peer

debriefing and support, member checking, negative case analysis, and an audit trail (p. 95). The following considers the use of each of these strategies in the present study.

As far as *prolonged engagement*, I spent some seven years as a highly active, albeit occasionally frivolous, participant in the final four case studies presented within this report- ACT UP, SexPanic!, Reclaim the Streets, and the Clandestine Rebel Clown Army.

Data *triangulation* was a primary source of data analysis. Diversity of method, combining multiple sources of data, is perhaps the most useful way for compensating for pitfalls in the logic of an inquiry. The study made use of multiple forms of data, including historic materials, face-to-face interviews (often with multiple subjects involved in the same organizations and actions), and first-hand observation. In qualitative research, the investigator is seen as a research instrument; this includes the observer's close consideration of the interview subjects, his/her questions, tests of propositions, and comparisons with observed reality. Multiple data sources neutralize the opportunity for bias. Thus, the use of primary historic archival materials as well as writings helped reduce investigator bias, such as leading questions. Historical materials, such as Abbie Hoffman's writings (1989), Sara Schulman oral history interviews with ACT UP members, and Tina Takemoto's interview with Douglas Crimp (2003), offered telling accounts of the use of play in creative community organizing practice outside the purview of this researcher. Further, the study made use of multiples theoretical frameworks, including public sphere theory and narrative theory of social movements, as well as multiple perspectives on play.

The study benefited from extensive *peer debriefing and support* among other social movement scholars and practitioners. A fixture of my life in New York is ongoing dialogue about the efficacy of social movement practice and scholarship within the context of email, online discussion groups, informal in-person discussions, and salons among peers. In these monthly meetings, the researcher cannot be divorced from the ongoing realities and imperatives of organizing practice.

Given the dawn of the Internet, *member checking* among interviewees has become relatively easy. The practice of allowing subjects to review interview transcripts has become a relatively common feature of ethnographic research, and this study is no different. I sent copies of interview transcripts to every interviewee after I had finished transcribing them. Sometimes I included brief questions and preliminary bits of data analysis. Some interviewees never got back to me. Others sent long emails with colorful responses to questions. Others, such as Ann Northrop, asked that they get a second chance to review quotes. Still others sent updated transcripts. Others, such as Vicente "Panama" Alba, insisted that we complete another interview to clarify pieces of analysis. Here, member checking provided a useful source of data about the different cultural contexts for interpretation of play and drama in social movements.

The case of the Young Lords offered a *negative case analysis*. Such negative cases are included to help the researcher consider opposing or "devil's advocate" research positions. Certainly Panama's counsel offered such a position. The study of the Young Lords effectively provided the useful finding that play takes place in different social, economic, and cultural contexts, but with fundamentally different views of play. Yet even in groups such as the Young Lords – which work in very heavy serious, contexts – play

in the broadest sense informs group dynamics and process. Music and poetry were an important aspect of the group dynamics of the Young Lords. When members were arrested after a banner drop at the Statue of Liberty, a long-time family friend of one of the arrestees, Tito Puente, played a fundraiser to finance their legal costs (Melendez, 2003).

Finally, as for an *audit trail*, this study been constructed with a spirit of openness. The study guide is available for those interested in attempting to replicate the research; data strips of interview results are presented openly and analyzed with an air of transparency. Limitations of space exclude the presentation of data coding and indexing. Still, each of Pagent's six strategies for enhancing rigor has been addressed within the construction and analysis of the data.

Findings

For Yippies, play involved the creative prank; for gay liberationists, play was a code word for pleasure; for AIDS activists, safe play became the order of the day, while subversive humor, street theatrics, pranks, and zaps were used to move an agenda; for DIY activists, play was part of a prank tradition, now known as culture jamming, that originate with the Situationists. For gay liberationists, ACT UPpers, and members of SexPanic! play fostered creativity; creating spaces for play was respected as a legitimate movement aim, and defending civic space overlapped with struggles to create a different public sphere. For public space activists, the imperative to act involved an effort to create and defend places to play with a burlesque of DIY protest. For global justice activists, play was part an effort to counter the privatization of public space, a way to help people build their own commons; for antiwar activists, play was part of an effort to offer a

counternarrative to war. For many, play offers a life-affirming response to death and war. Here, play represents a counterbalance to disengagement; it is a way to stay engaged rather than fall into depression and personal alienation.

As the study was in its gestation period in 2003, a majority of the U.S. Supreme Court ruled against sodomy statutes with the *Lawrence v. Texas* decision, thereby overturning the 1986 *Bowers v. Hardwick* decision that so galvanized earlier queer activists. Certainly, the decision was not perfect. Queer activists were quick to recognize that the law only supported private—not public—behavior. Nevertheless, it was still a powerful victory. If ever there was a case that demonstrated the vitality of social movement work, this was it. In 1986, an overall far more progressive Supreme Court voted in favor of criminalizing homosexual acts in private spaces. Over the ensuing twenty years, the American public witnessed wave after wave of queer activism and visibility. Along the road, a counter-public message moved from the margins to the center of public debate. The counter-public narrative—that queer sexuality is a healthy part of the pursuit of happiness in a pluralistic democracy—become a winning script.

The discursive contours of social movement activity have impacts in countless different ways. In his majority opinion in the *Lawrence* case, Reagan appointee Anthony Kennedy simply stated that he knew homosexuals and felt he could not rule that what they did at home constituted a criminal act. It all sounded very reasonable. But only seventeen years earlier, a similar court was not able to conclude that this was a legitimate position. Yet, between 1986 and 2003, ACT UP had used every tool at their disposal, including radical play, to advance a less homophobic, more inclusive narrative of queer life. For Mary Bernstein (2004), the *Lawrence* decision was discursive victory. Through

nearly two decades of challenging public beliefs, the views of society were radically changed in profound and unexpected ways. “I argue that theorists must understand not only a movement’s political impact, but its mobilization and cultural effects, including the creation of alternative discourse, community-building, and empowerment as well,” Bernstein states (2004, p. 6). Sometimes social change is more than achieving an immediate policy goal within a desired time frame. As Bernstein explains, “Political campaigns are often as important for their effect on communities, organizations, and identities as they are for the laws they change” (p. 6).

As Rebecca Solnit (2004) suggests, it is not always easy to know exactly what impact a social movement is having. It is not always so clear what effects are taking place. In the days after 9/11, many activists I knew started to talk about the notion of building communities of resistance and support.

Countless interviewees suggested that these communities are the most important things they have. Sometimes the community impact leads to cultural changes that in turn change hearts and minds. In other cases, they keep people engaged in the struggle.

Interviewees were asked to discuss how creative play contributes to or undermines social change activism. In the following section, I will highlight a few aspects of play that interviewees said work or do not work in social movement action.

The Strengths of Play

As far as strengths, interviewees suggested that play is useful for social change movements because:

- It feels good.
- It animates culture.

- It helps keep things light—even during dark times.

- It prevents burnout; it helps people stay in the streets.

- It fosters creativity.

- This creativity can help achieve movement aims, while keeping police on their toes.

- It recognizes pleasure.

- It creates stories.

- It expands the public commons and makes democracy more colorful.

- It helps actors propel their culture tales into the larger public discourse.

- It helps garner media attention to new narratives and calls for action.

- It helps actors reinvent protest repertoires.

- It reduces alienation.

- It creates humor.

- It creates hope.

- It gets people to think.

- It fosters networks and leadership.

- As a low threshold activity, it brings people into organizing.

- It helps cultivate social Eros.

- It helps combat mechanisms that control the body and political activity.

- It makes protest feel compelling and inviting, rather than boring.

When social actors organize in engaging, thoughtful ways, their work usually attracts followers. Through play, others are seduced to join. From the Yippies to ACT UP to Reclaim the Streets, when groups offered a low-threshold entry point that seemed fun, loads of activists joined. During Stephen Gendin's funeral, one of his former boyfriends

said he never wanted to go to jail more than the day he saw Gendin getting busted at the 1987 March on Washington; he couldn't think of a more appealing place to be than a confined jail cell with this fellow activist (*POZ* 2000). Here, play as sex, such as in ACT UP and SexPanic!, can be distinguished from play as pure silliness, such as with the Yippies or Reclaim the Streets. Sometimes people join groups to dance; in other cases, such as with Gendin's friend, they want to hook up. Yet, certainly as the Esperanza Coqui stories illustrates, hooking up in social movements is certainly not purely the realm of queer activists. In other cases, participating has more to do with the contact high. From ACT UP to the Black Block types, there are 'adrenaline junkies' who find battling police and getting tear gased much more fun than dancing in the street. Many actually regard it as a form of dark play, not just serious direct action. In others cases, the streets are about serial eros. Sometimes attraction to a specific person can be an important part of the passion to build a better world for everyone. While Gendin and the other members of ACT UP were getting arrested in Washington in 1987, queer activists were waging a discursive struggle that changed hearts, minds, and the opinions of Supreme Court justices (Bernstein, 2004). Like the efforts of the Gay Activist Alliance (GAA) a generation before to get the American Psychiatric Association to redefine homosexuality as a healthy outlet rather than pathology, play and pleasure, policy and planning, accompanied these later struggles. And they were certainly struggles. The GAA pleasure committee often clashed with its political committee (Kantrowitz 1977/1996). There is always more to play than pure fun.

From Church Ladies to community garden activists to radical clowns, play has been viewed as a useful approach to diffuse power. It was thought of as a way to

effectively present a point without engaging in violent conflict. When the Church Ladies performed in front of women's health clinics, they drew the ire of Operation Rescue, while the clients were able to access clinic services. When Wavy Gravy, the Yippee clown, played with police in 1976, people were able to laugh in 1976. Three decades later, when the Clandestine Insurgent Rebel Clown Army (CIRCA) included the police in their improvisational theater of the absurd during the 2005 G8 meetings in Scotland, the police backed away (Harvie et al, 2006). The New York CIRCA chapter did not receive similar treatment during the Republican National Convention in 2004: while they were clowning, the police had no interest in playing along. Yet when the Critical Mass bike ride in New York was attacked by police in 2005, the presence of clowns provided a needed lift.

Listening to the Crazies

While play is often misunderstood, supporters of playful activism appreciate its sheer silliness, its spirit of fun and freedom, its capacity to provide levity even during periods of repression, and finally, for its low-threshold approach to helping activists stay involved and reinvent repertoires so they can be active agents in the process of social change rather then passive spectators.

At its best, play is useful for instructive purposes. It helps activists get what they need to stay involved. Without some element of play, many people stop coming to protests. One interviewee, Gay Liberation organizer Eric Rofes, suggests it's like food. "I've often realized that most people who sustain themselves as organizers need to have fun and need to get social and cultural and pleasure needs met through organizing."

For many social change practitioners, play is a useful way to engage in thinking about another way of being in the world. While standing in line waiting to get inside the hearings on redevelopment of the Williamsburg Brooklyn waterfront, I spoke with Donald Gallagher of the Church of Stop Shopping and the Radical Faeries. "Do you think radical play makes us a richer democracy?" I asked. "I think so," he replied:

> People are so stuck in images of what they are supposed to be, what they should be, how high the building should be. Like this should be a forty-story building instead of a neighborhood, just to break through that miasma that people are in, like they were hypnotized somehow. We should break right through into a place with fun. Be who you are. It's allowed, no matter how foolish or silly that may actually be. Those things kind of go together, don't they?

For many activists, the struggle involves breaking through a grand mystification, a one-dimensional element of our culture that reduces social actors to passive spectators (Marcuse, 1964). Actors are inhibited from action, from being connected with their bodies, their passions, or their capacities to act for change (Reich, 1970).

"Capital," John Jordan explains. "[I]t needs sadness, the social and individual sadness. The tyrant needs sadness." Therefore, Jordan's activism has involved a core ambition: "Break sadness. Make people laugh and give pleasure, enable them to disobey the fundamental docile body." For him, play and ritual overlap with a fundamental set of embodied experiences that combine head, hand, and heart, linking bio, psycho, and social functioning. "It's fundamental to breaking the famine," Jordan explained. Yet it is also about recognizing different aspects of knowledge, some of which come from the gut, others of which come from the peripheries of our experiences in the world. "And it's also giving people the potential to see another way of being," he adds. "And then to take that

into other parts of their lives." Here, individuals learn to listen to their own bodies and recognize this linkage with their minds, their lives, and their communities.

Bob Kohler first learned this lesson when he started meeting the street youth who would later ignite the Stonewall Riots. Kohler had changed careers and was spending a lot of time in the public spaces of his neighborhood in Greenwich Village. At Sheridan Square, he used to listen to the stories the youth told him about their experience. He had no idea that youth such as this experienced so much abuse at home – cigarette burns and such – from parents when they found out they were gay (See Mallon, 1998). And later those youth moved to the city, where it was safer to be homeless and hustling than remain at home. These were the street youth who rioted at Stonewall. Some thirty-five years after the riots, Kohler was invited to participate in an interview about the history of the gay liberation movement:

> It's like when I was interviewed by Spanish TV and they asked if I had any advice and I said, yes I do. Listen to the crazies. This is the kind of thing that Sylvia Rivera could bring to a riot. Marsha P. Johnson could bring to a riot. And we don't have them now. And this is the problem. We don't have these people.

The insights of "the crazies" into alternative ways of being in the world often provide the catalyst for creating a different kind of world. "I think we ought to do this more often," Cleve Jones recalls a friend regaling while burning police cars during the White Night riots in San Francisco in 1979 (quoted in Shepard, 1997, 42). Yet such personalities are often anything but polished. "You absolutely have to listen to the crazies," Kirk Read concurred when I told him this story. For Read, this logic has to do with building a more authentic, less polished, less commercialized vision of queer life and community. The insights of the crazies offer a different kind of social knowledge,

contributing to a non-assimilationist storyline for queer citizenship. Without this perspective, the world is far less interesting for Read:

> It's one of my frustrations when I watch TV and I see these gay spokespeople, or lefty spokespeople. It's almost like they are parodying themselves. There's no sense of surprise or danger. And I feel like that kind of space is every bit as controlled as the most doctrinaire Republican space. So I'm more interested in people who are willing to speak beyond the talking points, whot are doing things that are so scary that whatever groups that are allied with them are nervous.

In contrast to professionalized models of social change practice, low-threshold models of organizing help create space where many – including the policy professionals as well as the crazies – can participate and feel included. Kate Crane explains:

> Sometimes the protests I've been part of have not been the most organized, but they've been fun and everybody's valued as an individual, even the wing-nuts, sometimes to a lesser degree. But everybody's welcome. And sometimes I find that there's always my deep-seated cultural assumptions about who's worthwhile and who isn't—at thirty years old and having been an activist all my life, I still have these middle-class notions about who's worthwhile and who isn't. And I'm constantly struggling with that. In these great fun actions that we do I'm like, oh my god, this person who I thought was a little nutty, they just brought all the colorful hats. Or they just showed up with food for all of us or they're singing loudest of all, or look at that crazy costume that everybody's taking pictures of and laughing at.

Here, less serious, playful approaches to organizing create a context that allows social actors to be seen and valued as full people. It allows them to bring all they have to contribute. Everyone has something they can pitch in. Play creates a space that brings more people into the process. It allows a diverse range of people to participate and to contribute. It allows a place for everyone in, even the crazies.

Thus, play opens up spaces for non-expert paradigms in organizing. Roughly translated, it helps organizers with different degrees of skill and professional training be

part of the process of social change. James Tracey, who works as an organizer with the homeless in San Francisco and writes books of poetry, has done a great deal of work to integrate the two tasks. When working with homeless and non-homeless youth, poetry has helped build on an ongoing dialog. For Tracey, poetry is a way to raise different kinds of voices. It's a way to break down conflicts between analysis and imagination. It stimulates imagination and thinking, and encourages different kinds of questions and stories. And anyone who has access to a pen and a napkin can do it. For Tracey, no revolution would be compete without some poetry. What he shies away from is the notion that play and organizing are zero sum games. "It's not one or the other – all joy versus the necessary organizing stuff. Art and revolution were not invented in Seattle." Playful politics gets people out, Tracey suggests. "Culture is a really good tactic."

Play as Possibility

Of course, the use of culture in organizing is not a new idea. Long-time organizer Si Kahn (1995, p. 575) has long suggested that poetry helps people wake up and become attuned to the message of social change in ways other forms of organizing simply cannot do. The use of culture in organizing involves notions of cultural animation. Here, the organizer works to give life—to animate—a vital cultural resource in a community (Reynolds, 1984). It takes a savvy organizer to help recognize this bit of culture, animate it, and start to engage others in the process of social change. John Sellers, the founder of the Ruckus Society, offers an example:

> One of my favorite things was working on the Anacostia River in Washington, which is usually considered to be either the first or second most polluted river in the country. The predominantly African American neighborhoods around it are some of the poorest in the United States. Clearcut environmental racism, right? The river is super-polluted by toxic PCBs. The fish have been profoundly

> contaminated. They constitute like a one in a thousand cancer death risk when eaten. But lots of folks around the river are so poor that they are still harvesting the fish for food. So one of the things we did, was to hold a classic fish derby. They are done all over the country. People love to fish.

Having recognized this cultural resource—this love of fishing—Sellers and his colleagues sought to animate it, to turn it into a resource for thinking about the environment. Sellers describes what happened next:

> However, our derby was actually a "Tumor Derby." Rather than awarding prizes for the biggest catches, our prizes went to the fish with the most tumors and birth defects. It was a creative way to show the general public how crazy things had gotten in this river. I think one of the first things you learn in organizing 101 is to meet people where they are. I love creative actions that are anchored into mainstream cultural touchstones and then flipped on their heads and taken somewhere radical.

Most important, play keeps protest fresh. As Saul Alinsky once said, you gotta keep it fresh. If you keep doing the same thing over and over again, nobody cares. Mark Harrington of ACT UP and now TAG noted that after a while, people stopped caring as much when ACT UP members locked themselves up to the offices of pharmaceutical companies. They stopped being scared. "People get bored," he says. "The media gets bored,"

Andrew Boyd, the founder of Billionaires for Bush (or Gore), explained. "[Y]our enemy, your target, figures out how to deal with it. You can't reinvent Seattle, you have to be doing something new." In organizing, sometimes the play approach works and sometimes it stops speaking to the public necessary to create change. ACT UP had a good understanding of the multiple publics activists could address to create change. Some groups, such as More Gardens, were able to use play as a tool to communicate with decision-makers in an unthreatening way. Yet sometimes it doesn't work. Boyd explains:

> I always try to turn this stuff around. Like you are some legislator who is pro-choice. And there are some wacko Christian protestors outside. And they have a better puppet than they did last time. Are you going to feel more pressure? No, only if it's a more effective puppet. If it's getting more attention, it's getting people to laugh, getting people into the street or fall in the message. But then you might worry. But if the papier-mâché is better, you don't care.

The lesson that many of the playful activists have brought to the new generation of organizing is the understanding that pleasure counts. Play often invites people into the game of social change. It's a lesson brought from the Yippies and the Gay Liberation Movement and translated through the Global Justice Movement. For many, such as Marla Stevens, the challenge is bringing some of the skills of personal fun, of sexual play, into politics. "It directly translates," Stevens explains.

Wonderful things occasionally happen in the spaces where play and social change intermingle. Here instead of war or violence, people are sometimes assaulted with random acts of kindness. Kirk Read explains:

> When war broke out, I was part of this group called the Committee for Full Enjoyment. We went out dressed all in white, with white face paint, with drums and musical instruments, and our purpose was to change the vibe. We went into places where the police had blocked in like 100 protestors, so all these people would be blocked in. The cops would just be standing there and we'd go in and start singing and start songs, fun song. Not the 2/4/6/8 crap. We would go in and sing bizarre songs that sometimes didn't even have lyrics. Even if people were about to get arrested, at least they would be happy.

A movie called *We Interrupt this Empire* was made about the Direct Action to Stop the War protests in San Francisco in March 2003. Kate Crane writes about the play in the movie:

> Watching *Empire* from my place in the Castro, I'm struck by the true San Fran flavor of the protests. People blocked traffic with yoga: Upward dog! Downward dog! Warrior II! At one lockdown, folks from various walks of life shook their booty and crooned Milli Vanilli at the riot cops: "Girl, you know it's true! Ooo, ooo, ooo, I love you!" (2004b).

There is nothing wrong with people occasionally just enjoying themselves or acting like children. One has to figure out ways to lighten things up from time to time. This is where the fun of play comes it. It is a free activity, involving hands, stories, moving back and forth between reality and fantasy, experiment and frivolity. "The fundamental feature of play is that it is gratifying in itself, without serving any other purpose than that of instinctual gratification," writes Lantos (1943). Without this space, many find it difficult to get back to the harder tasks of life. Groups that play well together are able to stay together and get back to the larger task of organizing. They are better equipped to focus on the tasks at hand; they are more ready to deal with the work of organizing, the active effort of creating change, "to get from the outside world whatever is needed for self-preservation" writes Barbara Lantos (1943).

It is useful for organizers to be clear about what play can and cannot do. Play helps actors convey a counter-public message; it helps create situations; it engenders fun. It is not a substitute for a larger more coherent organizing strategy. As Boyd and Stevens point out, play is one of many tools in the activist toolbox. Stevens explains, "Good organizing, the best organizing, the best organizers have the biggest tool boxes. You use them all to win." Here, play is part of a larger holistic framework for social change, which includes a clear well-articulated proposal, an analysis, media advocacy, and an element of freshness and surprise, with a jigger of intelligence, play, and performance. "It's best to keep 'em guessing about what's going to happen next," Stevens explains. Performative activism works best when linked with a well researched, well defined campaign, as Boyd explains:

> The metaphor I always use, and I think it makes perfect sense, is it's one tool in the toolbox. I get to the point where so many people are asking me questions and

> that's the answer. Then the next question becomes how does that tool articulate what other tools can't do? When do you think that took works? It's actually not one tool, it's a Swiss Army knife with a hundred tools in it. Which blade do you use when? So you have the straight tool and the humor tool, how do you build the house? The answer is, it's one tool. I don't know that you could say it's necessary. It's certainly not sufficient unto itself, but I don't know if you could go quite as far as to say it's necessary. You could almost. In terms of all the things it provides, it's a huge dimension.
>
> Like every social movement should be a microcosm of the human community, of all the things that we are, all the things that we aspire to and all that sort of stuff. It should have gravitas. It should have play in it. It should have mythology. It should have narrative. It should have love. It probably should have hate. It should have id and it should have super ego. You know, it should have authority. And I think it should have leadership and recognized leadership. It also has to have openness and democracy. I mean these are all dialectics and how they work together.
>
> There's certain things play has to offer. It's humanizing. It does this thing where it can ramp down the violence and bring down the tension in the situation. It can make cops laugh. It can kind of empathize with a common humanity on either side of the picket line. In the same way that in CD non-violence training that you are supposed to look the guy in the eyes, it makes it easier[HE MUST MEAN HARDER] to dehumanize. It's an obvious media attractor. It's something that nurtures, that makes everyone have a better time. It's a whole mode of communication unto itself. When you've got a super serious target, it's one way to take away the aura of authority. Like what we did with this guy in the military research lab.
>
> It's like what Saul Alinsky says, 'Ridiculousness is the most potent weapon we have. There is no defense against it.' But this was against the unsophisticated targets he was dealing with in the 1960s. Now everyone is a lot more sophisticated. Everyone is operating in this whole other rarified hipster symbolic media game. But in the 1960s, the targets were not that used to this and they would sort of respond in this kind of unimaginative organization man law-and-order kind of way. And if you were using humor against them, basically a cop beating up a clown looks really bad for the cop.

There are different kinds of policy stages for different kinds of performances.

Subcomandante Marcos (2001) of the Zapatistas has actually re-envisioned their struggle as a theatrical play: The play is a problem. Those directing it are making a huge effort to convince the audience that it's already over. Not only is the public not leaving the premises, they're also insisting on getting up onto the stage. Here, play is intricately connected with a conversation about democracy. Boyd elaborates:

> Well, that is a little bit what we're talking about. We're talking about it as one tool within a repertoire of tools that a social movement has. Again, on its own I don't think that it can do that much. That's why you take the Yes Men for example, they are like incredible at using play and humor and trickery to expose the underlying ideology of the neoliberal whatever. And also do a reductio ad absurdum [reductive and absurd to extrapolate what it really means into the true human costs of it. Like in their last action when they disbanded the WTO and everyone was kind of happy with that. They bring out the sort of invincible operations of even that capitalist class. Like this conservative guy in Australia says, 'It's about time we gave back to the people we've been taking from.' So it has a way to bring all of that stuff out. They are not going to bring down the WTO on their own. They are part of this large social movement. It's like a feedback look within that. Again, they cannot bring down the WTO on their own. But if it was not for a mass global movement and 10,000 little NGOs sort of clawing away at the beast, it would just be art. It would be a noble heroic, tragic, esoteric thing in costumes. I'm not taking away from their brilliance but they operate within this context, right. [For information on the Yes Men WTO prank see Yes Men, Undated].

Play is part of new kind of organizing which links art with performance and pleasure and a struggle to create social change. While there is certainly nothing perfect or ideal about social movements that organize around play, many view them as an important alternative to traditional organizing models. After all, Starhawk explains, "Traditional models of organizing and politics really haven't gotten us very far. So we have to be willing to try other things." The politics of play is very much about thinking of different ways to effect social change. Many practitioners aspire to bridge a praxis divide between fun approaches to community organizing and those that result in practical shifts in people's lives. David Solnit explains:

> I think it's actually essential to think in those frames. So much of how we are controlled is through the use of images, and communication that is below the surface... If we don't learn how to articulate feelings from the heart, feelings from the gut and learn to share them, we'll always be on the defensive. That's one level, another is people join movements that are fun and hopeful. People who are drawn to a dramatic quality, it dramatically shifts the quality. It's always been there, in the civil rights movements.

For many, such as Solnit, the process begins with telling different kinds of community stories. Sometimes the most important step is thinking of an alternative ending for a group of people who tend to live in dead-end stories, lives which seem predetermined. Kate Crane reflects on a conversation she had about storytelling and activism:

> I was talking with Sasha today, he is one of the cofounders [of the Icarus Project –an alternative mental health project]. He said a lot of what the Icarus Project is about is telling stories about our world to ourselves every day. We have these stories. And those stories frame how we live our lives, what we do, what we don't do. He said a lot of what the Icarus Project is about is creating new stories. And I think that theater and creative protest are a really amazing way to tell stories and to create new stories. And that is ultimately at the very core of what this is all about—getting people to think of a new story about what our world is about. [

Such an ethos echoes the aspirations of one of the foundational U.S. cultural movements, the 1950s Beat movement, which used poetry to shift the way people thought about their lives, censorship, and public life. "Not that you go to school and then you go to college and then you get a 9-to-5 job and you fit into this little template," Crane reflects. The Beats suggested that there were other stories, other ways of being in a culture, rather then just fitting into a system of narratives that end up in the same dead ends. For many of the Beat Generation, the poetry of Allen Ginsberg was the first exposure they had had to the idea that they could fight to create something different rather than fit into a system which they did not believe in.

As Keith Cylar of Housing Works always used to say, the job of the social worker is not to ask people to fit in, it's to change the system so there is more room for people to move and grow, find a home and a job and be citizens. For Cylar and Housing Works, there had to be another story. "There are lots of other stories," Crane reflects. "And so how do we get people to think about new stories? That's one of the major roles of

creative protest and of theater. The politics of play, performance, and storytelling is about engaging people without hitting them over the head. “Just getting people to think that something else is possible,” Crane suggests, is a vital step. “That in itself is a huge obstacle. People are really stuck in their ways because it makes them feel safe. People need to feel like the world is a certain way. Otherwise, it can be really scary.”

The politics of play is ultimately about respecting both the audience and the group members. It is about communicating in ways that are engaging and thought-provoking, inviting, and not condescending. “It puts an idea in people’s minds,” explains Amanda Hickman, who provides technology assistance for social service groups. Rather than giving a press release and just saying no to issues, Hickman explains, “Things like the Medicaid funeral highlight issues. It’s accessible and engage able and sustainable.” If a political message is condescending, people really do not want to pay attention. If the process is not engaging or democratic, then people do not tend to want to stay involved. Cindra Feuer, who worked with SexPanic! and ACT UP, explains:

> Ultimately, if you are not having fun or enjoying it, just don’t do it. Yet, there is definitely a role for play. It’s an integral part of any work. If you are not enjoying what you are doing, take another tactic or don’t do it. And also people won’t come back. They can’t sustain it. You can only go so far in your anger and then you really need to be getting enjoyment and fulfillment. So it’s essential.

Not only does play make activism more fun, but it also transforms the way social actors think about efficacy and power. As Subcommandanti Marcos (2001, 2004) and Doug Crimp and others have suggested, play helps direct action groups transform politics and power, away from the conventional tropes into a different kinds of relationships, different types of stories. Crimp suggests play was a distinct part of the politics of ACT UP: “ACT UP made engagement possible for many who were not comfortable with the

typical protest aesthetics. They did this by queering activist heroism and machismo, with a jigger of play." Thus, Crimp explains, "ACT UP made it possible for people to engage in a kind of antiheroic activism by queering it, by making it campy, funny, and ironic." Yet, even with the queerness and camp of ACT UP – men wearing dresses to facilitate meetings – the group still took its struggle very seriously. Here, play offered a different way of engaging with the serious. "[E]ven though there were still some traditional heroics going on," Crimp explains, "there were also ways of debunking them. On one level, ACT UP was very good at puncturing activists' tendencies to take themselves too seriously," (Takemoto, 2003).

Here, not only does play create a different kind of relationship to power and social knowledge, it helps create an outlet for direct action groups to take themselves less seriously? An interplay on an anarchist list serve offers a telling exchange on the interplay between playful responses and movement engagement. "[P]ersonally [I] think the question of taking ourselves seriously is the wrong question and i dont think it's semantics," Jameson (2006) explained. "[I] know ben is a very deicated activist, who clearly takes his shit seriously. even when playing!" As with the accounts of radical clowns, prankers and guerilla gardeners suggest, there is power in camp and self deprecating humor; there is a vitality in a rejection of heroic narratives of protest. The point of Zapatismo is to transform power, not to take it. Here play becomes a means for such engagement. "[W]hat i think is important to mention," jameson (2006) writes,

> is that social protest is often routinized and when it's routinized sometimes it often not only becomes boring to the participants (not the worst of it) but fails in its mission to capture the imagination of wider groups of people. i see playful protest as a tactic and strategy. it's a way of illuminating a problem effectively that sometimes militant protest or boring protest cannot. it's

> a way of creating social knowledge is an effective way that sometimes ordinary protest can't and a way of bridging divides among organizers that sometimes "ordinary" protest can't. it's a communicative act like all others, just a nontraditional way of communicating regarding protest.

Yet, movements for immigrant rights and against the war continue. "[A]nd mass action startegies have failed recently at summit-hopping events (including in soctland where there were armies of clowns)," jameson (2006) suggests the realm of play, "raises an interesting point in general about the ability of our movements to communicate effectively and to illuminate new social knowledge."

While, he apologizes for elevating play into a theory of communication, engagement, and action, jameson (2006) confesses: "sometimes the rhetoric i hear about play in movements comes from a self-serving impulse--the movement is boring, protest is boring, work is boring. [I] hate boring. [I]' not pro-boring." Yet, there is more to play than to break the tedium. "[B]oring is not the only reason to don a clown costume and dance in the streets," Jameson explains. "[I]t's an effective startegy. sometimes. sometimes not. but when, and under what conditions? can we play? can we kick it? yes we can..." Jameson finishes in whimsical flurry. In many respects, this study if a long response to Jameson's caveat, 'under what conditions? can we play? can we kick it?' It builds on what is a long history of community-organizing which makes use of prefigurative organizing approaches that seek to create an image of the world in which activists hope to live. The point of the study has been to tease out the instructive and expressive elements where play or lack of play influenced the distinct character of social movements. It builds on the lessons gleamed from a consideration of play element in direct action groups over nearly forty years to make the case that different kinds of social

knowledge, different views of efficacy and engagement are necessary to sustain movements for social cultural change.

Limitations of Play

Some limitations of play mentioned by interviewees include the following:

- It does not consistently function as an effective response to political repression.
- It can be easily misunderstood
- It can become stale quickly.
- Lack of resources limit its efficacy.
- It does not work alone.
- It is not a substitute for a clear policy proposal.
- It is not a substitute for a holistic organizing strategy.

While interviewees were happy to talk about what worked about play, they were also eager to talk about what did not work. Many of the uses of play are for instructive purposes; these include humor, jokes, and group processes. For external purposes such as political messaging or protest, it is often useful to carefully consider the audience for this message. External ludic play works well when the expression is matched with the goal—such as the defense of a community space such as a community garden or a public bike ride or play space. And the style of the protest does not always match the end goal. Michael Shenker explains:

> There was a style of things that came out after the gardens where you can't really go to a demonstration unless you give out the party toys. You know, I can't get with that. The mode of the expression and the tenor of the expression needs to be proportional to the injury being inflicted. So if a quarter million people have died, it's a little difficult to say we are going to go have a good time without paying some type of tribute through the collective expression which could actually create

> a deeper level of expression of the human experience. Some type of tribute needs to be made to the people who are suffering. There comes a time when we need to transcend ourselves and say we are not Americans or Iraqis, we're human beings.

ACT UP was quite useful at using clowning to pinch holes in social pretense or to highlight the flaws in a social policy. When the group staged the "Send in the Clowns" demo in Washington, DC, members used absurd play to mirror what they considered the lunacy of a reactive, moralistic policy analysis. Monica Hunken, a member of many New York direct action advocacy groups that makes use of clowning, notes that in such circumstances, "Shakespeare might remark that there is meaning to the madness, and Johan Huizinga might congratulate them for breaking into the proverbial private clubhouse of law." While such an approach is thought to demonstrate public discontent, it is by no means the best approach for every political action.

Ludic play is not as well tailored for many heavy issues such as police brutality, to name just one. "It's hard to play when people are dying," ACT UP veteran Julie Davids explained. While certainly, there is gallows humor which is powerful. There are times when effective, theatrical events are useful. But they have to be culturally specific, clear, and saaavy. When Lina Wertmuller produced, 'Seven Beauties' a commedy about the hollocaust, some called her brilliant. Yet, others found the film horrifying. It is ot easy to write a Hollocaust commedy. Just like David Feinberg's (1994) AIDS commedies are profoundly moving. But it is just so easy to miss the point and watch the point backfire. Julie Davids makes the same point Mallon (1998) makes, which is that sometimes there is too much pain to laugh. In such, cases, the use of ludic tactics can backfire, be misunderstood, or be seen as belittling a larger movement cause, unless they are extremely culturally specific. The ACT UP political funeral or New Orleans funeral

marches are profoundly culturally specific. Without such a context, play can appear flippant or disrespectful. Thus, it is useful for actors to be aware of the strategic uses of creative play. Andrew Boyd ruminates on the concept in the context of the Billionaires:

> Same with the Billionaires, what are we doing? We're part of this larger social movement. And we didn't try to over reach. We did at times. But we tried to check ourselves for what we are not good for. There's all these zillions of groups and there are all these coalitions of closely networked movements now. And so it's an ecology. In a funny way, in the same way in a global economy that every country has their own specialization. Every group has what they are good at and what they are not. We're good at getting a lot of media attention.

The most effective use of play in community organizing is when it works within a campaign framework that links a clear policy goal with tools which support this request. These often include art, research, data, legal reasoning, and a mobilization strategy. Play is part of a combination of tools necessary to create change. It's a tool in the toolbox. Without these tools, acting up is harder to take seriously. "You can't just have a temper tantrum because you like to have temper tantrums," Marla Stevens argues. "That's a turnoff. Grabbing attention and then not having anything to do is kind of stupid. And you do that enough and nobody is going to pay attention." After all, tactics have got to stay fresh and intelligent. If they are repeated over and over without updates, they lose their utility. "If you do too much for shock value, it ceases to have shock value. And it also then reduces your credibility. And so you are not someone to be taken seriously," Stevens concludes. "That's why I'm saying, mix it up."

Yet, this discussion also speaks to core question about whether there are certain topics or subjects around which Ludic play isn't likely to work, and how groups can avoid being seen as supercilious. Ludic play does not work as well for "heavy" issues, and

without a coherent program, play may be seen as silly and pointless. Yet, there is no consensus about this. ACT UP pushed the limits of what was seen as appropriate vs crossing that line. Different people agree and disagree about what makes something "heavy". Is cruising at a display of the Names Quilt tacky or a responce to mass death with more life affirming eros. The message of ludic play must match the point of the protest. If it is to point to the absurdity of a policy, that needs to be the point. But as Michael Shenker notes, when an issue involves violence to people, the message must be clear and specific, or else it carries the possibility of backfiring. Some issues, such as police brutality, are just not funny. Here the play responce can be counterproductive.

One of the ways the play spirit loses its effectiveness is when social movement organizations become over-bureaucratized. Allan Clear, who helped translate the aspirations of ACT UP's syringe exchange advocacy into two service organizations, notes that regulation has stifled the creativity, the DiY ethos that propelled the harm reduction movement for many years. He explains:

> I think I'm more conscious of the limitations right now. When we went from having seven needle exchanges [nationwide] to about a hundred in 1993-4, that's a big growth. Yet we had people getting their stuff. And that's where you talk about the DIY stuff. And then you had health departments getting on board like in Baltimore and stuff. They are not corrupting it. To me, you've got to have that government support. At the same time, you have these places who've been doing it for ten years and they are burnt out. They are not going any further. So the creative element, we did not see another birth of activism truly until like 1996. And we were mainstreamed in New York City.

Thus, it is useful to have play be part of the organizing process. Play contributes to innovation in social movements and movement organizations (Weissman, 1990). If there is play without an effective egalitarian process, then people do not stay engaged. The examples of SexPanic! and RTS confirm this. Without justice, there is no pleasure.

Play does not consistently speak across class, race/ethnicity lines. There are multiple and divergent perspectives and understandings of play, performance, and drama. Andrew Boyd effectively sums up the limitations of the play model when he explains: "We weren't good at organizing base communities in working-class and underclass populations, who were not diggin' on [it], who have a very different kind of irony." Understandings of pleasure and play and community building are certainly culturally bound. When I talked with Panama Alba about Reed's (2005) description of the Black Panther trip to the California State House bearing weapons as a form of "drama," he respectfully disagreed with this interpretation. "Again, this is where you talk about the cultural difference underlying this. That was not theater. That shit was dramatic. There is a difference."

The politics of play and performance is highly subject to interpretation. There is the possibility that play can become insular. Here, playful groups speak only to themselves or similar groups of allies, or their message can get confused. John Sellers recalls a case when a group wanted to form a "Teddy Bear Bloc" during a global trade summit:

> I think sometimes it becomes attractive, but I think often times we're so inside with it and we over intellectualize. I would use New York as an example. New York is an amazing place. There is an incredible kind of intellectual culture. There's great kinds of humorous actions that come out of it. And I think often times I look at actions and say, 'I get this; I love this; this would not play for a second in Kansas.' I think people have to really think about their audiences. I think it's really important that we create a subculture, but it's also important that we don't turn our backs on Babylon.
>
> [P]eople in Miami were thinking about forming a Teddy Bear Bloc. And they were going to pad themselves with teddy bears and march through the streets. First of all, I know the people that are going to do that. They are going to be dirty teddy bears that are going to be all gnarly and not very attractive. It's going to look like a mess. It's not going to be accurately portrayed by anyone and it's going to be misunderstood by people when they see it. And so where is it

> going to take us? And to just get into this contest with the cops to see who can look more…have most gnarly body armor, I think is really playing into their strength. If we go in that direction, they have all the tools and we've got none.
>
> Mainly my biggest critique of it is that too often we do it for ourselves. Why are we singing for the choir all the time? Why are we creating theater for our own fucking troop? I love some of that. I think it's incredibly creative, but I question why aren't we asking ourselves basic questions about who we are trying to reach with that piece? What are their values? How do we meet them at their value set and then take them a little bit further? And so often creative people are doing stuff that is so inside. Don't get me wrong, it can be really great when it's time to laugh at ourselves or recharge. [But] I don't think that we can turn our backs on Babylon. I don't think we have a culture yet so that we can turn this thing around. And so how do we pull people out of Babylon?

Thus, Sellers aspires to bring a creative politics to organizing which does not alienate, but rather speaks to the masses in culturally specific and intelligent ways.

In order to do this, activists who engage in playful political organizing have come to think very tactically about when irony works and when it does not. It helps if those working with irony recognize the limits of satire. Recall Andrew Boyd's willingness to go out of character when confronted by a family member of one of those lost after 9/11 (Hitt, 2004)

In the months after 9/11, the dullness of hierarchical protest re-reared its head. In response, a politics of authentic playfulness, of radical clowning, of humor reinvigorated and activated the antiwar movement to create February 15, 2003, a day of protests in cities worldwide that is considered the largest day of protest in world history (Kauffman, 2004).

From Saul Alinsky's work in South Chicago to the Ruckus Society's work in Seattle, the lesson remains that if activists do not keep their opponents on their toes, their opponents get the upper hand. Thus Stevens counsels, "Apply it to things that they don't expect it to be applied to." When play is overused, it becomes stale. Here, it loses its

intelligence and can actually impeded effective action. This limitation started to become clear even after the Chicago Democratic National Convention. While the frantic, ludic pranks of the Yippies were not expected in 1968, they quickly became routine. Elites tend to adapt to new challenges and create counter-responses. Once the ludic prank stops being "fresh," it tends to stop being "newsworthy." And the media gravitates to other stories. If playful pranks are not updated or re-invented, the media coverage of these events declines and the tactics lose their efficacy (Bogad, 2005).

Further, once political pranks stop being fresh, repression becomes all that much easier. After the first two RTS New York actions, police caught on to the group's methods and started conducting massive arrests during the actions. "I remember being on Brooke's rooftop fashioning props for our Wall Street action (which failed miserably in its way) when Torolf looked up and said, 'this is the revolution,'" recalls Louis Colombo, who sat on the tripod during the first RTS action. Over time, group members grew weary of continuing with the same tactics and the group continued to reinventing it activist repertoire for another four years. But after the Bush administration won a second term in 2004, many turned away from ludic politics. Colombo notes:

> Dude, I'm not sure about the politics of play right now. The politics of play don't seem able to keep the likes of Sam Alito off the Supreme Court bench, nor have they been able to stop the war. Not to say that we should abandon it, but I think – kick me for this if you'd like – that it can't be a substitute for politics as such. I'm generally in favor of both/and, and would see the politics of play as a part of a healthy political culture. But I'm not convinced that it is yet ready to stand on its own feet.

Few argue that play should stand on its own. But some, such as Gregg Gonzalves, a former ACT UP member now involved with the international AIDS treatment movement, points out that play and massive protest is not part of the

Republican policy approach. And they have made great strides in the last four decades. "It would be reasonable to observe this glaring lack of effect and conclude there's no use, one might as well stay home," Karen Loew (2005) concedes, "Mass mobilizations, after all, are not a part of right-wingers' routine, and look where they are today."

Others suggest that this is simply part of a movement recognizing the limits of what it can and cannot do with a given tactic. William Etundi explains:

> I think it's a continual challenge right now because all political movement right now is being challenged from the federal level. I mean if you look at the IMF protests in April of 2000; it was the first big economic summit after Seattle. We did the loan sharks [a kick-line routine] and there were a lot of groups doing a lot of stuff. The feeling after Seattle was like we can take on the world. And we were kind of proven wrong pretty quickly at that action. For creating institutional change, dressing up in shark outfits isn't going to do it.

Steve Questor, who was also at those IMF protests, begged the question:

> How much of this is white people talking among themselves? Whether it's the summer of love or RTS in NYC. Is this the children of privilege speaking to each other? And the right uses this to great advantage. It's privileged people talking to each other. How much of this deals with jobs and economic realities?

The politics of play tend to hit a wall when faced with the question of political economy. As this study suggests, there are cases where the two meet, yet this does not make it easy. And the examples which suggest they do not overlap are numerous. I asked John Jordan about his experience with the conflict between community-building play and real world policy changes. He explained:

> I look at people and I think 'fuck, maybe it's time to build real external differences.' The ideal is to build both. I'm always trying to do both. If you just create alternatives, you forget why you were creating the alternatives in the first place. You create alternatives to the system and then you get sucked into the system. You have to resist and create at the same time. It's really hard, but they are both as important. Before I pop off this planet, I would love to be part of something that does both at the same time.

For Jordan, who helped create the RTS storyline that that expanded around the globe, the limitations of the play model are simple: “It was part of a transnational community. It’s lined up with the poetic and the pragmatic and the symbolic.” But, he explained, “It can become just symbolic, with no real policy or external changes.” After a while, symbolic actions that fail to create immediate changes in the external environment become frustrating. Groups ranging from SexPanic! to the Lesbian Avengers to RTS experienced some of this frustration.

Yet, success or social change is not always easy to assess or measure. Jordan referred to Rebecca Solnits’s work, *Hope in the Dark* (2004). “It’s so beautiful. It’s extraordinary. Really extraordinary,” Jordan explains. He suggested it was one of the best books he’s read in a decade. For Jordan, the work is important because it “really challenges the way we see success, how we evaluate successes for change and comes to it from a really brilliant way. She’s looking at the importance of the unexpected... not the social change in media kind of process.”

In *Hope in the Dark*, Solnit writes:

> The glum traditional left often seems intent upon finding the cloud around every silver lining. And joy is one of our weapons and one of our victories. Non-activists sometimes chide us for being joyous at demonstrations, for having fun while taking on the serious business of the world, but in a time when alienation, isolation, and powerlessness are among our principal afflictions, just being out in the streets *en masse* is not a demand for victory: it is a victory.
>
> But there’s an increasing gap between this new movement with its capacity for joy and the old figureheads. Their grumpiness is often the grumpiness of perfectionists who hold that anything less than total victory is failure, a premise that makes it easy to give up at the start or to disparage the victories that are possible. This is earth. It will never be heaven. There will always be cruelty, always be violence, always be destruction. There is tremendous devastation now. In the time it takes you to read this, acres of rainforest will vanish, a species will go extinct, women will be raped, men shot, and far too many children will die of

> easily preventable causes. We cannot eliminate all devastation for all time, but we can reduce it, outlaw it, undermine its source and foundation: these are victories.

Jordan further reflects on this work.

> She looks at the way social change changes people's lives. It helps build a movement. We've had victories if one looks at it in not a linear way, but in a very networked kind of way, how the Reclaim the Streets stuff helped build Seattle and created support for efforts in the global South. It's hard to see direct physical changes that have happened when you've prevented something. In lots of ways, we've kept capitalism at bay. We have to pat ourselves on the back that things get better and they get worse at the same time. There are lots of things we've stopped from happening but we still think things are getting worse. She challenges the way we see social change. It helped build a movement that had victories. It's something in the distance.

One of the interesting features of studying social movements/collective action is that because groups are always innovating--that's usually one of the hallmarks of c.a.--predicting "success" is trickier than it might be in settings where people are using routine strategies and tactics. Figuring out what works might actually be more akin to figuring out what kind of aesthetic things work (e.g., plays, paintings, dance, etc.) than it is strictly a question of when a policy might work. Arts and songs, chants and stories speak to people in many many different ways. They create different illusions. Here, play offers a way to imagine and engage with other forms of reality and engagement. Yet, the challenge remains to do more than playing with ideas and using this spirit alter the route of history (Nardi, forthcoming). If reality is made of countless stories and illusions, then the challenge is to advance different kinds of stories. Yet, such a framework is often anything but linear. Thus, it is useful to stear away from a positivist-style prediction by thinking about innovation and the mix of the aesthetic/ political activism. While the study considers ends, the focus of the study is on means. The study of play in social movements compels practitioners and scholars to consider different forms of efficacy,

different outcomes than scoring the goal. By asserting there are different ways of studying social movement and social change activities, practictioners acknowledge there different forms of social knowledge, which are liberated when people play. The play is afterall the thing to get the conscience of the king.

In Sum

In the midst of a bloody civil war in El Salvador, a group of women organized three committees per refugee camp: one for education, another for construction/sanitation, and a third for joy—the comité de alegría (Hollyday, 1995; Wallis, 1994). Joyful play finds itself in the strangest places and campaigns. This study has documented cases from ACT UP to the community garden struggle where play contributed to campaigns that utilized holistic approaches to organizing for social change. These include groups that worked for economic justice, education, health care, and basic needs, as well as pleasure—not one or the other.

Just as in the civil war in El Salvador, the committee for joy was not formed outside of the work of the committees for education and construction/sanitation. Yet, without the committee for joy, or LESC's Ministry of Love, other work becomes more than people can bear. The limitations of play in politics are easy to understand. McKay (1998) writes that DiY politics can easily fall into repeating anarchism's limitations: poor organization, a partial narrative, micro politics, naive utopianism, and preference for spectacle over long-term organizing strategy. Yet, with these limitations in mind, play can complement a larger organizing story; here, play can offer profound energy and resources to a campaign.

Play is useful in politics because:

- It helps create community as well as bring new political actors into the arena.
- It bridges gap between hearts and minds.
- It helps validate different ways of knowing and working within the world.
- It supports a holistic organizing strategy that includes research, mobilization, legal tactics, direct action, and a clear workable policy alternative.

The politics of play works as part of a coherent organizing strategy. Instead of just offering a "no," play helps advocates articulate what they want the world to look like. Play speaks to both the rational and the irrational parts of participants and spectators alike. It can feel wildly exuberant and emotional to play in a public protest. It can also be a profoundly effective part of a larger plan of social action. Combined with an effective campaign, play is useful for inviting people into organizing, training them, and later disseminating knowledge and public education. Thus, play is useful for articulating a clear message of what a community group wants. As Aresh of More Gardens explains, it is part of being a "yes" group, a group that clearly knows what it wants. "I think we very much have to be able to articulate and embody what we're for, not just what we're against," explains organizer David Solnit.

Social change activists could do worse than learn from the lessons and approaches of party groups , such as Complacent, which make use of cultural resources, strategies, and groups which play; here, activists could learn to be cultural as well as political leaders. Yet to be effective organizers must realize that there are different forms of expertise and knowledge. In an era of a dwindling welfare state, play can be a useful way to help expand social networks. But social actors must build on a rich appreciation for the

complexity of play. This is certainly not a universally understood concept. Therefore, social actors must work in culturally specific and respectful ways with local leaders and stakeholders to animate culture, help people organize, socialize, and build connections with those engaged in creating coalitions aimed at creating a better world today.

In 1831, Alexis de Tocqueville toured the United States. The result was his work, *Democracy in America*. In it, he suggested that civil society, where people play, debate, and converge, was necessary for American democracy to thrive. Today, the struggles of public space activist groups can be viewed as battlefronts in a public/private debate. Many such groups use play to cultivate a counter-public. In the era of globalization, there remains a need for a civil society in between the market and the government. The groups discussed here are part of a burgeoning movement of do-it-yourself activism aimed at preserving public space and civic culture. Through forms of radical creative play, new stories emerge.

Different groups form; different tribes build their own communities of pleasure and resistance. Some of them are book groups, such as a network Eric Rofes has been part of for the better part of a decade. Here social connection and intellectual stimulation, rather than play, is the focus. Yet, the principles are the same. People need to be engaged to be persuaded to stay involved.

> Let's talk about the San Francisco Study Group on Sex and Politics, now in its twelfth or thirteenth year. It's a group of kind of egghead type people who have formed a community of some kind. Some of us are new and some of us have been around for twelve or thirteen years just getting together once a month over food and a book and a reading or an article or a video we've seen to discuss it. I specifically could have planned that as simply read the book and come and talk. 'Cause I could do that and I find that meaningful. I had to add food. I had to add social events and field trips. And I had to find a way to sustain it for the long haul, cause other people need that. And so good organizing of that, and not at all

> perfect, involves a careful mix of community building, food, people kind of hearing about landmark events in people's lives – all through this fairly artificial ritual of study group.

In other cases, play might involve bringing elements of performance and storytelling and the politics of pleasure into an open-mic night. Kirk Read describes one such space: "I organize a monthly open-mic in a gay men's STD clinic called Magnet. The space is very sort of Chelsea. I do it with Larry Bob Roberts from Holy Titclamps [Boys Club]. There's always a sense of fun." Sometimes the politics of play is about protest and other times it's about poetry readings, creative artistic direct action, live art, party groups which organize dance events, or the Church Ladies—almost fifteen years and counting—singing and chanting.

When Joe Tuba and the Hungry March Band traveled to Rome, they found a vast new network of political marching bands:

> Well, since Rome we've kind of learned from that we didn't know before that this marching band, it's not restricted to wires or being in a club, it's not restricted to anything, it's kind of like this democratic thing where you can play for everybody for free as soon as you walk out the door. And you can have this whole other network of other bands that do that its use[??]. It's amazing. People go crazy. They follow us everywhere.

And even among audience members, a network is built. People get to know each other, dance, and do political work together. People live for the sort of space created at the shows, the streets, the gardens, the public commons that emerges through the connection of bodies and politics which link at the carnivalesque shows and communities that emerge around such cultural play. Tuba continues:

> Well, that's the thing. It's the same thing RTS was doing. That the gardens were really doing. You are creating a space. And it's like the commons that people are always talking about. It just doesn't exist in the mindset in the United States at all. In England there is a history of it. Here there is no recollection of that kind of

> thing. That's what this whole scenario is trying to remind people about and make people create.

Tuba broke out into laughing as we finished our conversation. The show and the interview were over. All the while gardens are growing; picnics are happening; kids are romping through public space and their parents are talking about ways to organize daycare collectives and getting together for additional play-dates.

Is play everything to a social movement? Certainly not. Yet it is better for people to form tribes to expand alienation-reducing social networks (Maffesoli, 1993; 1996) than for people to bowl alone (Putnam, 2000) or leave public life entirely. While dour politics often mirrors the very power structures activists oppose, playful responses open up questions, stories, and spaces.

Appendix

Central Questions and Study Guide

Why play?

1) Age and place of birth?
2) What brought you to this type of community organizing? Biography question…
3) What were/are the names of the groups you were involved with?
4) Have you utilized elements of creativity, play, direct action, or performance in your organizing?
5) What best experiences with the use of play and creativity in your work?
6) Is creative protest and community building a viable alternative to traditional models of organizing and politics? Is there a contrast?
7) What is the politics of playful creative protest as opposed to conventional protest? How do you use play? Is play a useful response to social controls?
8) When you use play, theater, and creative direct action, what kind of audiences do you have in mind?
9) What responses have you gotten?
10) How do you think that theater, creativity and play work to effect change? Can creative, playful, fun approaches to organizing practices result in practical shifts in people's lives?
11) To what extent is the community you are seeking to create embodied in your protest tactics?
12) How do you define success and find meaning in this work?
13) Is creative protest most useful for connecting political actors with formal political channels or for creating a prefigurative image of a better world in which activists hope to live?
14) Are you fighting to build community or create external changes? And are these aims mutually exclusive?
15) Given there is a vitality in prefigurative community building and a social imperative of organizing toward material ends, can social and creative play/organizing bridge these two streams of social change practice?

Limitations

16) What are the strengths vs the limitations of playful, creative protest and direct action?
17) Have I missed something?

CONSENT FORM

My name is Benjamin Shepard. I am a student in the Hunter College School of Social Work Ph.D. Program in Social Welfare at The Graduate Center of the City University of New York (CUNY) and Principal Investigator of this project, entitled "Play, Creativity, and the New Community Organizing." My research question for this study is: In what ways does social, cultural, and creative play contribute to or undermine social change activism? The study is expected to build on an applied research tradition to generate practice knowledge about community organizing. I would like permission to interview you about your experiences as an organizer. The interview will take about 60 minutes. Taking part in this interview is completely voluntary, and you can end the interview at any time and refuse to answers any questions.

I would like permission to use your name and the information you provide me with in any future publications or in presentations at conferences. Also, with your permission I would like to audio tape our interview to be sure I don't miss anything important. The information you provide will not be held confidential **unless** you wish not to have your name and background information used publicly. Please indicate this preference below:

DO NOT USE MY NAME AND BACKGROUND PUBLICLY. Write your initials here _____.

By marking the box and writing your initials, your real name and other identifying information will be kept confidential. The tapes will only be heard by me or my advisor. Information will be stored in a locked file cabinet, to which only I, and my advisor, will have access.

There is no risk involved in this study. The benefits of your participation are that your knowledge of the subject will add to the generalized knowledge of community organizing and social change activism. There will be approximately 50 participants taking part in this study.

I may publish results of the study. If you would like a copy of the study, please provide me with your address and I will send you a copy in the future.

If you have any questions about this research, you can contact me at (917) 586 7952 or benshepard@mindspring.com or my faculty advisor, Professor Irwin Epstein, of Hunter College School of Social Work, (212)-452-7048, iepstein@hunter.cuny.edu. If you would like more information about your rights as a participant, you can contact Kay Powell, IRB Administrator, The Graduate Center/City University of New York, (212) 817-7525, kpowell@gc.cuny.edu.

Thank you for your participation. I will give you a copy of this form to take with you.

Please sign in the space below if you agree to be part of the study>

I agree to be audio-taped, please circle one: YES NO

_____ _____ _____ _____

Participant's signature Date Investigator's signature Date

Interviews

The primary data source for this study is of interviews.
The following individuals participated in interviews for the study.

Vicente " Panama" Alba
Mark Anderson
Walter Armstrong
Dana Beal
Tim Becker
Johnathan Berger
Barton Benes
Andrew Boyd
L M Bogad
Ariane Burgess
Allan Clear
Kate Crane
Bill DiPaola
Tim Dooty
JKtheCat aka Judith Canepa
Julie Davids
Todd Eaton
Beka Economopoulis
Abby Ehmann
William Etundi
Cyndra Feuer
Jason Grote
Mark Harrington
Amanda Hickman
Melissa Hope
Ann Northrop
Donald Gallagher
Greg Gonsalvez
Ron Hayduk
Wayne Hoffman
Liddell Jackson
Aresh Javadi
Louis Jones
John Jordan
Aron Kay
Charles King
Bob Kohler
Jamie Leo
Jarrett Lovell
Mike McGuire

Ben Mauyers
Bonfire Madigan
Elizabeth Meixell
Urania Mylonas
Steve Questor
Karen Ramspacher
Kirk Read
Chuck Reinhart
Eric Rofes
Mattew Roth
Eric Sawyer
Michael Shenker
John Sellers
Marina Sitrin
David Solnit
Starhawk aka Miriam Simos
Marla Stevens
Susan Wright
Seth Tobochman
James Tracey
JoeTuba aka Joe Keady
James Wagner
Lesley Julia Wood

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