

and decadent ‘liberals’ believe. And there is nothing we can do about it. It’s American democracy, take it or leave it.

As an artist I feel the profound vertigo of the immediate future, one in which my voice means little or nothing, and my art has no place other than performing the role of raw controversy and strident opposition.

I suddenly feel I live in a country I do not know, a country inhabited by rabid fundamentalist Christians waiting for ‘the rapture’ and intolerant patriotic warriors who perceive intelligence as snobbish, art as decadent, international diplomacy as weak and any form of dissent as ‘un-American’.

When I look at the electoral map I get even more depressed. I see a huge ‘red country’ I would be scared to visit, *Jesuslandia*, like a humongous India dividing two tiny ‘blue countries’ (the two Pakistans). I know real maps are much more complex, and fears are largely mythical. But they are also ‘real’.

My colleagues and I are angry, exhausted, scared and confused. Should we leave? Where to? Mexico? Canada? Any country where they don’t give the death penalty to doctors who perform abortions? Where homophobia is not a legitimate national policy? Where foreigners are not perceived as potential terrorists? Should we become part of a culture of resistance, sort of American Kurds? Or should we face utter marginalization and disenfranchisement as ‘dissident’ artists? We are obsessing over these questions in cafes, bars, galleries and rehearsal spaces across Blue America.

Meanwhile, the rest of the world out there is baffled, to say the least. Let’s not forget that according to international polls, 80% of the world was against Bush. I keep receiving daily email condolences from Europe, Latin America and Australia as if what we just went through was a major natural disaster, an earthquake or an epidemic. ‘Gomez-Peña, I’m so... sorry. I hope you and your loved ones are all right. Whatever we can do for you, just ask... Any plans to move to \_\_\_\_\_?’ It breaks my heart even more.

For the moment I badly need to detox. Starting today, no more TV or newspapers...

at least for a month. Perhaps then I could live pretending that politics don’t matter.

I will pretend I’m living in an open, multi-faceted social democracy.

I will pretend the Patriot Act and the Bush doctrine were never approved.

I will pretend Carnivore is not scanning this email.

I will write about love, friendship, the importance of art and community-building across borders, races, nations and generations.

I will recapture my humor and spunk.

I will put on a different costume each day and pretend it’s okay to be different, agnostic, pagan, bohemian, brown, tattooed, outrageous, contradictory.

At least I’ll give it a try... Unfortunately I may wake up one day soon to find out ‘they’ are already invading Iran, Korea, or Venezuela... or knocking at my door.

Am I exaggerating? Should I loosen up a bit? Are my thoughts and fears just what they want me to feel? Will the tone of my writing be different next week?

San Francisco  
8 November 2004

## Billionaires For Bush: A Postmortemist Accounting

*L.M. Bogad*

Frisbees and grass. In the lead-in to the Republican National Convention (RNC) in New York City this summer, the Republicans made it clear that both of these things were more important than the First Amendment to the Constitution. The United for Peace and Justice (UFPJ) coalition wanted to have a massive rally on the Great Lawn in Central Park, a space big enough to accommodate the hundreds of thousands of demonstrators expected to gather to protest the Bush agenda. However, the Republican Mayor, Michael Bloomberg, backed up and pressured

by the Bush Administration, insisted that so many people in the park would kill the grass. Bloomberg further claimed that such an enormous mass of protestors would violate the rights of people who wanted to play Frisbee.

These were the excuses for marginalizing a mass demonstration that threatened to disrupt the painstaking dramaturgy of the RNC, which had been scheduled noticeably later than any other RNC in history so that it would be closer to 9/11. By occupying this hallowed time and space, the Republicans hoped to stage a pageant with a storyline in which a grateful New York would embrace their President-protector-avenger as he co-opted the memory of that tragedy for his reelection campaign.

The battle for the right of peaceable assembly was key. A massive, peaceful and festive, creative public rejection of Bush in a historic, picturesque site in the city would certainly speak against the event-narrative. Thus the pressure on Bloomberg to marginalize the protestors as much as possible, claiming it was for their safety in the post-9/11 era, or for the grass's sake. Without a legal permit, many people would be intimidated and would stay home. If the protestors were denied a viable permit, frustrated protestors might engage in civil disorder, confirming the culture war for the viewers at home, and mobilizing the Bush base.

After rejecting the offers of a permit to demonstrate in Queens, several miles and a river away from Madison Square Garden where the RNC was to be held, and on an inhospitable strip of the West Side Highway, where protestors standing on the shadeless blacktop would have passed out under the NYC summer sun, UFPJ agreed reluctantly to a march, without a rally, that would mass west of Union Square, pass Madison Square Garden, and double back to disperse at Union Square. This was hardly ideal, but UFPJ decided to make it work.

There were many responses to the government's rulings. For 40 weeks, Reverend Billy staged a recurring action in the recently-reopened World Trade Center subway/

PATH station. Every Tuesday evening rush hour, anonymous performers would join the swarms of commuters, scuttling around and talking in their cellphones; as they did so, instead of chatting to their spouses or barking orders to subordinates back at the office, they recited over and over the First Amendment to the United States Constitution:

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances.

This mass-recitation would gradually escalate from invisible theatre to a crescendo of screaming glorious First Amendment worship, and police found it hard to arrest those who chanted those sacred words. The tricksters of the Clandestine Insurgent Rebel Clown Army [CIRCA] also intervened to remind spectators of Bush's now-infamous jetfighter landing on an aircraft carrier, costumed in a flight suit, putting his thumbs up, and announcing the end of major combat operations in Iraq under a 'MISSION ACCOMPLISHED' banner. This intrepid appearance was stunning in its crafted, mediated placelessness; in fact the carrier group was just outside of San Diego. Normal conveyance for such an executive visit would be a quick shuttle on a helicopter. However a jetfighter looked much more daring and exciting, so a supersonic warplane and the entire aircraft carrier were commandeered as set and backdrop for the heroic figure of Bush. CIRCA Harpo-Marxed on this Bush moment by wearing flight suits that said 'MISSION ACCOMPLICATED' while searching for weapons of mass destruction in restaurants, mailboxes, and the body cavities of passers-by, and using giant straws to snort the white lines in the streets and crosswalks, thus evoking both Bush's delightfully contrived moment on the aircraft carrier and his narcotic pastimes of times past.

However, there is one voice that the author has shamelessly neglected in this tract: that of



Figure 2 The Clandestine Insurgent Rebel Clown Army, 29 August 2004 (author centre in peaked cap), Photo courtesy of Fred Askew

the elites. Their response to all of these provocations was crucial to an understanding of the civic dialogue that was happening in the streets of New York. Accordingly, and in the interests of objectivity, I will report the following: On Sunday, August 29, the day of the march, about a dozen people showed up on the Great Lawn, in lovely opera gowns and tuxedos, and festooned with blinding jewelry. These were the ‘Billionaires for Bush’, and they archly informed the massed media (who were there to document any trouble that might occur) that, in fact, the real reason one million ‘hoi polloi’ were denied the Great Lawn on that day was because they, the upper .00001%, had already reserved the space to play lawn sports. They went on to point out that this was part of their agenda to ‘Privatize Everything,’ from the Park to the City Library to the electoral process itself—‘one dollar, one vote!’

The dazzling gaggle of haute-reactionaries then spread out all over the massive lawn, playing croquet and badminton. The sight of a few well-to-do cartoon characters scattered about, having their elitist way with that massive green space, sharply evoked the absence of the million protestors.

This was a typical Billionaire action: riffing on reality; using satire to surprise, amuse, and engage; and satirically straight-arming the ‘red-state/blue-state’ culture-war binary by trying to get Americans to once again think about *class*. Through ironic adoration they attempt to disrupt Bush’s constructed persona as a straight-talking, dirt-under-his-nails Everyman, re-constructing him as the upper-class wastrel-turned-war-monger that the Billionaires love so much. Of course class is a key component of the base-line irony of the project: the sight of ‘plutocrats’ marching in the streets with signs underscores the reality that of course, this sort of ‘grassroots’ performance in public space is something elites need never resort to. The Billionaires manifest as a funhouse-mirror image of the elites whose disembodied, globalized fluidity is one of the very foundations of their power. Since they won’t come out and play in the street, the Billionaires provide the punchlines.

Billionaires were seen all over New York: in the Million Billionaire March, they were out in force with signs and banners such as: ‘Tax Wages Not Wealth’, ‘Corporations Are People Too’ and the mischievous, ‘Cheney is Innocent’.



Figure 3 A *billionaire for Bush*. Photo courtesy of Fred Askew

Billionaires flash-mobbed the city in actions planned and spread by Internet and cell-phone, such as waltzing *en masse* in Grand Central Station. In an intra-social-movement bit of theatre, they played a smackdown game of basketball with the organizers of the Poor People's Coalition. As the highly corrupt referee, I can report that the Billionaires were losing to the Coalition by somewhere around 96 to 2. Fortunately, in the course of the game the Billionaires were able to privatize the city basketball court, purchase it, and evict the Coalition from the grounds.

Billionaires spread their message on radio, TV and the Web ([www.billionairesforbush.com](http://www.billionairesforbush.com)); this multimedia approach added layers to the campaign, while the Billionaires' performative irony allowed them to play both sides of the debate. As my Billionaire character, 'Ollie Gark,' I found that doing a radio interview on a left-wing gay radio show

enabled me to draw connections between class and gender oppression with a smarmy, condescending smile. Affable, self-satisfied demeanors and a repertoire of one-line jokes led to a great deal of media and press attention for the Billionaires. The website, designed to present both the satirical group-persona and an earnest political critique, also served as a modular tool to help spread the concept: people looking to start a chapter in their hometown could download many excellent graphics, slogans, performance ideas, and even original songs in karaoke version so they could sing them with the backup of a blinged-out boombox. This helped the consistency of costume, graphics and 'branding' of the group across the country, while allowing for flexibility, creativity and idea-sharing amongst and between the local groups. Thanks to the website, media coverage and relentless proselytizing, there are now one hundred Billionaires for Bush chapters in the United States and abroad.

The Billionaires had already bird-dogged Bush on the swing-state campaign trail, setting up their red-white-and-blue piggy-bank banner and cheering him on with 'Two Million Jobs Lost: A Good Start!' In fact, in York, PA, Bush gave us the double thumbs-up as his motorcade whooshed by. The Billionaires also swung through the swing states during their Get On the Limo tours, spreading the gospel of greed and seeding new chapters as they went.

Of course, irony can always be misinterpreted, especially when a group uses the same shtick on multiple simultaneous audiences. We found that police tended to treat the Billionaires more politely: because of our generally genteel, entitled demeanor? or we were perhaps activating some ingrained instinct to protect the propertied? There were incidents when the police would put us in with pro-Bush demonstrators...and at least one when those Bushites took us seriously, joining in on chants such as 'Four More Wars!' in earnest, a chilling example of the complexities of irony as a tactic.

Now that the election is over, sadly, the group will not be changing its name any time

soon. Thanks to targeted voter suppression/intimidation, an insufficiency of voting machines in minority districts, and a well-coordinated character assassination of Kerry, the day ended in victory for Our Benefactor. When confronted with the devastating consequences of this ‘victory,’ the cadres may have faltered, and the joke may have worn thin. The class warriors of the radical Right will drive to further Privatize Everything, from our genes to our prisons to our national forests, while striving to overwhelm discussion of class with culture war at home and wars of choice abroad. They will strive to further dominate all branches of the government, all sectors of civil society, and still farther-flung corners of the world.

Nevertheless, the Billionaires website immediately hailed the results and noted that the group had, after all, ‘paid for eight years,’ and celebrated ‘the disappearance of over 1 million votes.’ Will this extended, multimedia subvertisement regain momentum after the election, and how will it fit into a greater long-term strategy? Clearly, this kind of performance is only one tool in the repertoire of the movement of movements, only one approach of many, and not to be relied upon exclusively or inflexibly. Groups like the Billionaires will continue to experiment with techniques that are not purely reactive but that help to create a culture of shared meanings that can in turn sustain an oppositional movement even in the darkest of times. The satirical struggle continues.

*The author would like to thank the Arts and Humanities Research Board and the British Academy for their support.*

### **Beyond Repair Celebrating 20 Years with Forced Entertainment**

*Joe Kelleher*

The time we spend in the theatre can feel like an odd sort of way of engaging with the here and now; as if to be there were to be present

in a way that is somewhat irresponsible, not altogether adult. Even the most committed aficionado of the theatre thing, in those moments when it all gets too much, when the rhetorical authority of the stage apparatus won’t quite wash, when all of those people up there *acting* just becomes a bit of a strain, might recognise something of themselves in Freud’s description of the fetishist, of whom he wrote, ‘He has retained that belief, but he has also given it up.’ We go along but keep to a certain distance, not quite sure if we really want to arrive, unsure of what we will find – or fail to find – when we get where we are going.

Freud’s phrase also seems to capture a quality in the work of the performance collective Forced Entertainment, for whom it has all been too much (too much and not enough) for twenty years now, but who gathered nevertheless – along with various associates – for a UK celebration of that twenty years during the two week season *Indoor Fireworks*, produced by LIFT at the Riverside Studios in early November 2004. Of course Forced Entertainment do much more than theatre, and a fair indication of that ‘more’ was on show at Riverside in a series of exhibitions, talks, and a week of performances in various media by artists other than Forced Entertainment, all of which evidenced a complex connectedness not just across different ways of working, but across different ages and locations of performance. As director Tim Etchells said on the last morning of the season their intention was to ‘not party alone’ and, as they partied, to open out beyond their own work to a diversity of reflections upon relations between the world and the ways the world is encountered. At Riverside these ways ranged from the enthusiastic face to face of Gob Squad’s cinematic interventions into the performance of everyday life in the Hammersmith streets outside the Studios, to the dead-eye ‘interface’ of Edit Kaldor’s self-installation at a lone computer terminal, where we witness on a massive screen a meagre life turning its insides out, as she attempts to link to an ‘outside world’ that does not deign to link back in return.