ACTIVISM

Tactical carnival
Social movements, demonstrations, and dialogical performance

L.M. Bogad

All Power to the Imagination!

<div align="right">Situationist International slogan</div>

October 26, 2002: Washington, DC, A preemptive peace demonstration, responding to the Bush Administration's call for preemptive war on Iraq, is in progress. Hundreds of thousands have gathered for the largest antiwar demonstration here since the Vietnam War. Although the demonstration was first called by International ANSWER, a group largely run by the Workers' World Party, the massive turnout includes people of many walks of life and world-views, from all over the country and beyond. This diversity is encouraging for the potential growth of the peace movement.

International ANSWER has organized a very long series of orators, and while the rally is so huge that thousands of people cannot see the soundstage or hear the speakers, many stand quietly and listen to the amplified oratory, applauding and cheering when moved to do so, while others mill around, chat, and wait for the announcement that the march will begin.

However, at least one troupe of costumed performers called Absurd Response is not listening to the speakers. Instead, they move randomly through the throng, singing, dancing, and improvising with the crowd around them. They walk behind a banner that says "ABSURD RESPONSE TO AN ABSURD WAR." These are the Perms for Permawar, eight alluring men and women wearing fluorescent colored gowns, opera-length gloves, and two-foot high Marge Simpson-type wigs. Each wig sports a brightly colored letter, so their foreheads spell "P-E-R-M-A-W-A-R." The Perms, also known as Bombshells for their glamour and prowar orthodoxy, lead festive chants such as "We Need Oil! We Need Gas! Watch Out, World, We'll Kick Your Ass!" and "We Love BUSH! We Love DICK! All You Peaceniks Make Us SICK!"

The Bombshells are accompanied by dozens of other characters created around the theme of absurd response. A ghoulish trio, "The Spirit of '76 Gone Wrong," costumed in pallid skin, bloody rags, and militarist trappings, carry drum, flute, and flag (which reads "OIL"). Gibbering War Clowns bounce and pounce around the perimeter of the procession. A singing, stilt-walking Angel of Death in a red dress hovers above. She plays a squeezebox, and hanging from her neck are a miniature skeleton and a sign reading "Death ♥s W." A large number of Billionaires for Bush are there as well, in their top hats, tuxedos, jewelry, and formal dresses, to ironically support the war effort and cheer their boy "W" onward.

Finally, the speakers on the stage are finished. The enormous march begins, and Absurd Response joins the parade. At one point we are passed by an International ANSWER sound truck. ANSWER is as one-way in their communicative style as their name suggests. They

are heavily amplified, overpowering the voices of those below them, as they shout decades-old, plug-in chants such as "Hey, Hey, Ho, Ho, George Bush Has Got to Go!", "George Bush! You Can't Hide! We Charge You with Genocide!" and "The People, United, Will Never be Defeated."

There is a palpable clash in style and worldview between Absurd Response, with its irony, satire, multivocality, and even ambiguity, and the monotonous monological chant of the sound truck. Before long, some new call-and-response chants emanate from the Absurd Response contingent, no longer merely mocking the warmongering White House but lampooning ANSWER's dogmatic, redundant, unimaginative style. These chants include: "Three Word Chant! (Four Words Are Better!)"; "March March, Chant Chant, Rhetoric Rhetoric, Rant Rant!"; "Hey, Hey, Ho, Ho—'Hey Hey Ho Ho' Has Got To Go!"; and "Bad Slogans, Repeated, Ensure That We're Defeated!" The people on the ANSWER sound truck, perhaps unwilling to break their rhythm or come up with a comeback, simply continue their own chants and drive down the road. A brief, instructive disruption has occurred.

This chapter is an exploration of performance aesthetics and tactics in social movement activism. It focuses specifically on what social movements are most known for to the greater public: demonstrations in public space. It draws on the praxis of the global justice movement, specifically in the United States and mostly in New York City. This is a localist effort meant to open the subject; I am not trying to arrive at final conclusions, nor to write from one locality in a way that generalizes about this incredibly diverse, dialogical, and decentralized movement. Finally, a look at social movement theory will help us understand the importance of the public demonstration and where Theatre of th Oppressed (TO) fits within the wider range of activist practice.

Building social movements

A social movement is a network of people engaged in sustained, contentious, collective action, using methods beyond established institutional procedures such as voting (Tarrow 1998: 3). For example, the global justice movement, also known as "globalization from below" (Brecher *et al.* 2002), or the antiglobalization movement by its detractors, seeks to oppose the disastrous effects of corporate globalization while building progressive, constructive, and dialogical connections between the people of the world. Performance, both public and private, is a key element in the formation, sustenance, and building of such social movements.

Hidden transcripts and the cycle of contention

Movements often form slowly, through the daily building of social networks, a growing awareness of a collective complaint, and an increasingly articulated conceptual frame for taking action. Even in periods of repression, people can build networks for potential social movements through the clandestine creation and nurturing of a "hidden transcript" (Scott 1990). Hidden transcripts are the highly articulated and stealthily nurtured worldview and grievance list of the oppressed. They are the stories, rumors, complaints, and utopian visions that a sub/counter-culture keeps alive for the historical moment when, because of shifts in political opportunities and constraints, substantial mass liberatory action becomes possible.

Alternative worldviews need an alternative space in which to be developed and shared. Nancy Fraser argues that the oppressed create "subaltern counterpublics" as an alternative to the dominant bourgeois public sphere because they need:

> [V]enues in which to undertake communicative processes that were not, as it were, under the supervision of the dominant group . . . to articulate and defend their interests . . . [and] to expose modes of deliberation that mask domination by absorbing the less powerful into a false "we" that reflects the more powerful.
>
> (Fraser 1997: 81)

Through this communicative process, counterpublics can develop a collective action frame, or a way of looking at the world that argues that mass mobilization for change is both possible and necessary (Tarrow 1998: 21). The development of sophisticated subaltern counterpublics, including the nurturing of hidden transcripts and/or collective action frames, is a necessary precursor to the launching of a powerful social movement.

An example of this is the development of the civil rights movement in the United States. Though locked out of the halls of power and civil society in the south, this movement was able to nurture resistance based in churches, civic organizations, and their own press and allied cultural workers (musicians, artists, theatre makers, *et al.*). They also built coalitions across region, race, and class, sustaining their struggle against American apartheid over the course of decades. After World War II, in which African-Americans had participated to defeat fascism, the US government was concerned with its image as the bastion of human rights within the Cold War contest with the Soviet Union. In this context, the civil rights movement escalated its anti-Jim Crow activity with massive, highly visible, nonviolent direct action as well as juridical, legislative, and cultural methods. The whole world was watching, including more sympathetic sections of the United States beyond the south.

A "cycle of contention" is just such a time when the incentives for contentious collective action are raised, and/or when the costs of such action are lowered for various reasons, such as when there is a perceived split in the elites, a weakening of the state's repressive apparatus, or a shift in the relative power of competing or allied forces, encouraging social movements to get active across an entire society (Tarrow 1998: 24–25):

> [C]ontentious politics is triggered when changing political opportunities and constraints create incentives for social actors who lack resources on their own . . . When backed by dense social networks and galvanized by culturally resonant, action-oriented symbols, contentious politics leads to sustained interaction with opponents. The result is the social movement.
>
> (Tarrow 1998: 2)

Social movements cannot preordain a top down loosening of national policy in order to better facilitate their own actions, but they certainly have the agency to "seize the time" if they perceive a chink in the establishment's order. When a historical opportunity for such collective agency presents itself, a cycle of contention may begin. To take advantage of the opportunity and to build group formation and cohesion, activists need to construct a cultural frame, or set of impassioned, shared meanings, that justify and motivate collective action (Tarrow 1998: 21). A cycle of contention gains momentum when social actors perceive that change is desirable, that the risks and costs of movement participation have lessened, and that the chance of victory has grown (Tarrow 1998: 24). Without a sense of shared grievance, purpose, and possibility, an effective social movement does not develop; indeed that sense of shared meaning, a role in history, and liberatory agency can sustain resistance even when the tide has turned and danger has increased (Wood 2003: 231–41).

Theatre of the Oppressed workshops can play a vital role during cycles of contention in helping members of a burgeoning movement define their issues and explore possible solutions. Whether participants are seasoned activists or people who have never engaged in overt political action, Image Theatre can help bring people together, in a common space, to creatively, nonverbally, and dialogically express and develop their perceptions of their world, power structures, and oppressions. Forum Theatre provides a relatively safe space, protected from the actual ramifications of reactive state repression, to experiment with possible contentious methods. This is oppositional praxis in action. Legislative Theatre, during this period, can help a movement develop a parliamentary agenda. Thus TO techniques, with their myriad variations, are particularly useful for social movements' development of hidden transcripts and collective action frames.

Boal was not the first to call for decentralized, anti-authoritarian methods for progressive movement building. In fact, various methods of "rehearsing for reality" are a common staple of organizing manuals from way back. However, these manuals generally call for activists to *discuss* overall strategy, and to role play and rehearse only the moment of action, public performance, and/or confrontation. For example, nonviolence training teaches activists, through practice, how to stay calm, centered, committed, and nonviolent in the face of harassment or abuse. Theatre of the Oppressed expands the role of rehearsal to help people at any level of political commitment not only to rehearse direct confrontation with the state but to use improvisatory performance to decide what their problems are, what they want, and what they are able to do about it.

There is also a long history of theatre at the service of social movements. But Boal's unique, historic contribution is the inventive systematizing of theatrical methods based on Freirian and anti-Aristotelian theory. Boal's Freirian influence leads his approach in a dialogical direction; a director or auteur does not dictate the movements on the stage but rather a Joker facilitates the creative collaboration of a group. Jokering is not unproblematic, of course, but TO strives toward the minimization of hierarchy. In his first book, Boal (1979) articulated the ways in which his theatre consciously resists Aristotelian catharsis. This is ideal for social movements' development of collective action frames and tactical and strategic praxis; a social movement seeks to galvanize, to agitate, to articulate dissent and dissatisfaction, and so the purgation of social complaint through catharsis is anathema.

Repertoires of contention

The "repertoire of contention" is the set of oppositional tactics that movements creatively accumulate over the course of many struggles (Tarrow 1998: 20–21). These tactics evolve over time as movements interact with their often-hostile environment. Some tactics become outdated; at other times, variations are invented. A new tactic can initially be incredibly disruptive, catching one's opponents by surprise. The first sit-down strike in the USA, by the United Auto Workers in Flint, Michigan in 1936–37, was a powerful innovation in the repertoire of contention and resulted in an important victory for the labor movement; the UAW won recognition and its first contract. Gandhi's philosophy and techniques of nonviolent resistance confounded the British Empire, and the American civil rights movement achieved similar successes with its own version of Gandhi's techniques. In the US and Europe, the New Left caught their opponents unaware with spectacular, symbolic pranks that disrupted what they saw as the oppressive activity of the state, drew media attention to their social issues, and provoked the imagination and sympathetic ire of many

spectators. The Kabouters, for example, broke into many abandoned houses and vacant office buildings across the Netherlands, using whimsical humor in art and street performance to soften the shock of their illegal actions as they squatted the buildings to protest the desperate housing shortage of the time. They succeeded in garnering the sympathy of Dutch people of all ages and most classes, who were all affected by this shortage. Eventually, they forced the state to address the housing problem, including the legalization of a number of Kabouter squat-communes (Bogad 2005). While these examples of nonviolent creativity can expand the efficacy of social movements, tactics can eventually become so conventionalized that they lose a great deal of their effect. The state develops counter-tactics for containing and minimizing their potency, including what the Dutch Left bitterly refers to as "repressive tolerance." Some activists feel that prearranged, routinized civil disobedience arrests have lost much of their bite for this reason.

One of the major turns in the history of the repertoire of contention is the development of modular tactics, or tactics that can be transferred across boundaries of context, complaint, location, and identity. The public demonstration is an example, spreading across many national borders and tried by almost every social movement to date. Modular tactics have great utility; when an action is needed, the local groups of a movement across a country, or even internationally, can do the same type of action on the same day. The advantages are not to be underestimated. For example, if a corporation or state knows that if they push one union too far, the result may be not just one local strike, but a national strike, possibly with sympathy strikes against their subsidiary firms in other countries, they will at least think twice before escalating a conflict. Examples of recent coordinated global modular action include the demonstrations against the USA's buildup to invasion in Iraq on February 15, 2003, in which an estimated 10 million people across the world took part, and the Lysistrata Project, in which hundreds of groups in many countries performed that ancient Greek play as an anti-Iraq War statement (lysistrataproject.org). TO itself can be thought of as a potential modular form of resistance. Because books describing the practice have been translated into many languages, and as TO centers and groups have been working all over the world, TO techniques could be activated if desired on several continents at once.

Modular action also carries with it some risk of routinization; it too can become reductionist and mechanistic. However modular a form of resistance it may ostensibly be, an action still must be adapted to local needs, dangers, cultures, and legal/sociopolitical contexts. This is reflected in a hard-won bit of wisdom shared among experienced TO Jokers and theorists: TO facilitators must remember that TO techniques are meant to serve the local, specific, and ever-changing needs of spect-actors, and not the other way around. As a modular tactic in the repertoire of resistance of social movements, TO remains valid only to the extent that groups feel free to adapt and change its form.

Leslie Kauffman makes the corollary point that many activists fall in love with a particular tactic, and start to confuse that increasingly redundant and sometimes inappropriately used tactic, with strategy (Kauffman 2004). Strategies are comprehensive, complex plans for a long-term campaign, projecting power onto space and time; tactics are immediate actions. Tactics can be the building-block elements of a strategy; on the other hand, they may be the only items in the repertoire of a player that lack strategic power. New tactics need to be constantly innovated to feed a movement's evolving strategy; the opponents of social movements, alas, are not blocks of wood. States and corporations exercise agency, too! The tactical interaction between social movements and their opponents is a dance of competing innovation. As one tactic is used, the police (for example) will develop a tactic that disrupts

or neutralizes that tactic. Another tactic will have to be innovated to respond to that response, and so on. A movement that is organized so as to maximize the creation and circulation of new tactics, and that employs praxis-oriented experimentation with and reflection on those methods, is a movement that will stay flexible and unpredictable.

Public demonstrations

Why do movements spend so much time and effort organizing public demonstrations? Some feel that the public demonstration is obsolete—that public space no longer exists, or that power is now too fluid and dispersed to be contested by gathered masses of people. There are so many other tasks for activists: direct action, recruiting door-to-door, fund raising, lobbying, training, reflecting/theorizing/writing, building counter-institutions at the grass-roots level, and jokering TO workshops and performances, to name a few. Although this may seem a very basic and obvious question, there are many, sometimes conflicting, often overlapping motivations for the public performance of dissent. Here is a nonexhaustive list, with each item accompanied by the tactical emphasis most beneficial to further the particular goal:

1   *To collectively express dissent on a specific issue*, in order to influence the state, and/or other elites, and the larger public, or at least to embarrass the state and put mass opposition to state policy on the public record. The more important this is to the group, the more the coherence of its message matters.
2   *As an expression of strength for the movement*, both for internal confidence-building and as a general warning for opponents. If this is important to the group, then successfully organizing a big turnout is of the essence.
3   *To recruit new members and grow the movement*. If this is important to the group, then the public space they inhabit should be attractive to be in. And even if the issue is deadly serious, there should be something about the time spent and the physical movement through space that inspires desire and defiant joy. An atmosphere of serious play, of ludic experimentation with freer ways of being, may be ideal, but concerns about going past a broader public's horizons of expectations or understanding may complicate this.
4   *To define collective identity for a group, subculture, or movement*. Since demonstrations alone rarely change public policy or power structures, they arguably should serve a countercultural purpose, to build cohesion and sustain resistance. When developing a countercultural identity is important to the group, then the style of the demonstration matters a great deal. Organizers and participants may ask themselves: What is the mood at the demonstration? Is the composition of the group diverse or homogenous? What culture is being created and expressed in the space? How are people's bodies costumed/gendered and how do they move in the space? What is the dramaturgy of the space—the blocking, timing, tone, composition, design? What is the role of art and creativity? Is the emphasis toward individual identity or collective identity or toward a non-dualistic mix/interplay of the two?
5   *As a way to convene the movement for targeted direct action*. The anti-abortion movement, for example, has gathered people from all over the US to shut down abortion clinics in some localities. The pro-choice movement has responded in kind, gathering masses of activists to protect access to those clinics. The global justice movement regularly convenes to disrupt and protest the proceedings of state/corporate globalization agencies

such as the World Trade Organization. If this goal is important to the group and the target is well-defended, then it helps to have a diverse organization that is trained to implement a diversity of tactics in the space.

6 [Insert your motivation here.]

These different priorities are always in competing and overlapping play with each other. The friction between International ANSWER and Absurd Response described earlier reflects a conflict between priorities at a demonstration. International ANSWER most valued coherence of message while Absurd Response valued creativity, style, and opening up a joyful, countercultural space. These two approaches parallel two overarching models of public demonstration—"occupying public space" and "opening public space." Almost every public demonstration shows elements of both models in a tensive, dialectical mixture. When the two styles clash in the same place, the result is often an instructive disruption that reveals their underlying assumptions.

Instructive disruptions: occupying versus opening public space

Demonstrations that occupy public space typically preprint thousands of identical signs and ask people to hold them high while they stand, listen, and march together, chanting the same chants at the same time, in order to keep their message absolutely clear. However, this uniformity can be boring and uncompelling. Dramaturgically, this sort of action may have been seen so many times that viewers react to it the same way they react to any cliché—by tuning out even when they wish to pay attention. A mass of social actors fade into the background like blurry extras from central casting.

But there is something else that is unappealing about this style of demonstration in its extreme form. Generally speaking, there is no process whereby the average participant can contribute creatively to the dramaturgy of the protest. The underlying ideology of this sort of gathering is monologic, with a mass of spectators listening to a few elevated and amplified leaders. The clear division between speakers on a podium and the audience stands in sharp contrast to TO concepts of dialogism and spect-actorship. However, this sort of demonstration does occupy a public space to serve a unified purpose and a clear message. Just because it is monologic does not make it necessarily authoritarian. It requires no special effort to attend, so if one is really tired from work or life, all one has to do is show up.

In contrast to the occupying space model with its very clear message and control of space for unified dissent is the opening space model. This model attempts to open a space for collective and individual, Do-It-Yourself creativity, generally organized around a certain loose theme (such as Absurd Response to an Absurd War). Sometimes the group will even bring extra costume elements, (e.g., plastic Billionaire top hats) to offer to people who didn't have the time or energy to bring their own.

The opening space message may get confused, lost in the fun, or there may not even *be* a central message. Far from a liability, Naomi Klein (2002) considers this desirable, at least in the case of the anticorporate movement which reflects a coalition of diverse agendas. This variation in focus is accepted in the hopes that the event as a whole will nevertheless hold together. Beyond the pleasure of the moment, these unpredictable and participatory actions can help create a joyous counterculture that can sustain long-term participation in a movement.

Some public actions have no explicit, verbal political content besides the action itself;

they are not clearly open space or occupying space models. For example, a Critical Mass action disrupts car culture and exerts pressure for non-polluting urban public transport by the "organized coincidence" of hundreds of people riding their bikes on the streets at the same time. These actions can polarize by angering and inconveniencing car-users. However, activists have consciously accepted that polarization as a necessary aspect of directly confronting what they perceive as an unsustainable and unacceptable urban infrastructure and system of priorities that have gone unmarked for too long. While this action captures the monologic message of an occupying space model, its participatory design borrows from the opening space model (especially on Hallowe'en Critical Masses, when pirates, monsters, and superheroes of all shapes and sizes convene for the ride).

In some contexts, different motivations for demonstrating can coexist in a mutually re-inforcing way. A group may decide that they can more clearly communicate their agenda if the greater public and passersby are actually compelled to stop and pay attention. They may thus make their demonstration interesting and entertaining, which, in turn, also serves the purposes of recruitment and of performing the movement's countercultural identity. A group may then feel pressure to be innovative and keep coming up with new material; interestingly, this is the same challenge that career comedians face to avoid staleness.

Both occupying space and opening space models have the option of using a variety of aesthetic strategies in their public demonstrations and performances. Next, I examine the ramifications of using the particular strategies of humor and irony as elements of protest in both models.

Humor and irony

> [T]he weird and clownish forms . . . get on the nerves of the Establishment. In the face of the gruesomely serious totality of institutionalized politics, satire, irony and laughing provocation become a necessary dimension of the new politics.
>
> (Marcuse 1969: 64)

Not only can laughter take the piss out of grim authorities, it can also help the laughers to get through the strains and tensions of everyday life and movement activity. Humor can also add to the efficacy of a demonstration as people are often more likely to stop and listen if they are entertained.

It is important to note that the opening space model has no monopoly on the use of humor in protest. The use of humor takes different forms for the two models. For opening space it means the encouragement of a festive and ridiculous theme for the event. The result may be a less organized type of humor, one that does not have a single point of focus, a sort of simultaneous and chaotic variety show. On the other hand, occupying space protests may attempt to choreograph and coordinate complex and surprising humorous performances, organizing the space to direct audience focus as desired.

Andrew Boyd (2002) argues that irony has become a tool for a highly motivated new generation of activists. Inverted meanings and sarcastic satire can surprise people and stimulate reflection. Irony, which throws several simultaneous meanings at recipients, may cause passersby to do interpretive work, puncturing their assumed frame of reference to let new light shine in. There is always the risk of losing spectators if the irony is either too simplistic or too abstruse. There is no way to control the creative consumption of irony by all individuals,

but performers may nevertheless play with audiences' sensibilities, trying to anticipate possible misfires.

Here is an example of the use of irony in an opening space action: on the day after Thanksgiving, New York City's Union Square is traditionally filled with booths of people selling freshly baked goods. On this day in 2002, members of Absurd Response staged a "Bake Sale for the Military" in Union Square. While activist Kate Crane held out a tray of (delicious) missile-shaped gingerbread cookies, I called out for people to "Give 'Til It Hurts Someone Else." As concerned citizens, we hawked our wares, calling out to the passing crowd to please help our charity, to dig down deep, to do their part, because a lot of missiles were about to be expended by the government in the first few minutes of impending war, and if we could sell 1,200,000 cookies we would be able to buy one replacement missile for the rubble-bouncing second wave.

The bake-salers were accompanied by a small mob of Billionaires and a trio of joyfully ultra-rightist Missile Dick Chicks. The latter were dressed in red, white, and blue wigs, showgirl outfits, and makeup, with enormous missiles jutting out from their crotches. They performed tightly choreographed numbers remaking songs such as "These Bombs Were Made for Dropping" to the tune of "These Boots Were Made for Walking." The idea of selling cookies on the street fit in with the bake-sale context; the cruise-missile phalluses waving around in proud unison did not. The charity drive rhetoric was familiar; the premise of the Pentagon being strapped for funds and in need of volunteer help was not. People hesitated, cocked their heads, watched, listened, and walked on. Some approached us. Of those, most played along, responded wryly, and were rewarded with a missile-cookie and some antiwar mobilization literature.

However, there were three concerned, apparently antiwar people who asked, "Are you serious?!" We responded in character, playing out the irony as blatantly as possible, and while this seemed to reach them, they were still shaken up enough by the spectacle to need our straightforward assurance that we weren't serious. I stayed in character and handed them the antiwar literature, and this finally gave them the relief they were looking for. The literature served as a catch-all for anyone who wasn't comfortable with the irony, while also giving them an internet link for antiwar event schedules and locations. This was hardly an act of Invisible Theatre! Nevertheless, our choice to use irony, in the context of an opening space protest with lots of swirling, absurd signifiers all around us, did confuse a few people.

Protests that use irony and other forms of humor are engaged in a balancing act between novelty and familiarity. Public reactions to them are not predictable. They may help a movement reach people in a more engaging way, but can threaten the clarity of a movement's message. On the other hand, an emphasis on unity of message, of being "on point," can suppress the multivocality of a diverse movement.

Unity meets diversity

As noted earlier, the occupying space model has the strength of emphasizing a movement's unity. However, when the movement is composed of a coalition of various interests and identities, unity is a false and fragile façade that can ultimately detract from the movement's integrity and efficacy; unity itself must be redefined. As Kelly Moore and Lesley J. Wood argue, coalitions are strongest when they do not claim a unity of interests, priorities, or tactics, but rather acknowledge their diversity while emphasizing the spirit of cooperation for the tasks at hand (2002: 30). The US global justice movement is an example of such a

complex array of loosely-coordinated affinity groups and blocs of activists who gather at non-hierarchical "spokes-council" meetings to plan actions.

The decentralized affinity group model is not just ultra-democratic dialogism for its own sake. The consensus process, by which affinity groups make decisions, can result in greater efficacy even if it takes more time than an authoritarian central committee might. Starhawk (2002) argues that the decentralized aspect of the movement made it much more capable during the "Battle of Seattle" against the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 1999. The movement nonviolently swarmed the city, the WTO was disrupted despite the violent response of the state, and the existence of mass opposition to corporate globalization in the USA was established for a global audience.

When affinity groups meet at spokes-councils, the emphasis on dialogue is not purely idealistic but vital for planning intelligent action that acknowledges the heterogeneity of the movement. At the spokes-council meeting for the massive February 15, 2003 antiwar demonstration in New York City, representatives for the Carnival Bloc made a very important negotiation with the People of Color Bloc. Both groups were planning to gather at the main branch of the Public Library, and then to move out in the direction of First Avenue where the rally was taking place. However the City of New York, with the help of a Bush Administration lawyer, had successfully banned any marching against the war that day. The rally was permitted, but there would be no legal way to march in the street in order to get there.

The Carnival Bloc, including such opening space-oriented groups as Reclaim the Streets, the Glamericans, and the Missile Dick Chicks, tends to ignore such antidemocratic rulings and demonstrates in public spaces anyway. For reasons of privilege or motivation, this bloc is mostly made up of people who are willing and able to incur some risk of arrest in this sort of situation. The People of Color Bloc, however, included many who could not afford to be arrested because of job, income, family, or legal status. At the spokes-council meeting, it was agreed that the People of Color Bloc would set out for the rally first, staying on the sidewalks and following traffic signals. After they had traveled far enough away that they would not be embroiled in any mass arrests, the Carnival Bloc would set out on its path, following its agenda of taking over a street or a neighborhood and playing music and dancing against the war despite the permit ban. In a movement that privileged a more totalizing, reductionist unity, or which took orders handed down from a central committee, this dialogue might not have occurred, and one group's needs might have been subsumed under that of the other.

Working with a diversity of tactics is more complex than having a central command, but it is also more dynamic and flexible. Organizers of occupying space protests may be more tempted to emphasize or impose unity than those that attempt to open space. However, in the planning stage of either type of event, a movement can engage in open dialogue between blocs so that diversity of interests, tactics, and identities are acknowledged and respected. Pre-action TO workshops may be of use in acknowledging and dealing with these differences as well.

Tactical carnival

Carnival does not know footlights, in the sense that it does not acknowledge any distinction between actors and spectators.

(Bakhtin 1968: 7)

Recent creative protest, with its Do-It-Yourself ethos, emphasis on collective and individual creativity, and free-flowing multivocality, is often described as carnivalesque. Kauffman asserts that:

> [T]he central idea behind the carnival is that protests gain in power if they reflect the world we 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 . . . not unlike creating a community garden.
>
> (Kauffman 2004: 380–81)

It is instructive to see how the opening space model largely follows the practice of carnival. The global justice movement, for example, often convenes in massive, festive, creative street protests, and has consciously theorized itself using terms such as "Carnival Against Capital" (Notes From Nowhere 2003: 185). This type of engaging, ludic protest encourages people to enjoy, and to imagine other possible worlds. The attempt to remove the performer/audience divide follows Bakhtin's notion that carnival is liberatory and subversive because it "does not know footlights." Calls to action for this carnivalesque model do not only list a series of angry complaints, but solicit contributions to a counterculture fantasia, or a human community garden. The Glamericans come to protests in maximum glam-majesty to decorate public space with themselves. The Rock Stars Against the War assume alter-personas, get on their tour bus, and turn protests into hard-partying, no-sleep adventures.

   Carnival is as much for the benefit and social change of the activists as it is for any spectators who will hopefully become spect-actors. The serious play is meant to inspire desire, collective stories, group cohesion, and identity formation—making a movement that has denser social networks and is more sustainable and adaptable through hard times. Even setbacks and misfires will be fed back into the creative process to help generate new ideas for the movement. As Stephen Duncombe argues,

> This is *praxis*, a theory arising out of activity . . . An *embodied theory* of mass activity is competing against the *idealized theory* of capitalism that celebrates the self-gratifying individual . . . Direct action groups . . . consciously try to create these theory-generating, lived experiences as part of our politics . . . Protest becomes a breathing, dancing example of what a liberated public space might look like. A lived imaginary.
>
> (Duncombe 2003: 15–16)

But are these protests carnivalesque in the Bakhtinian sense? Are they liberatory simply because the footlights are removed? Is this purely an opening space model? Bakhtin (1968) theorized the carnivalesque as a mode of being and as a social ritual wherein laughter and ribaldry, emphasis on the undifferentiated masses, bodily functions, and symbolic inversion of the social order created a liberatory space even in the most repressive societies. Bakhtin perhaps romanticized the power and nature of carnival a bit, and in the Stalinist context in which he was writing, who could blame him? It is questionable whether medieval carnival ever totally overrode individualism and hierarchy. Later theorists have argued that carnival is situational—that, depending on the historical moment, it can either be a liberatory moment of rebellion or a safety valve that actually serves the long-term stability of the given social order (Stallybrass and White 1986: 16–19; Kertzer 1988: 144–50).

   There are important differences between modern oppositional performances that evoke

the carnivalesque and the phenomenon that Bakhtin was exploring. Feudal carnival was a calendrically circumscribed event, tied to the harvest and religious schedules of agrarian-Christian societies still influenced by their pagan pasts, and the event itself was part of a commonly shared cultural and religious vocabulary. The oppositional, carnivalesque protests of today take place when and where the protestors choose: sometimes in reaction to "establishment" events, sometimes not. They may be ideologically complicated and ambivalent events, but they still tend to be more focused and specific in their social critique than most feudal era carnivals. In this sense, there is more tactical agency in contemporary carnivalesque protest, drawing on a narrower, more specialized appeal than the all-community carnival of feudal times. While those who dance, sing, and party in current street protests may share an experience of the joyous and outrageous carnivalesque, the entire village, so to speak, does not take part. Thus there is an inherent performer/audience divide in current carnival protest, and indeed the events are often framed in terms of how spectators receive them, either on the street or through the mass media. For these reasons, I would distinguish between Bakhtinian carnival and what I call the *tactical carnival* of today.

This tactical carnival is not purely participatory. It unavoidably and inherently includes an audience. It is also not purely an opening space proposition. Tactical carnival involves a dialogue and a dialectic not only between individual activist groups but between the modes of occupying space and opening space. In this sense, TO aligns with tactical carnival for Forum Theatre, in form and content, contains elements of both modes. During the initial performance of the anti-model, forum is more controlled than open space—but then the scene is opened up for spect-actor improvisatory intervention. Theatre of the Oppressed contains both strident contestation of oppressive structures and practices and a group-invented enactment and embodiment of (at least glimpses of) the future world the participants want to live in.

To be truly tactically flexible, sustainable for a diverse coalition with different interests, resources, and vulnerabilities, and to effectively engage with the ever-inventive and vigilant state, tactical carnival must negotiate and fuse techniques from various modes: a huge demonstration that scatters into a citywide radical costume ball, a creative and ironic engagement with passersby leading to earnest direct action, dozens of diverse columns converging at City Hall for an extended session of Legislative Theatre. The techniques of TO that increase the level of dialogism and spect-actorship, have already begun to take their place in the tensive negotiation that is the public demonstration.

Bibliography

Bakhtin, M.M. (1968) *Rabelais and His World*, trans. H. Iswolsky. Cambridge: MIT Press.
Boal, A. (1979) *Theatre of the Oppressed*, trans. C.A. and M.-O.L. McBride. New York: Urizen Books.
Bogad, L.M. (2005) *Electoral Guerrilla Theatre: Radical ridicule and social movement*. London: Routledge.
Boyd, A. (2002) "Irony, meme warfare, and the extreme costume ball," in R. Hayduk and B. Shepard (eds) *From ACT UP to the WTO: Urban protest and community building in the era of globalization*. London: Verso.
Brecher, J., Costello, T., and Smith, B. (2002) *Globalization from Below: The power of solidarity*. Cambridge, MA: South End Press.
Duncombe, S. (2003) "The poverty of theory: Anti-intellectualism and the value of action," *Radical Society: Review of Culture and Politics*, 30: no. 1: 11–17.
Fraser, N. (1997) *Justice Interruptus: Reflections on the "postsocialist" condition*. London: Routledge.

Kauffman, L. (2004) "A short, personal history of the global justice movement," in E. Yuen, D. Burton-Rose, and G. Katsiaficas (eds) *Confronting Capitalism*. Brooklyn: Soft Skull Press.

Kertzer, D.I. (1988) *Ritual, Politics and Power*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Klein, N. (2002) "The vision thing: Were the DC and Seattle protests unfocused, or are the critics missing the point?" in R. Hayduk and B. Shepard (eds) *From ACT UP to the WTO: Urban protest and community building in the era of globalization*. London: Verso.

Lysistrata Project website. http://lysistrataproject.org. Accessed May 26, 2004.

Marcuse, H. (1969) *An Essay On Liberation*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.

Moore, K. and Wood, L. (2002) "Target practice: Community activism in a global era," in R. Hayduk and B. Shepard (eds) *From ACT UP to the WTO*. London: Verso.

Notes From Nowhere (2003) *We Are Everywhere: The irresistible rise of global anticapitalism*. London: Verso.

Scott, J.C. (1990) *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Stallybrass, P. and White, A. (1986) *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Starhawk (2002) "How we really shut down the WTO," in R. Hayduk and B. Shepard (eds) *From ACT UP to the WTO: Urban protest and community building in the era of globalization*. London: Verso.

Tarrow, S. (1998) *Power in Movement: Social movements and contentious politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Wood, E.J. (2003) *Insurgent Collective Action and Civil War in El Salvador*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.