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3. Performance and Politics in the Public Sphere

3.1 The Public Sphere

In the discourse about politics in public sphere, Jürgen Habermas's study *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* has been crucial for the definition of the public sphere in Western societies. Even more importantly, with the 1989 English translation of Habermas's study (more than twenty-five years after its original publication) the phrase "public sphere" itself entered North American academic cultural discourse where it has become a crucial analytical and conceptual term (Reese-Schäfer 37). In *Structural Transformation* Habermas examines the emergence as well as the decline of a bourgeois public sphere in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century. Habermas used this bourgeois public sphere as an ideal of a "developing critical sphere," a space that "provoked the critical judgment of a public making use of its reason" (Habermas 24). The English coffee houses, French salons or German Tischgesellschaften of the eighteenth and early nineteenth century all represent Habermas's ideal of a public sphere because they were spaces in which private people exchanged and discussed their political ideas. As a space in which dialogue, argument and public debate are emphasized, "the ideal of the public sphere calls for social integration to be based on rational-critical discourse" (Calhoun 29). In addition, this Habermasian ideal of the public sphere is considered one in which the sphere of the state and the sphere of economics do not interfere with the "rational-critical" public discourse of citizens. Public opinion is thus supposed to be a process of critical inquiry into both state and economic affairs that takes place outside the realm of these affairs (see Fraser, *Rethinking* 59).

Yet, with regard to the discussion of activist performance, the classic Habermasian notion of the political public sphere which emphasizes reasonable debate and discussion of a common good neglects important social and political conditions of contemporary Western societies which determine the modus operandi of activist performance. As Nancy Fraser has pointed out,

> with the emergence of "welfare state mass democracy," society and the state became mutually intertwined; publicity in the sense of critical scrutiny of the state gave way to public relations, mass-mediated staged displays, and the manufacture and manipulation of public opinion. (Fraser, *Rethinking* 59)

In contemporary societies, the clear-cut separation of the public sphere and the state (as well as the economy) does not exist. Instead, we find ourselves confronted with a conglomerate of interests and agents that cannot be clearly separated from each other—a process that Habermas referred to as "refeudalization" (Habermas 232). For Habermas, this merging of spheres and in particular the commodification of culture and the press is a key indicator of the transformation of the bourgeois public sphere and a loss of the critical-rational character of public discourse (192). This merging of the spheres also blurs the distinction between citizen and consumer.[44] Yet, as Nancy Fraser points out, "Habermas stops short of developing a new post-bourgeois model of the public sphere" (*Rethinking* 58). Because activist performances take place in spaces in which the public sphere of citizens, corporate and commodified spaces, and spaces determined by mass media are inextricably connected and at times even indistinguishable, for my inquiry, Habermas's concept of the public sphere needs to be supplemented with other approaches.

While Habermas's notion of the public sphere builds on the idea of "consensus formation" (Habermas 208) and thus agreement between citizens (which, for him, results from rational discussion and debate), activist performers stage their politics in public as an act of *dissent*. Although the actor-citizens of activist performances use the public sphere to call attention to their political agendas, they do not discuss and debate these agendas in public, but draw attention to specific political circumstances, suppressions or inequalities, in short, political issues that they feel are not adequately discussed in governmental or party politics. Thus, for the analysis of activist performance it is necessary to perceive the public sphere as a battleground of competing publics that struggle for public attention. Before certain political issues become subject of political discussion and debate, these matters must be uttered and made visible in public. For this reason, activist performers as actor-citizens often make use of symbolic political acts in order to make their agendas visible to a wider public. In other words, they create a space for public discourse by means of performance.

For the discussion of activist performance as a form of engaged citizenship Chantal Mouffe's and Nancy Fraser's critiques of the Habermasian concept of the public sphere seem to be particularly fruitful: Political scientist Chantal Mouffe criticizes the Habermasian notion of the public sphere as she argues that the contestational character of public dissent, which she refers to as an "agonistic

[44] I discuss the conflation of citizen and consumer within different contexts throughout this study. In particular in my discussion of Reverend Billy's political consumerism (chapter 4), this aspect looms large. In chapter 5 (as well as in chapter 6), I then look at new political practices emerging within new media environments that question former clear-cut distinctions of media producers and consumers as well as consumers' participation in popular culture and citizen participation in politics.

struggle," represents "the core of a vibrant democracy" ("Artistic Activism" 3). Furthermore, she argues,

> Consensus is no doubt necessary, but it must be accompanied by dissent. Consensus is needed on the institutions constitutive of democracy and on the "ethico-political" values informing the political association—liberty and equality for all—but there will always be disagreement concerning their meaning and the way they should be implemented. In a pluralist democracy such disagreements are not only legitimate but also necessary. They provide the stuff of democratic politics. (*On the Political* 31)

For Mouffe, the public sphere is a political battleground rather than a space of rational discussion. Although a basic consensus on a core of values exists, dissent and disagreement are necessary for democracy to work. Since the conflict taking place in public sphere is one of confrontation instead of consensus, the public must be conceived of in the plural: "there is no underlying principle of unity, no predetermined centre to this diversity of spaces, there always exist diverse forms of articulation in them" ("Artistic Activism" 3). Similarly, in her influential essay "Rethinking the Public Sphere," published in 1991, feminist philosopher Nancy Fraser argues:

> [T]he bourgeois public sphere was never *the* public. On the contrary, virtually contemporaneous with the bourgeois public there arose a host of competing counterpublics. . . . Virtually from the beginning, counterpublics contested the exclusionary norms of the bourgeois public, elaborating alternative styles of political behavior and alternate norms of public speech. (61)

Similarly, Fraser's concept of the public sphere builds on an idea of the public as a site of contestational politics, a space in which a "plurality of competing publics" encounter and combat each other.[45]

With regard to activist performance, Fraser's argument is important because she recognizes the existence of multiple publics and rejects the idea of the public as a monolithic, homogenous entity. In addition, Fraser also theorizes the relation between counterpublics and the dominant public as a "conflictual" (61) one. By abandoning the idea of a single, unified and above all socially homogeneous public sphere "parallel discursive arenas" emerge (68). In stressing the relation between different publics as conflictual and contestational, Fraser's notion of a plurality of publics "supposes inter-public discursive interaction" (68). Publics do not emerge in a social vacuum, but always respond and appear in reaction to other publics. Here,

[45] See in this context also Michael Warner's discussion of the relation between public and counterpublic (Warner 65-125).

Fraser takes up the idea of Geoff Eley, who considers the public sphere as "the structured setting where cultural and ideological contest or negotiation among a variety of publics takes place" (qtd. in Fraser, "Rethinking" 68).[46] This concept of competing publics emphasizes the relation between a counterpublic and a dominant public against which it is defined. For this reason, activist performance can only be examined in relation to a dominant public discourse in which the activists interfere with their performance. Reverend Billy interferes with his preacher performance into the dominant discourses of consumption; Billionaires for Bush stage their spectacles within the context of national elections and The Yes Men appropriate already existing media formats to articulate their protest in public.

Fraser's the notion of the counterpublic stresses that its subordinate status lacks the material base, media, and structural organization of a dominant public. For this reason, Fraser attributes to counterpublics "alternative styles of political behavior" ("Rethinking" 61, qtd. above). This idea is crucial for the examination of alternative modes of political expression such as acts of civil disobedience, demonstrations, as well as activist performances. As regards the examination of contemporary examples of activist performance, Fraser's argument is important because she distinguishes between different *aesthetics* of politics. With regard to my subsequent analysis of three case studies, I argue that activist performances use alternative rhetoric, organization and aesthetics to articulate and stage their political agenda in the public sphere in order to call attention to political issues these groups find excluded from dominant public political discourse. As members of non-governmental, grassroots collectives, activist performers lack the organizational structures or material bases of dominant political organizations such as, for example, political parties or unions. As a consequence, activist performance also lacks a space of its own and instead depends on and needs to appropriate already established publics. The protest performances of Billionaires for Bush, for example, intervene into and thus benefit from the public discourse of the presidential campaigns in order to make their political agenda visible in public space. In a similar vein, The Yes Men's media hoaxes do not establish new channels of news distribution, but hijack already existing ones to spread their critique on corporations such as Dow Chemical. Furthermore, activist performances do not participate in public discourse by means of rational discussion or political debate and they do not exclusively communicate their political positions verbally, but also *physically*. As I elaborated in chapter 2, the activists' bodies become sites of signification. In addition, and as my subsequent analyses will demonstrate, activist performances

[46] Interestingly, it is here that the idea of a single public sphere sneaks in through the back door in that the public sphere in a general sense is considered to be the playground or battlefield on which different publics constitute and bear on each other.

use theatrical and entertaining elements as well as the rhetoric of parody to stage their politics in public.

For the time being, I propose the following working definition of activist performance: Activist performance is a form of political action which is located *outside* the political consensual realm of party politics as it is not institutionally affiliated with parties, unions or other organizations. Activist performance comes into existence as *a physical act of dissent of engaged citizens*, and because it takes place outside the institutionalized realm of politics, activist performance uses *alternative aesthetics* to articulate, or rather, to stage its political agenda. In this sense, as my subsequent analyses will illustrate, *activist performance can be conceived as the (temporary) formation of a counterpublic which both aesthetically as well as ideologically defies prevailing, dominant political discourses.*

3.2 Political Parody in the Public Sphere

In the discussion of my three case studies in chapters 4, 5, and 6, I show how the activists' diverse forms of protest express their political critique not by means of reasonable argument and rational debate, but in a performative and above all humorous manner. Thus, by preferably using parodic impersonation as their primary mode of presentation, the works of all three activist-artist collectives discussed in this study represent an entertaining form of political critique. However, to stress the comedic and amusing character of these forms of protest does not mean to depreciate activist performances as mere entertainment. Rather, I intend to show that the performance of protest allows for a political rhetoric that is emotionally appealing and that draws a smile on the faces of the audience. When Reverend Billy positions himself and his gospel choir in front of a Starbucks' coffee shop, when he begins to preach about the "evils" of the corporate coffee company and the choir (consisting of mostly professional singers and actors) sings their gospel song "Sidamo" to protest against Starbucks' exploitation of Ethiopian coffee farmers, the passers-by are addressed in an affective and humorous yet insistent way. By drawing on John Carlos Rowe's observation concerning the need of paying attention to affective, emotive and even biophysical data for the study of American culture ("Perspectives"),[47] my analysis of activist performance will focus on how the activists employ performance as tool to articulate their politics in an emotional, i.e. humorous way.

For this enterprise, I draw on the work of political scientist Chantal Mouffe who emphasizes the importance of the emotional dimension of democratic politics

[47] See in this context my discussion of John Carlos Rowe's six characteristics of American studies in chapter 1.1.

and thus argues for "a democratic mobilization of affects" (*On the Political* 28). She continues this idea:

> The theorists who want to eliminate passions from politics and argue that democratic politics should be understood only in terms of reason, moderation and consensus are showing their lack of understanding of the dynamics of the political. They do not see that *democratic politics need to have a real purchase on people's desires and fantasies* and that, instead of opposing interests to sentiments and reason to passions, it should offer forms of identifications conductive of democratic politics**.** (*On the Political* 28, emphasis added) [48]

Mouffe warns us not to abandon the affective element of politics. Furthermore, she emphasizes the importance to channel people's desires and their emotional responsiveness into a direction that does not destabilize, but strengthen democratic politics. This idea is consequential for my analysis of activist performance. Unlike rational approaches to political processes, which appeal to "reason, moderation and consensus," a performative approach, as I argue, allows to address people in an affective way.[49] As impersonators, the activist-artists of The Church of Life After Shopping, Billionaires for Bush as well as The Yes Men employ the element of parody to express their political protest. At first sight, parody does not seem to have a place in politics. "Laughter—a visceral, involuntary reaction that feels good" (Marc ix) seems to be hardly compatible with decision-making processes, political debate and argumentation. However, although parody and humor more generally do not belong to the sphere of politics, I show in this study that both appear to be useful tools for citizen engagement in politics. Concordantly, communication theorists Jonathan Gray, Jeffrey Jones and Ethan Thompson argue that

[48] In support of Mouffe's line of argument, one can also draw on the work of media and cultural studies scholar Stephen Duncombe. In his recent monograph *Dream: Re-imagining Progressive Politics in an Age of Fantasy*, Duncombe argues that "the irrational and the emotional are not intrinsically negative aspects of politics. They are not something that must be prohibited, not even necessarily something that must be civilized; they can be noble and good. They are, however, something that needs to be addressed if one hopes to attain, and hold, political power" (36).

[49] In this context, one must emphasize that to stress the affective dimension of democratic politics does not mean that politics can do without reason. In a similar vein, with regard to e.g. the fascist political regime of the Third Reich or current right wing populism such as the Austrian FPÖ formerly led by Jörg Haider, one cannot deny that the emphasis on the emotive dimension of politics can indeed become a precarious enterprise. See in this context also Duncombe's discussion of fascists' appeal to emotions instead of reason, *Dream* 24, 26, 125 and Mouffe's discussion of right wing populism, *On the Political* 64-76.) US president Barack Obama's electoral campaign offers a prime example how the emotional dimension of *democratic* politics contributed decisively to the success of his campaign. His political message of "hope" and "change" emotionally appealed to citizens; his campaign strategically used this emotional appeal to mobilize a maximum of volunteers and to defeat the Republican candidate John McCain.

> [d]emocratic theorists have tended to emphasize news as the most important form of political discourse because, in their formulation, it is the primary means through which individuals can make rational democratic choices based on information. But . . . news is only one narrative of public life, and a limited one at that. Instead, political comedy, satire, and parody all provide important narrative critiques that enable democratic discourse and deliberations. . . . [These narrative critiques provide] valuable means through which citizens can analyze and interrogate power and the realm of politics rather than remain simple subjects of it. (16-17).

Similar to Mouffe, Gray, Jones, and Thompson argue for an affective approach to politics to complement a purely reasonable one. As scholars in the field of communication studies they are interested in possible public "narratives" and thus how people communicate about politics. Within such a context, the distribution of news appears to be an important instrument of communication with which to inform the public about politics. However, as they emphasize above, alternative narratives such as political parody are equally important for democratic politics as they offer citizens a way of scrutinizing political discourse and of criticizing political officeholders.

Parody is suitable way of scrutinizing politics because it requires participation. In order to understand the humorous dimension of this form of imitation, parody demands a certain literacy of its audience. Laughing about the joke and understanding parody as a form of mockery and critique is an act of both engagement in the subject of parody and an exchange with the person telling the joke, or in the case of my examples, the impersonator.

Throughout this study I examine three cases of parodic impersonation. An impersonator is a performer who imitates and thus acts the character of someone else.[50] Generally speaking, one can say that all three instances of activist performances impersonate their subject of critique and/or turn the impersonated character into a mouthpiece for the activists' political critique of corporate globalization. In my analysis of processes of impersonation I build on Linda Hutcheon's definition of parody. Her monograph, *A Theory of Parody: The Teachings of Twentieth Century Art Forms*, is relevant for my study for various reasons. First, Hutcheon's theorization of parody is not limited to literary texts, but examines parody as a ubiquitous phenomenon that represents "one of the major forms of modern self-reflexivity" (1-2). Thus, her broad approach enables me to consider

[50] For a detailed discussion of the politics of impersonation, see Schechter 1-6. In particular in the field of gay and lesbian identity politics, acts of male to female and female to male impersonations have been extensively discussed. See in this context, for example, Butler, *Bodies That Matter* 121-142; Davy 130-48; Dolan, "Impersonation" 5-11; and Schacht and Underwood 1-18.

parody as a practice that is used for political and cultural self-reflection and commentary. Second, according to Hutcheon parody denotes "a form of imitation . . . imitation characterized by ironic inversion" (6). Hutcheon specifies: "Parody is, in another formulation, repetition with a critical distance, which marks difference rather than similarity" (6). As political activists, the impersonations of The Church of Life After Shopping, Billionaires for Bush and The Yes Men employ parody as a means of protest against the subjects they impersonate. Third, Hutcheon theorizes parody not only as a critical practice but also draws attention to the affirmative dimension of parody. The "ambivalence set up between conservative repetition and revolutionary difference," she argues, "is part of the very paradoxical essence of parody" (77). Thus, as regards the relation between the original and its parody, she describes the practice of parody as a form of imitation that has a critical *and* a confirmative dimension. My analysis of the parodic dimension of activist performance will take up Hutcheon's "paradox" by asking not only in which respect the activists' impersonations ridicule and criticize the subjects of their impersonations, but also whether they affirm (or subvert) the very power structures and norms the activists seek to work against. Since activist performance cannot only be considered a cultural practice that represents and pictures political realities but one that seeks to actively interfere into and thus change these realities, it is necessary to complement Hutcheon's approach to parody with theorists emphasizing the relation between parody and democratic politics. For such an enterprise, Martha Nußbaum's critique of Judith Butler's idea of performative gender subversion will help me embed parodic activist performance within a larger political framework (see in particular my discussion in chapter 5.2).

Thus, it is within this frame of political parody as a critical political practice that I intend to examine my three examples of activist performances. As parodic impersonators, I do not consider the activist-actors of The Church of Life After Shopping, Billionaires for Bush or The Yes Men as a singular phenomenon. Rather, this study positions these performative articulations of political critique within the broader frame of what could be observed as an increasing exchange and at times even convergence of popular culture and politics, which, broadly construed, occurred during former President George W. Bush's two terms in office (from 2001 to 2009). Within these eight years, American political culture underwent a significant transformation of which the increasingly comedic take on politics is only one characteristic (I will elaborate on others below). Let me discuss three individual yet related indicators of the emerging points of intersection of popular culture and political discourse as well as the humorous character of this convergence.

First, commenting on the presidential race between George W. Bush and Al Gore in a cover article in *The New York Times Magazine* in 2000, journalist Marshall

Sella observes an increasing popularity of comedy news shows reporting about and commenting on the electoral campaigns of both candidates:

> The link between politics and comedy is now fully institutionalized. News outlets now present comedians not as escapists from hard news but as legitimate commentators upon it. Late-night hosts like Jon Stewart, Dennis Miller and Bill Maher are in constant rotation, not only on the fluffy "Larry King Live" but also on CNN's staple, "Late Edition." It's logical. A comic's take on politics is nimble, bite-size and utterly clear. And Americans prefer to take their news sweet. (72)

Sella's observation of the close relation between politics and comedy is further consolidated by the findings of a recent study of the Pew Research Center in Washington, DC, which brought evidence that 54 % of the TV audience group that is best informed about current politics actually watch comedy news shows such as *The Daily Show* or its spin-off *The Colbert Report* ("What Americans Know" 3). Although the survey stresses that these numbers do not imply that these shows are the primary source of information, nonetheless, "even after taking into account their overall news gathering habits and their political and demographic characteristics, the audiences for the comedy shows . . . have significantly higher knowledge scores than the average" ("What Americans Know" 15). Even more strikingly, in 2004, the Pew Research Center released a study examining different news sources reporting about the 2004 electoral campaign. Here, *The Daily Show* became "the preferred election news source by one-fifth of surveyed Americans ages 18-29" (qtd. in Day 99). The popular half-hour show, which airs Mondays to Thursdays on Comedy Central (in the US) features and recollects current political news headlines, re-plays original media footage and satirically comments and interacts with these news reports. In 2008, Americans voted the host of *The Daily Show*, the comedian Jon Stewart, number four of their most admired journalists (Pew, "Today's Journalists" 3). A show that heavily relies on mockery and parody as a means of interrogating current politics is favored by a large proportion of the American public and is considered a reliable source of information and significant component of American news media.

Second, in 2002, filmmaker Michael Moore won an Academy Award for best documentary for his film *Bowling for Columbine*. The film explores the social and political backgrounds of US gun violence and accompanies Moore on his quest to talk to the president of the National Rifle Association, the former actor Charlton Heston. His subsequent, highly controversial documentary *Fahrenheit 9/11* is even more obviously political as the filmmaker targets President George W. Bush and his "War on Terror." The film is noteworthy because it "became the most successful . . .

nonfiction film in history"[51] and the first documentary film which won the Grand Prize in Cannes (Hunt 925-26). But both *Bowling for Columbine* and *Fahrenheit 9/11* are not conventional documentary films.[52] Rather, both films heavily draw on humor to convey their political messages. Film critic Michael Wilmington writes, "*Bowling for Columbine* . . . [is] a fiercely opinionated film. But it's also a fiercely funny one, and the humor is what makes it so effective" (M1). Similarly, Claudia Puig writes in her review of *Fahrenheit 9/11* in *USA Today*: "The documentary's scathing attack on the war in Iraq and George W. Bush's presidency is informative, provocative, frightening, compelling, funny, manipulative and, most of all, entertaining" (D1).

In order to create this humorous effect, Moore's films promote a clear-cut political agenda according to which Moore stages himself as the average working class citizen—a position from which he questions political, social, and economic processes and conditions. In *Fahrenheit 9/11*, Moore intends to ridicule George W. Bush as an indolent and incapable president who lacks executive abilities. In order to convey this opinion in the film, Moore employs among other techniques "ironic use of stock footage" (Hunt 925). By using original news footage depicting presidential actions and speeches and dismantling their political settings, contexts, and histories, the narrative of Moore's film aims to expose the deceitful and fraudulent nature of President Bush's politics as well as the coverage of his politics in mainstream media. Thus, by means of deconstructing and commenting on news coverage, Moore develops his critique of the Bush administration and its War on Terror.[53]

[51] This success is also mirrored in bare numbers: As Robert Hunt points out, the film earned "more than $100 million in the first two month in release" (Hunt 925). Similarly, Michael Renov remarks that Michael Moore's films "have produced bigger box office success than all other documentary films combined" ("First-Person" 48).

[52] For detailed discussions on the parameters of the genre documentary see, for example, Austin and de Jong, *Rethinking Documentary*; Nichols, *Introduction to Documentary*; Renov, *Theorizing Documentary*; and Vaughan, *For Documentary*.

[53] Accordingly, film theorist Bill Nichols defines the genre documentary as a form of filmmaking that presents a certain view on the world. He elaborates: "In documentaries we find stories or arguments . . . that let us see the world anew. The ability of the photographic image to reproduce the likeness of what is set before it compels us to believe that it is reality itself represented before us, while the story or argument presents a distinct way of regarding this reality" (Nichols 3). Thus, *Fahrenheit 9/11* does not objectively record reality, but presents Moore's personal political view on this reality. While news coverage appears as a form of neutral observation and thus disguises its political preference, Moore's films openly acknowledge their political positions. This biased view, however, sometimes borders on the obfuscation of the distinction between fact and fiction. By taking, for example, news-footage out if its original context and inserting it into the narrative of his documentary *Fahrenheit 9/11* Moore erases the origins and contexts of his material and substitutes these with his personal narrative. This is also the reason why Moore was criticized fiercely for violating "documentary ethics" (Hunt 925). For further discussions of Moore's films in the context of documentary filmmaking, see, for example, Bernstein C20; Hunt 925-26; and Rizzo 32-39.

Released in June 2004, and given its immense media furors due to Miramax's and its parent company Disney's refusal to distribute the film, many critics discussed the film's impact on the upcoming presidential elections. Film critic Mick LaSalle observes, "in the 90-year history of the American feature film, there has never been a popular election-year documentary like this one" (E1). Similarly, Robert Hunt recalls that "[b]y the time it [the film] hit theatres in the summer of an election year, . . . Moore's film had become as big a political story as the presidential race itself, dissected by news-analysts [and] attacked from the stage of the Republican National Convention" (Hunt 926). The film's open attack on the Bush administration biased audiences into two camps: those who enthusiastically praised Moore as a political activist rallying against the political ills of the country and those who considered Moore a traitor to the American people, who tells lies about governmental politics. The film, it can be said, equally mobilized both camps. Some critics even went as far as hypothesizing that "if Moore had not made his film, Bush would have lost" the election (Oberacker 361), alluding to the enormous effort Bush supporters put into defending their candidate against Moore's attacks. Thus, within this electoral context Moore's documentary—as an entertaining product of popular culture—suddenly gained an unprecedented political function as it became attributed with the potential to sway public opinion and to convince people of the importance of their citizen duty to vote for a political candidate.

While these two cultural phenomena—parodic news comedy shows and political documentaries—are professional media products screened on TV and in cinemas, the third phenomenon I draw attention to emerges from and circulates on the Internet. Benefitting from the emergence of the Internet video sharing platform YouTube in February 2005 as well as from the advancement of digital technologies that enabled amateurs to easily produce, edit, and upload short video clips, political viral videos became a popular form of citizen participation in and communication about current politics (Rasiej and Sifry, "Viral Video"). A viral video is a clip that is usually distributed via the Internet, addresses a topical subject (such as for example, elections) in an entertaining way and becomes very popular within a short period of time by being shared and forwarded by Internet users (Fahs 152). New communication technologies and the Internet in particular enabled new forms of political expression for both citizens and the presidential candidate.[54] President Obama's extensive use of the technological possibilities of the Internet during his 2008 electoral campaign enabled an unprecedented number of people to participate in his campaign (see also my discussion of the impact of new media on the 2004 and

[54] In chapter 5, I elaborate on the impact of new media and communication technologies on citizen participation in electoral politics. See also Chadwick and Howard 1-11; Fenn 210-220; Jenkins, *Convergence* 206-240; "Snowman" 187-209; "Impact;" Sifry, "Networked Politics;" and A. Smith, "The Internet's Role in Campaign 2008."

2008 presidential elections in chapter 5.3). At the same time, popular culture phenomena such as the "Obama Girl"[55] indicate the vivid participation in the electoral race of both amateur and professional media producers. Already during the 2004 electoral campaign, these new and popular forms of expression were widely explored. As media scholar Henry Jenkins observes in this context, "we can see citizens starting to apply what they have learned as consumers of popular culture toward more overt forms of political activism" (*Convergence* 208). Jenkins is referring to activists' use of new media as well as popular culture practices for different projects of political grassroots mobilization such as MoveOn's video contest "Bush in 30 Seconds" (which I discuss in more detail in chapter 5.3.1) or Ben Cohen's voters' recruitment project "TrueMajority."[56] By 2008, as Henry Jenkins observes, "parody videos, both produced by the public and by the campaigns, played an unprecedented role in shaping public perception" ("Snowman" 189). Jenkins' observation fosters the impression that parody became something like a lingua franca of popular culture's participation in political discourse within the past two election cycles, as viral videos, comedy news shows as well as political documentaries preferably drew on a rhetoric of parody to comment on politics. It is within this (pop) cultural context that the activists' aesthetics of parodic impersonation shall be examined more closely.

At the same time, these examples also hint at another aspect which needs to be considered for the analysis of activist performance. When parody represents an "alternative style of political behavior" (Fraser, "Rethinking" 61, qtd. above) with which counterpublics interrogate and criticize dominant politics and public discourses, the different media spaces within which these parodic utterances occur must equally be considered. Furthermore, while the political issues these parodies address might be national ones, the broadcast and reception of these media cannot be confined to the national entity of the United States. Consequently, as information as well as flows of goods, money, and people increasingly unhinge national demarcations, the notion of the public sphere asks for a transnational approach.

3.3 The Transnational Public Sphere

[55] Actress Amber Lee Ettinger played the Obama Girl in a viral video called "I got a Crush ... on Obama." The video clip was produced by barelypolitical.com (an online entertainment website) and has been watched over 11 million times during the election campaign (Fenn 220).

[56] Founded in 2002, TrueMajority is an online advocacy group. By 2004, TrueMajority (as founder Ben Cohen explained in an interview with *Business Week*) had already 400,000 members. The non-profit organization focuses on issues concerning social and economic justice and prior to the presidential elections the organization focused on motivating citizens to register to vote and to actively participate in the elections (Green, "Web Politics"). See also Jenkins, *Convergence* 206-8.

Political scientist Colin Crouch argues that processes of globalization cause Western democracies—and here he is particularly referring to the US—to develop towards a political situation which he calls "post-democracy" because "[d]emocracy has simply not kept pace with capitalism's rush to the global" (29). Economic globalization challenged the very idea of the nation-state as it rendered its political agents, parties, and governments incapable of action in the face of the economic principles and dynamics of transnational capitalism. While the power of transnational corporate elites increases as nation-states depend on their investment (and the workforce they secure), the ordinary citizen opportunities for political participation in this process decreases and governments (as representatives of citizen interests) become incapable of adequately protecting their citizens. The current global financial crisis illustrates this point all too powerfully: Ignited by the American subprime mortgage crisis (which resulted in the insolvency of many banks and financial institutions) and the increasing international energy demands (which resulted in a record high for oil of approximately 150 dollars a barrel in July 2008), the inextricable connection of capital and resources across national borders and the proportional impotence of governments to shield their national markets from being affected appeared to be all too obvious.

For this reason, political scientists, such as, for example, advocates of cosmopolitanism call for the continuing institutionalization of democratic politics beyond the confines of the nation-state and thus propose and discuss concepts of a global citizenry.[57] In a similar vein, Nancy Fraser investigates the concept of a transnational public sphere and its effect on the notion of citizenship. She begins her considerations by acknowledging, "the idea of a 'transnational public sphere' is intuitively plausible, as it seems to have real purchase on social reality" ("Trans-national" 37). Yet, she also concedes that "from the perspective of democratic theory, at least, the phrase [transnational public sphere] sounds a bit like an oxymoron" (38). Here, Fraser addresses major problems that mark the difficult relationship between a transnational public sphere and the very idea of democracy. Any conception of a public sphere in democratic societies, she argues, enables its citizens to articulate "a valid public opinion" (38). Thus, the idea of a public sphere in democratic societies is closely tied to the possibility of empowerment and agency of a "political citizenry" (38). When the public sphere enters a transnational arena, the idea of citizenry seems to become obsolete, since the very idea of the citizen as a

[57] More precisely, as David Held observes, cosmopolitanism promotes the "principles of egalitarian individualism, reciprocal recognition, consent, and inclusiveness and subsidiarity"—principles which have been implemented in global institutions such as, for example, the United Nations (and its International Court of Justice), in the establishment of the International Military Tribunal at Nuremberg or, more recently, in the formation of the International Criminal Court (Held, "Cosmopolitanism" 474-5).

member of a political community depends on the political and geographical confines of the nation that establishes this political community (see also my discussion of global citizenry in chapter 1.1).

Fraser maps the territory and constituency of what she refers to as the "increasingly transnational or postnational" (44) public sphere as she outlines the major transformations of the notion of this sphere:

> The "who" of communication, previously theorized as national citizenry, is now a *collection of dispersed subjects of communication*. The "what" of communication, previously theorized as a national interest rooted in a national economy, now stretches across vast reaches of the globe, in a *transnational community of fate and of risk*, which is not however reflected in concomitantly expansive solidarities and identities. The "where" of communication, once theorized as the national territory, is now *deterritorialized cyberspace*. The "how" of communication, once theorized as national print media, now encompasses *a vast translinguistic nexus of disjoint and overlapping visual cultures*. Finally, the addressee of communication, once theorized as state power to be made answerable to public opinion, is now an *amorphous mix of public and private transnational powers* . . . , that is neither easily identifiable nor rendered accountable. ("Transnational" 44-45, emphasis added)

By merely looking at the choice of adjectives—"dispersed," "transnational," "deterritorialized," "disjoint," "overlapping," "amorphous"—one immediately realizes that highly complex and multifaceted processes are described here. The adjectives, it seems, attempt to grasp practices, scenes and transactions that escape clearly defined concepts of space, time and identity. Several things are noteworthy in this passage and warrant closer examination.

In a transnational public sphere, Fraser argues, the "who of communication" can no longer be perceived in terms of national citizens but represents a vast array of different interests groups ("collection of dispersed subjects," qtd. above). Similarly, the addressee, in this communicative process of the transnational public sphere becomes "an amorphous mix of public and private transnational powers" (Fraser, "Transnational" 45). Transnational corporate power vis-à-vis national political institutions increases and as Lauren Berlant observes, "Corporations are like empires; both work transnationally to reshape national standards of conduct" (42). Similarly, the growing political influence of transnational organizations such as the World Trade Organization (WTO) or the International Monetary Fund (IMF) both serve the needs of transnational corporations and challenge the nation-state as a democratic entity. In former times, the nation-state and its government were the primary addressees of political protests because it was in their power to address and eventually alter socio-economic and political conditions the protesters criticized. In

contrast, today the "opponent" becomes increasingly difficult to grasp as he or she "is neither easily identifiable nor rendered accountable" (Fraser, "Transnational" 45)—a condition, which the recent collapse of the global financial markets and the inability of national governments to protect their citizens from the after-effects demonstrates most powerfully. In other words, the "what"—i.e., the subject of communication—also escapes the confines of the nation-state and moves into a global arena.

The third and fourth aspects of the transnational public sphere Fraser points out—the "where" and "how" of communication—both refer to the media and their spaces. As quoted above, Fraser substitutes the former space of national territories with "deterritorialized cyberspace" (45). At the same time, "a vast translinguistic nexus of disjoint and overlapping visual cultures" substitutes traditional means of communication such as "national print media" (45). The shift Fraser describes is one from national public spheres towards what she refers to as a "transnational" public sphere, which is inextricably linked to the emergence of new media and communication technologies.

As sociologist Manuel Castells has argued, the Internet currently pervades all aspects of society. Accordingly, he begins his 2001 study *The Internet Galaxy* as follows: "The Internet is the fabric of our lives. . . . [T]he Internet is the technological basis for the organizational form of the Information Age: the network" (1). For Castells, the Internet marks a new form of societal organization, the network. Similarly, historian Mark Poster argues "none but the internet so drastically reconfigures the basic conditions of speech and reception" (*What's the Matter* 176). Print, radio, and television function as agents of information, education, and propaganda. They are structured hierarchically and constitute a form of one-way communication. In contrast, the Internet reconfigures this basic condition of communication as its network structure allows a many-to-many communication, which is not structured hierarchically but decentralized like a rhizome. What becomes apparent here is that the media and a notion of the public sphere cannot be considered in isolation from each other. More importantly, various media address and create notions of a public differently. Henry Jenkins explains the effect of this shift in the mode of communication:

> One of the real potentials of cyberspace is that it is altering the balance of power between media producers and media consumers . . . . In such a world, the category of audience, as a mass of passive consumers for pre-produced materials, may give way to the category of cultural participants, which would include both professionals and amateurs. (qtd in Schechner, *Performance Studies* 267)

Jenkins emphasizes that the Internet not only functions as a tool of communication, but more importantly, it must also be conceived as a social space in which people communicate and thus interact with each other. In this sense, it is important to consider the Internet also as a form of public sphere in which new information technologies expand the possibilities for citizens to create critical, political publics. Thus, the Internet in general and the recent emergence of social networking sites, blogs, and wikis in particular provide multiple ways of establishing, connecting, and organizing publics on a global scale.[58] These sites are collaborative works "harnessing collective intelligence and turning the net into a kind of global brain" (O'Reilly 26). For these social, collaborative internet applications, Tim O'Reilly introduces the expression "Web 2.0," to refer to the net as a form of platform which "creat[es] network effects through an 'architecture of participation' and [which] go[es] beyond the page metaphor of Web 1.0" (17).

With regard to the notion of the public sphere, it seems that for Nancy Fraser this emergence of a "deterritorialized cyberspace" ("Transnational" 45) is accompanied by a shift in the notion of the public sphere from a material space, a container in which different social and political agents interact with each other, to a conception of the public sphere which lacks this physical dimension. The global flows of money, economic goods, and the supposedly territory-less space of the new information technologies foster the impression of an increasing deterritorialization of the public sphere. It appears that the emergence of the world wide web and its multifaceted possibilities of creating transnational public spheres in form of websites, blogs, chat rooms, and virtual realities such as Second Life substitute traditional means of communication and the material basis of the public sphere.

But one must be careful with abandoning the territorial space of the nation and its public sphere all too easily. In contrast to Fraser's evaluation, I agree with Markus Schroer that

> this *de*-territorialization is succeeded by a *re*-territorialization, and *de*-spatialization by *re*-spatialization. The disentanglement of commodities, products, services, capital, information and people from the confines of the nation-state does not mean that they are free-floating, but that they are re-

[58] The networking capabilities of new communication technologies cannot be adequately assessed without taking into consideration what is generally referred to as the "digital divide." The digital divide, as Mehra, Merkel and Bishop point out, "has been broadly articulated as the troubling gap between those who use computers and the internet and those who do not. Disparities in technology access and use are related to socioeconomic status, with income, educational level and race among the factors associated with technological attainment" (782). Thus, while computer technologies enable communication across national and racial confines, access to these technologies is far from being shared in equal measure around globe.

> grounded in newly emerging spaces. (207, my translation, emphasis in original)[59]

Thus, rather than equating the transnationalization of the public sphere with its deterritorialization, I agree with Schroer that the transnationalization stimulates the emergence of new public spheres in which physical and virtual spaces are interconnected. In this sense, processes of globalization do not lead to the dissolution of spaces, but rather to a transformation, creation and an emergence of new spaces of social (and thus also political) interaction. This argument builds on the assumption that space in general and the public sphere in particular cannot be thought of as an already existing space but must always be considered as a space that is produced by those who use, engage and communicate in it.

As media theorist Douglas Kellner points out, in the face of technological transformations, it is necessary to rethink the notion of the public sphere in order

> to conceive the public sphere as a site of information, discussion, contestation, political struggle, and organization that includes the broadcasting media and new cyberspaces as well as the face-to-face interaction of everyday life. These developments, concerned primarily with multimedia and computer technologies, require a *reformulation* and *expansion* of the concept of the public sphere. ("Public Sphere" 279, emphasis added)

In contrast to Fraser's rhetoric of deterritorialization, Kellner promotes a reconsideration and adjustment of the notion of the public sphere to include new communication technologies alongside face-to-face communication and traditional forms of (hierarchical) media. While it seems true that processes of globalization lessened the political autonomy and authority of the nation-state, at the same time, as political scientist Micah Sifry stresses, new media offer new possibilities for citizen participation in politics. Immediately after the 2004 presidential elections, in an article of the same title, Sifry predicts "the rise of open source politics." In this article, he sketches out a new era of citizen politics that makes use of social networking technologies. He observes:

> New tools and practices born on the Internet have reached critical mass, enabling ordinary people to participate in processes that used to be closed to them. . . . The era of top-down politics—where campaigns, institutions and

[59] The German original reads: "auf die *De*territorialisierung folgt eine *Re*terri-torialisierung, auf die *Ent*räumlichung eine erneute *Ver*räumlichung. Die Herauslösung von Gütern, Waren, Dienstleistungen, Kapital, Informationen und Menschen aus dem nationalstaatlichem Raum führt nicht zu ihrem frei schwebendem Umhertrudeln, sondern zu ihrer Wiederverankerung in sich neu bildenden Räumen."

> journalism were cloistered communities powered by hard-to-amass capital—is over. Something wilder, more engaging and infinitely more satisfying to individual participants *is arising alongside the old order.* ("Open Source" 14, emphasis added)

Sifry hails the end of elite politics in which the very few make politics for the very many. But like Kellner he does not think of a political practice that displaces the former, but of an extension, readjustment and convergence of different political practices with the help of new communication technologies. Both Kellner and Sifry state that new communication technologies, and the Internet in particular, have changed the notion of politics and the public sphere. This evaluation can only be confirmed as regards President Obama's 2008 electoral campaign and his extensive use of the technological possibilities of the Internet, which enabled an unprecedented number of people to participate in his campaign (see also my discussion of the 2004 and 2008 presidential elections in chapter 5.3).

Recently, numerous short amateur video clips brought evidence of the brutal repression of demonstrations against the re-election of the Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. Filmed with mobile phones and distributed against the Iranian government's consent on online video sharing platforms such as YouTube, the political significance of these clips further strengthens the need for and democratic potential of a reformulation of the public sphere in the face of new media and transnational politics. As these new communications technologies allow for new political practices to emerge, Lauren Berlant observes, "so too the activity of ordinary people to force accountability and to imagine new possibilities for democratic collective life and the sovereignty of the people . . . continues to revitalize the political sphere everywhere" (41-42). As goods, information and money naturally transgress national borders and the world becomes even more connected by means of new media, citizens experiment with new alliances and practices beyond the confines of the nation-state. In order to perceive the transnational character of these alliances, for the field of American studies, the "trans" in relation to the "national" needs our attention.

For this reason, before I will turn to my case studies, in the next subchapter, I first discuss one key moment in which the transnational alliances of citizen protest came to the fore most vigorously. Furthermore, I show how the three examples of activist performance I discuss in chapters 4, 5, and 6 emerged from or concordant with this moment not only in *political* but also in *aesthetic* terms.

3.4 Transnational Protest: The World Is Not For Sale

Although an inevitably constructed historical narrative, I want to begin my inquiry into what is referred to as the global justice movement with the demonstrations against the ministerial conference of the World Trade Organization in Seattle in 1999.[60] As sociologist Todd Gitlin rightly prophesized after the protests, "The issues that brought these people to Seattle are enduring issues. They are not the subject of a single egregious policy . . . . It's not just about the W.T.O." (qtd. in Greenhouse A28). Simplifying for the sake of argument, one could say that the protests against the World Trade Organization in Seattle in 1999 brought into public, international sight what is today known as the global justice movement—a diverse and rather loose international collaboration of approximately 700 different interest groups, ranging from environmental and human rights activists to unionist, pacifists, religious groups, anarchists, farmers, indigenous people, gay and lesbian activists and many more (Reed 240). In the streets of Seattle (and many other cities around the world in the following years) this international and diverse conglomerate of protesters from various backgrounds expressed their discontent with various and diverse effects of economic globalization.[61] For this reason, this movement was initially considered an "anti-globalization" movement. But as Joseph Stiglitz and Andrew Charlton point out,

[60] The protests in Seattle do not mark the beginning of this movement. Different activist organizations protesting against the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), protests against the fiftieth anniversary of the WTO in 1994 and most importantly the Zapatista uprising in Chiapas, Mexico must already be considered important expressions of this movement. Nonetheless, as T.V. Reed points out, the protests in Seattle signal a starting point because they "represent both a moment of convergence for U.S. movements and a moment in which U.S. movements were decentered in the context of global struggles" (241).

[61] The term globalization in its current usage refers to a late twentieth century phenomenon related to neoliberalism and transnational capitalism. However, as Lisa Lowe among many others pointed out, such connotation of the term "obscures a much longer history of global contacts and connections" (Lowe 120). When taking this "much longer history" into consideration, globalization is by no means a phenomenon which emerged in the late twentieth century, but which dates back to ancient and early modern times. However, as a first approach to this complex process, Americanist Lisa Lowe very generally defines "globalization" as follows: "'Globalization' is a contemporary term used in academic and non-academic contexts to describe a late-twentieth century condition of economic, social, and political interdependence across cultures, societies, nations, and regions precipitated by an unprecedented expansion of capitalism on a global scale" (Lowe 120). As an all-encompassing process caused by the global hegemony of capitalism, globalization thus describes a condition which forces us to re-think the relation between the global and local on various levels. Saskia Sassen referred to this condition as "an epochal transformation" (1) whose dynamics generate an irretrievable effect on the notion of the national. She explains, "globalization consists of an enormous variety of micro-processes that begin to denationalize what had been constructed as national—whether policies, capital, political subjectivities, urban spaces, temporal frames, or any other of a variety of dynamics and domains" (Sassen 1).

> [t]he term 'anti-globalization' is in many ways a misnomer, since the group represents a wide range of interests and issues and many of the people involved in the anti-globalization movement do support closer ties between the various peoples and cultures of the world through, for example, aid, assistance for refugees, and global environmental issues. (54)

Thus, the term "anti-globalization movement" has been widely criticized because the movement does not merely criticize globalization, but represents itself a form of globalization as people from all over the world and with different political agendas form a loose network of people who intend to protest against "corporate globalization" (Graeber 63). For this reason, the movement has also often been referred to as the "global justice movement" (see, e.g., Della Porta and Tarrow 2). In focusing on the political orientation of the movement—global justice—it would perhaps be more accurate to consider this movement as an advocate of cosmopolitanism. Cosmopolitanism promotes cultural difference while at the same time arguing for a global citizenry of cosmopolites, of people belonging to a universal community or "global tribe" (Appiah xi). The diverse political motivations and cultural identities of the protesters in the streets of Seattle (as well as on various succeeding demonstrations and other events), indicate that the demonstration demanded a more just and equal distribution of power and economic wealth and simultaneously celebrated the pluralism of its participants. As political scientist David Held observes, "Cosmopolitanism is not about stipulating an homogenous cultural world with a homogenous set of political and economic institutions. Cosmopolitanism is about mediating and adjudicating difference" (Held and Guibernau 437). Thus, while globalization seems to be a term which primarily denotes the increasing worldwide social, political and economic interconnectedness (Held and McGrew, "Globalization/Anti-Globalization" 1), cosmopolitanism is a much more nuanced concept as it relates the process of globalization (the interconnectedness of the world) with issues concerning cultural difference and an ethics of the care of others regardless of kinship or nationality (Appiah xiii). Accordingly, I want to stress the cosmopolitan dimension of the global justice movement (and of my examples of activist performance).

Each of the three activist collectives whose work I discuss below either participated in the protests in Seattle or promoted the protests in their performance. While The Church of Stop Shopping and Billionaires for Bush actually marched with the other protesters in the streets of Seattle (see Talen, *What Should* 83; Haugerud, "Brief History" and Boyd, "Irony" 245), The Yes Men supported the protests online.[62] They designed a copycatted website of the WTO which exhibited

[62] In an interview with the author, The Yes Men explain, "I think it [the protest in Seattle] was important for everyone in that alter-globalization movement because the activists were able to shut

collected sources criticizing the organization (see also my discussion in chapter 6.1). Thus, these protest performances enact the issues that are on the agenda of the global justice movement: The Church of Stop Shopping mourns the corporatization of public space as they sing, dance, pray and preach for responsible, political consumerism against multinational brands such as Starbucks or Disney. Billionaires for Bush address the increasing influence of transnational capital and corporatizations on national politics in general and on the electoral process in particular, as their already mentioned electoral slogan—"government of, by and for the corporations"—illustrates very aptly. Finally, The Yes Men's activist performances are media hoaxes, initially created on the Internet. The activists use the media attention that is aroused by their spectacular hi-jacks to draw attention to transnational, corporate profiteers of economic globalization and their lack of political and moral responsibility.

The remaining parts of this subchapter are structured as follows: first, I point out how new communication technologies impacted the organization and structure of this protest movement and opened up new spheres of action. Second, I emphasize the performative dimension of the protests against the WTO in Seattle. Finally, I bring these two strands together in discussing how new communication technologies also opened up new public spaces of activist performance.

3.4.1 Political Protest and New Media

Already during the protests against the World Trade Organization (WTO) in Seattle in 1999, demonstrators realized the potentials of new communication technologies. The enormous organizational effort of coordinating and mobilizing more than 700 activist organizations could hardly have been achieved without the Internet as a communication tool. "Participation in Seattle was mobilized largely through an extensive Internet campaign, driven by hundreds of listservs and thousands of personalized emails traveling virtually instantaneously around the globe" (Reed 272). Thus, as an organizational tool the activists made extensive use of the Internet as a decentralized network. Due to concerted efforts of diverse grassroots organizations ranging from labor unions, human rights activists, environmental organizations, students and many more, approximately 50,000 people filled the streets of Seattle. They publicly expressed their dissent with the global politics of the WTO and finally prevented the organization from meeting because the delegates were stuck in their

down the ministerial, they were able to block off everything. For us, it was important because we saw that happening and it gave us a lot of energy to do what we do now and also it was the reason why Andy set up the first fake WTO website that we did. . . . We set up the website because we could not go to Seattle" (The Yes Men, "Interview").

hotels (Reed 263). Yet even during these physical acts of civil disobedience, of blocking the convention site and marching in the streets, new media and communication technologies played a crucial role. While the police tried to enclose and control the body of protesters, by "making use of pagers, cell-phones, and walkie-talkies . . . the spontaneously choreographed movement of affinity groups evaded their [the police's] efforts and successfully disrupted the conference" (Foster 409). In other words, during the protests, communication technologies fostered the networked character of the movement by enabling activists to coordinate and to transmit necessary information concerning, for example, police force. Similar to the network structure of new media, protest became a flexible, mobile and almost rhizomic political organism. In this sense, as Naomi Klein notes, "What emerged in the streets of Seattle . . . was an activist model that mirrors the organic, de-centralized, interlinked pathways of the Internet—the Internet come to life" (qtd. in Reed 270).

During the Civil Rights Movement, media already played a crucial role in contributing to the public visibility of activists. African American activist Bayard Rustin recalls the civil rights protests in the South and the function of TV broadcast of these events: "As the cameras laid bare the southern lies, public opinion turned against the South. As the public witnessed the South's violent response to the law of the land there seemed no choice but support for those who were the victims of that violence" (Rustin 45, also qtd. in Foster 405). As Rustin's statement illustrates, television functioned as a means to unveil and bring evidence for the institutionalized violence against African Americans.[63] Simplifying for the sake of argument, one could say that while the beginning of the Civil Rights Movement profited from media reports that contributed to the public visibility of African American demands, later protest movements strategically used media, but were also portrayed by the media in a more biased manner (Foster 405).

This was, for example, the case during the protests in Seattle. While the majority of the 50,000 protesters gathered peacefully and only a small number of thirty to one hundred violent protesters (the so-called Black Bloc) destroyed property and smashed shop windows, mainstream media coverage nonetheless presented the demonstrations as an uncontrolled eruption of violence on the part of the protesters (Reed 269). To counteract these biased reports by dominant media outlets, "global justice activists have created their own media" (Highleyman 1466).

[63] Another prominent example are the recordings of the brutal force of the police commissioner Eugene "Bull" Connor from Birmingham, Alabama, against civil rights activists. As Paul S. Boyer observes, "He [Connor] unleashed his men, armed with electric cattle prods, high-pressure water hoses, and snarling attack dogs, on the nonviolent protestors. The ferocity of Connor's attacks, caught on camera and television, horrified the world" (669).

Bottom-up media formats such as Indymedia helped to provide alternative channels of distributing news about the event. The protesters'

> encouragement of videographers and photographers to record independently their experiences of the protest reflects a new attitude towards the media . . . . [T]he WTO demonstrators . . . anticipated negative coverage of the protest and countered this with their own on-line broadcasts of events in the streets. (Foster 409)

Here, media producers and consumers cannot be distinguished anymore. Interactive websites such as those of Indymedia not only allowed users to access distributed news coverage, but also to actually upload their material. As Reed points out, "during the week of the Seattle protests the site received over 1 million hits, more than CNN during the same five days" (274). This user-generated content could be accessed from all over the world[64] and subsequent to the events it was also used as important evidence documenting the police violence during the event (Reed 275). The protesters not only represented a physically present counterpublic, but their presence was also transferred into different media spaces. In this sense, regarding the protests in Seattle, new media changed the face of political dissent both on an organizational and structural level, and allowed for the emergence of an alternative public discourse about the event.[65] Furthermore, the Internet gained importance not only as a means of media distribution, but also as a public space of action. In other words, the virtual space of the Internet also became a battlefield: While people blocked the streets with their bodies as an act of civil disobedience against

[64] Here, one must stress that the digital divide renders this in part a utopian idea, since access to the Internet is not provided in an equal measure. As Sandra Ball-Rokeach points out, the have and have-nots with regard to Internet penetration and access are still divided into Europe and America versus Asia and Africa (1305). However, one must acknowledge that Indymedia's use of new media considers this unequal access and penetration. Indymedia journalist Jeff Perlstein's detailed comment on Indymedia's modus operandi during the protests in Seattle is worth quoting at length, because it reflects the network's careful consideration of the politics of distribution: "We were especially concerned with the way the internet has really grown and how access by certain segments of the population has also grown . . . . So we set about to do this innovative thing, linking high and low technologies, or old and new technologies. . . . For example, we posted audio, video, text, and photos, all these different mediums, to the site, and easy to download. Then community radio stations, cable access stations, even community-based organizations internationally could download and distribute them. Here's a good example: Radio Havana pulled down the audio feed, because they had an internet connection in their office, and they rebroadcast it on the FM dial, and people all over the island could hear it, nine million Cubans could hear it and didn't have to use the internet" (232-33).

[65] For more detailed analyses of the potential of new media for social movements, see, for example, van Donk, *Cyberprotest*; Jordan and Taylor, *Hacktivism*; Kahn and Kellner, "New Media;" McCaughey and Ayers, *Cyberactivism*; and Opel and Pompper, *Representing Resistance*.

the politics of the WTO, a comparable action took place on the net. Inspired by the writings of the radical performance collective Critical Art Ensemble (CAE), protesters translated the physical act of civil disobedience into an electronic equivalent of blocking access to information and servers. In 1996, CAE published *Electronic Civil Disobedience*, in which the collective reexamines the concept of civil disobedience against the backdrop of globalization and information communication technologies. In transferring nonviolent tactics into the digital sphere of flows of information, CAE states that the "efficacy" of physical acts of civil disobedience

> fades with each passing decade. . . . Even though the monuments of power still stand, visibly present in stable locations, the agency that maintains power is neither visible nor stable. Power no longer permanently resides in these monuments, and power and control now move about as desired. . . . These outdated methods of resistance must be redefined, and new methods of disruption invented that attack power (non)centers on the electronic level. (9)

It is generally assumed that power as regards the net has become decentralized, global and even nomadic. Likewise, forms of resistance adjusted to theses immaterial power formations. Whereas, for example, the blockage of a street or a building usually requires a mass of participants coming together and being physically present in the same place, efficient operations on the net can be carried out with the click of a mouse. In contrast to the physical blockage of a house or a street, CAE proposes the blocking of information as an alternative to physical or bodily performance of civil disobedience. "Blocking information conduits is analogous to blocking physical locations; however, electronic blockage can cause financial stress that the physical blockage cannot, and it can be used beyond the local level. ECD [Electronic Civil Disobedience] is CD [Civil Disobedience] reinvigorated" (CAE 18). These early conceptualizations represent one among many approaches of how artists and activists have explored the potentials of the protocols of new media. My discussion of the work of The Yes Men in chapter 6 will follow up on these ideas.

In 1998, Ricardo Dominguez, former member of CAE, founded the collective Electronic Disturbance Theater (EDT). Dominguez describes EDT's first virtual sit-in as an online "performance" which represented an act of solidarity with the Zapatistas in Chiapas.[66] For this protest action, members of the group designed a

[66] The Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN), often also referred to as the Zapatistas, is a Mexican revolutionary group based in Chiapas, a southern state of Mexico. The group largely consists of indigenous people, but also draws on a broad range of international support. It is considered to be closely connected to the global justice movement because the beginning of their protests against the Mexican government coincided with the implementation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in January 1994. Naomi Klein explains that the Zapatistas identify "their enemy not only as the Mexican state but as 'neoliberalism.' The Zapatistas insisted that the poverty and

software called “FloodNet.” This software automatically reloads the attacked website (in this case the website of the Mexican government). When enough people participate, the site’s server is not able to cope with the number of requests (Arns, “Toywar” 53). Thus, a virtual sit-in blocks the flow of information on the net and the site is not available for a certain amount of time. EDT founder Ricardo Dominguez describes electronic civil disobedience as follows: “EDT creates mass representation of a community. . . . The more hits there are to President Zedillo’s web site, the more our presence is felt, and the less functional the government site becomes, until it is eventually overwhelmed by the public” (Dominguez and Fusco 114). Bearing in mind Fraser’s description of the transnational public sphere as a sphere in which national media give way to a “a vast translinguistic nexus of disjoint and overlapping visual cultures,” FloodNet’s primary aim is to establish virtual presence which is expressed and thus also “felt” when the requested site is not available due to the online protest. Communication theorist Alexander Galloway elaborates explicitly on the visual dimension of this form of protest by explaining, “FloodNet is primarily a visualization tool, . . . mak[ing] the internet and the people in it more visible—and their political causes with them . . .” (Galloway 214).

During the protests in Seattle, an activist group called the Electrohippies conducted a comparable action. By “flooding” the WTO’s online services and blocking the flow of information, “the action was successful overall, with the WTO conference networks being constantly slowed, brought to a complete halt on two occasions and with 450,000 people (or technically computers) participating over five days” (Jordan and Taylor 75). While the protesters in the street prevented the delegates from entering and thus being physically present at the convention, the virtual blockage on the Internet hindered the flow of information. “In both cases, the overall aim was to prevent the conference, in order to prevent the most visible neo-liberal organizing institution from functioning” (Jordan and Taylor 75).

In sum, to speak with Kahn and Kellner, the various protest actions signal a “way in which the internet may be deployed in a democratic and emancipatory manner by a growing planetary citizenry that is using the new media to become informed, to inform others, and to construct new social and political relations” (87-88). Thus, one can say that concerning the protest against the WTO in Seattle in 1999, protesters made use of new communication technologies in various ways—be that their use for the organization and co-ordination of protest in the streets, their function for the distribution of alternative forms of news, or their opening up of new

desperation in Chiapas was simply a more advanced version of something that was happening all around the world, and which began with the first acts of colonialism” (“Farewell” 160). Thus, as Massimo de Angelis points out, the Zapatista struggle is an indigenous struggle, but it is also an international one as the guerilla movement targets global economic policies which the group claim responsible for their poverty and suppression by the Mexican state (De Angelis 18-20).

public spheres of action. These usages represent examples of how the Internet not only constitutes a transnational public sphere, but also how the virtual space of the net is inextricably connected to the physical, political reality of the public sphere on the streets. As I show in the next subchapter, these fundamental transformations of the public sphere also enable the emergence of new performative and political practices. Subsequently, in chapters 4, 5, and 6, I discuss the activist performances of The Church of Life After Shopping, Billionaires for Bush and The Yes Men in light of these transformations. By performing in various spaces ranging from sidewalks, multinational chain stores to various spheres of broadcast and online media, these three cases studies of activist performance, I argue in this study, operate within and across various transnational public spheres.

3.4.2 The Performance of Protest in the Transnational Public Sphere

One of the key aesthetic characteristics of the protests of the global justice movement is a fondness for costumes, puppets, masks, street theater and other forms of creative tactics. As Liz Highleyman observes, "Highly visible features of many recent protests are the huge puppets representing everything from corporate criminals to mother earth" (1464). Among the most prominent images of the protests in Seattle were the costumes of protesters from the Earth Island Institute. The protesters demonstrated in the streets dressed as sea turtles and carried inflatable sea animals.[67] Generally speaking, one can say that the diversity of the protesters (ranging from trade unionists, environmental activists, refugee organizations, indigenous rights activists and many more) corresponds to the visual variety of their costumes. In an article in *The Village Voice*, activist and co-founder of Billionaires for Bush, Andrew Boyd, remembers the demonstrations against the ministerial conference of the WTO as follows: "In Seattle last November 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 to the waist except for a strip of black electrical tape across each nipple" ("Irony" 245). This miscellaneous vivacity and the physical and visual diversity of the protesters can be considered an expression of the heterogeneous

[67] The Earth Island Institute, an environmental activist organization, had prepared 500 costumes for protesters to visualize the activists' concerns about endangered species caused by a WTO tribunal, which allowed shrimp catch to be conducted without turtle excluder devices (Cockburn, Clair and Sekula 16). Interestingly, activist Bill Talen (aka Reverend Billy) elaborates on the close connection between different protest groups. "The lady who purchased the turtle costumes for the activists who famously blocked the front lobby of the WTO delegates' hotel also bought robes for the Stop Shopping Gospel Choir" (*What Should* 83).

public body or the populace. Thus, despite the entertaining, and at times provocative costumes of the protesters, the diverse dresses are not mere décor but also express the protesters' attitudes as they visualize the diversity of the movement and also indicate their desire for a peaceful and celebratory protest event.[68] David Solnit, one of the key organizers of the protests in Seattle and founder of the activist organization Art and Revolution explains: "[A]rt shouldn't be an ornament, but rather an integral part of the movement. . . . In this ever shrinking world where corporations are attempting to homogenize us into passive, unquestioning consumers, our culture is our greatest weapon of resistance" (qtd. in Reed 255). In a recent interview, Solnit comments on the function of Art and Revolution during the protests in Seattle: "Art and Revolution was both a concept and a network of street theater and organizing collectives. Our goal was to infuse art, theater, and culture into popular movements to create a new language and new forms of resistance" ("Arts" 4). What becomes obvious here is that the protests of this movement rely on visual, acoustic and performative means to articulate their critique of corporate globalization. As protesters themselves (Solnit, Graeber, Talen), political scientists (Highleyman, Stiglitz) and cultural studies scholars (Reed, Kahn and Kellner, Orenstein) remark, the protests in Seattle in 1999 changed the face of political activism at the end of the millennium. More precisely, activist Bill Talen, head of The Church of Life After Shopping, recalls how the theatrical character of this protest had a lasting impact on participants and audience alike: "These anti-globalization theatrics created an expectation that we would return to our neighborhoods with a new readiness to defend community gardens and local businesses against transnational capital" (*What Should* 83). In a similar vein, Claudia Orenstein speaks of a new era of "theatrical political activism" ("Agitational Performance" 149) and stresses the explicit use of performance as a means for political protest:

> They [today's activists] use performance to show protest as celebratory and fun, rather than aggressive or dour, and they provide ironic entertainment for both participants and the media. In a world where global corporations wield power without any centralized authority, activists likewise remain decentralized and attempt to unite as many people and relevant causes as possible. . . . In a culture of spectacle, the visible act of performance itself

[68] At this point, it must be emphasized that contrary to the protesters' desires to peacefully perform their protest, violent outbreaks could not be prevented. Although the number of violent protesters (often referred to as the Black Bloc) was estimated at about approximately 50 people, destructions of chain stores and increasing brutal police violence interfered the nonviolent protest activities (see Reed 260-69). As many independent and/or amateur recordings evidence, subsequent protest events against the WTO or the IMF, in particular in Genoa, Italy in 2001, were accompanied by unprecedented police violence. For a detailed research of the causes for this outbreak of violence, see, for example, Andretta, della Porta et. al. 112-152 and Davies G2.

> speaks louder than any merely didactic argument; it is no wonder, then, that performance has become such a powerful tool for activists to deliver their message to the world and draw an ever-increasing number of young people to their growing movement. (151)

Orenstein draws attention to the *aesthetic* dimension of protest, the "visible act of performance" rather than reasonable argumentation. But in addition to visual appeal and nonviolent, festive connotations, the costumes of the protesters are not mere decoration but also gain a tactical and symbolically charged function.[69] More precisely, the protesters' choice of costumes already conveys their idea of the event as a peaceful, nonviolent, and festive gathering of a diverse body of people visually expressing their discontent with the politics of international organizations such as the WTO. In a similar vein, as parodic impersonators, the activist performers discussed in my three case studies articulate their political agenda in a playful and creative rather than threatening and violent manner. Already the choice of the characters the activists of The Church of Life After Shopping, Billionaires for Bush, and The Yes Men impersonate represents a parodic comment on distinct political and economic conditions. Thus, as I show in the subsequent analyses, the

[69] In this context, the costumes of one specific group of activists known as the tute bianche serve as a good example. They became prominent during the protests against the IMF and WTO summit in Prague in 2000 and against the meeting of the G-8 in Genoa in 2001. Literally translated, tute bianche is a "white overall," but "tutte bianche" also means "entirely in white." In order to become immediately visible as a group, to distinguish themselves from other protesters, and to protect their bodies in the confrontation with armed police force, the tute bianche wear white overalls and use foamed material, rubber and plastic to cover and shield their bodies from injury. This way, their white costumed bodies also become synonyms for the global citizen: "We are not armed, we are acting as citizens, putting our persons at risk, in order to demonstrate that the democracy of the IMF and the World Bank is tanks and armed police. . . . We want to show that it is possible to rebel against the order using our bodies as weapons" (Cuevas, "Body"). The white jumpsuit not only serves as a weapon or shield, but also gains a symbolic function. The activists explain: "If the struggle aims at achieving visibility, the colour of the fight is white, and the white garment covers the whole body. If the objective is a universal citizen's income, our battlegrounds are those of cash, housing, culture, transport, working conditions, the right to a dignified life" (Ya Basta, "Age of Clandestinity"). Here, the white overall allows for multiple associations. As regards the function of the garment, the jumpsuit alludes to blue-collar workers and sweatshop workers. These are the workers that usually lack public visibility. Thus, the white jumpsuits also function as a means of making visible the invisible workforces and their political agendas. These performances represent creative embodiments of political critique as their costumes are visually appealing and at the same time also serve tactical purposes of protecting the bodies from police violence. The unusual appearance of the protesters also attracts the attention of the media as these white figures powerfully stage the contrast between people dressed in the color of innocence and peace as opposed to forces of the state, protecting those in (economic) power, armed with weapons and dressed in black combat gear (Foster 410).

performative character of their protests both expresses a distinct *political* comment and a deliberate *aesthetic* choice.

3.4.3 Transnational Protest, Performance, and New Media

Thus far, I have elaborated on the emergence of transnational protests in which the use of new media and communication technologies loomed large. In addition, I have drawn attention to the inherently performative character of these transnational protests. What I have not examined yet is how new media and communication technologies also affect the performative character of protest. What I am interested in in this concluding subchapter is an approach to activist performance which allows me to on the one hand make use of my formerly established four parameters of activist performance (chapter 2.4) and on the other hand take into consideration the multiple public spheres in which contemporary activist performance takes place.

During the sixties, radical theater collectives such as the Performance Group and the San Francisco Mime Troupe and political actions like those of the Yippies radically redefined the relation between performance and political action. The fictional world of the stage and that of other social spheres collided as performance left the confines of the theatrical stage and moved into much less clearly defined public spaces as e.g. my discussion of Abbie Hoffman's action (in which he threw dollar bills from the gallery of the New York Stock Exchange) illustrates. In addition, radical theater collectives also redefined the notion of performance with regard to the relation between actors and spectators as both became co-creators of the performative event. These events emphasized less their staging of an illusionary world on stage but represented a form of collective, communal practice. These "indistinct transformations" and "explosive fusions" had the effect that the "realms of art, social life and politics [could] not be clearly separated in performance" (Fischer-Lichte, *Power* 51, qtd in chapter 2.4). In activist performances of the sixties, theatrical and political *action* became indistinguishable from each other. Because fictional world and social reality collided, the *actor* could no longer be considered an actor performing a role, but in many cases the identity of the actor and that of the character embodied merged. Because performance left the confines of the theatrical stage, the *space* of the performance and concordantly also the addressee of the performance became inseparable from the notion of the *public* as a formation of citizens. In sum, activist performances of the sixties abandoned the distinction between the performative and the political event and thus created a form of counterpublic, which addressed, articulated and *performed* their political protest in public space.

While the historical moment out of which the Civil Rights Movement emerged remains exceptional, as regards the convergence between the

performative and the political, contemporary forms of activist performance can be compared to these historical precursors. Thus, in this chapter, I have presented the protests against the World Trade Organization and affiliated protest events as one possible historical moment in which artists and protesters joined forces against corporate globalization and neoliberal free market politics. However, the social foundation and the political and cultural conditions in which today's activist-artists articulate their political protest have changed significantly. For my three case studies, this modified social, political and cultural framework must be taken into consideration as it substantially affects the notion of public sphere, that of engaged citizenship, and consequently also the possibilities of performance to function as a cultural practice with which citizens enact their citizenship (i.e. activist performance): The increasing power of transnational corporations threatens the political agency of nation-states while, at the same time, new media technologies redefine the notion of the public sphere. The idea of the citizen as a political agent is in decline, while at the same time transnational public spheres offer new potentialities for the emergence of a global, cosmopolitan citizenry that transcends the confines of national borders. These transnational processes let local resistances appear futile and outdated, yet, they also create new spheres of action in which the local and the global need not necessarily be at odds with each other, and in which the local also becomes a global stage (as it was the case, for example, during the protests in the streets of Teheran after the re-election of President Ahmadinejad in June 2009).

During the protests against the WTO, activists expressed their discontent in multiple ways, and performance functioned as a suitable means to articulate their conviction that another world is possible. By means of performance, people from diverse backgrounds have communally and collectively transformed political protest into a joyful, nonviolent and at times festive event (Orenstein, "Agitational Performance" 151). In Seattle, performance thus became a cultural practice of engaged citizens as it represented a creative alternative to public debate and to the articulation of a reasonable argument. At the same time, activists have also made use of new communication technologies not only as a means of co-ordination of diverse protest groups and distribution of information, these technologies also opened up new spheres for activist performance.

As Lisa Lowe argues, in discussions concerning globalization and its multifaceted impacts on culture, one needs to "situat[e] U.S. culture . . . in an international context . . . . As 'information' becomes a pervasive new medium of global production, 'cultures' of globalization will include information technologies, like the internet as sites of both production and critique" (Lowe 122). Taking into account the virtual sit-ins and the fake WTO website, which accompanied the physical protests in the streets of Seattle, one could say that the Internet served as

such a site of production and critique. Concerning, for example, the work of the Electronic Disturbance Theater, it is striking that the group intentionally chose a name that connects their electronic form of civil disobedience to theatrical performance. In his foreword to an interview with EDT's founder Ricardo Dominguez, Stephen Duncombe explains: "What makes Dominguez's understanding of electronic activism so noteworthy is his insistence that EDT's activism can be understood as theater." He continues this thought by arguing that the actions of EDT constitute "cultural counter-performances, an informational intervention: harnessing networks, clogging up websites and generating hype" (*Cultural Resistance* 379). Dominguez himself also stresses this point when he recounts his motivation for becoming a professional actor as performance represented for him "a way one could critique . . . , one could actually *do* something" (Dominguez 380, emphasis added).

With the extension of the notion of performance to the digital sphere, "new technologies thus call received ideas about the nature of theater and performance into question" (Dixon 3). In face of the emergence of new communication technologies and the interlacing of physical, mediatized and virtual spaces, my previously established parameters of activist performance (*space, action, actor,* and *public*) need to be adjusted in order to apply to both physical and digital forms of performance:

The *space* of performance can no longer be conceived of as an exclusively physical, material space, but must be expanded to include the virtual space of the Internet. Here, the distinction between the theatrical space of a performance and other public spaces becomes increasingly difficult to sustain because as media scholar Roberto Simanowski observes, "in cyberspace the distinction between fictional and real space blurs altogether." Furthermore, the distinction between "aesthetic . . . and non-aesthetic spaces" becomes increasingly porous and cultural practices "transgress the border of the medium itself by using the Internet as an operational basis for actions conducted in the physical world" (134, my translation). As such, the Internet—as I show in particular in my discussion of the work of Billionaires for Bush and The Yes Men—appears to be an ideal breeding ground for activist performances.

The *action* of activist performance, which is both an artistic expression and a political act, no longer entirely depends on the interaction of physical bodies and on a co-presence of actors and audience. In contrast to a live performance, which is bound to a physical, local space, EDT's online performance collapses the distinction between global and local action. In this context, Dominguez comments on his online performances (such as, for example, the virtual sit-in described above):

> Sometimes we have gotten e-mail from people who are blind, from people who are stuck home for various reasons, . . . or they are too far away, they are in South Korea. They couldn't be in Seattle, but in their hearts they wanted to be there. Here was a *gesture* that they could add to those databodies. Say that you only get 500 people at an action. Electronically, perhaps, you could add another 12,000 from around the world. So all of a sudden what is considered a small *local action* becomes a larger *global action*. And that means to me that you can leverage small actions into global actions. (392, emphasis added)

Concerning the parameter of *action*, in activist performance it is thus important to consider that not only theatrical presentation and political action merge, but also that the performance transcends the confines of a physical, local (inter-)action of bodies.

Thus, in a similar vein, in activist performance the notion of the *actor* or the actor's body still functions as a signifier, agent and important locale of performance. But the dissolution and mediatization of the material body into databodies, code and avatars must be equally taken into account.

During EDT's virtual performance people were still interacting with each other, and the performance thus constituted a form of *public*. As Dominguez recalls the event, "it took a great many people to create the disturbance. I couldn't do a V[irtual]-Sit In by myself, you couldn't sit by yourself with a FloodNet system and do anything. It would take a lot of people to do any sort of disturbance" (Dominguez 390). Although no bodies were interacting with each other, nonetheless, the performance created a sense of community, which exceeded the local physical space of a performance venue. Thus, despite the lack of a shared physical space, the performance nonetheless evoked a sense of presence and agency. This agency consists of a "gesture" that can be experienced and also "felt" by an audience when the requested site is not available due to the online protest. Here, I argue, the participants acted as a collective body of people and publicly expressed their disagreement with the politics of the Mexican government.[70]

[70] As I have mentioned above, this becomes especially obvious when looking at EDT's performance against the Mexican government in 1998. As an act of protest against the Acteal Massacre in Chiapas in Dec. 1997, in which 45 members of a pacifist group who supposedly supported the Zapatista Army of National Liberation were killed by paramilitary troops with the Mexican army within close proximity, the US American activist performers and their 14,800 participants attacked the website of President Zedillo (Dominguez 388). The FloodNet software enabled the protester to send a "personal message" to the server error log. By, for example, requesting of the server of the Mexican government the names of the farmers who were killed by the paramilitary attack, the server "answers" with a "file not found" or "error 404" notice. FloodNet would ask the server: "'Is Anna Hernandez, one of Acteal Dead, found on this server?' And this is called 404, a traditional function of the Internet that lets you know that what you are looking for does not exist on this server. And so by this small gesture, we create a disturbance, because it takes up CPU [central processing unit]. It takes up space.

New communication technologies open up new public spheres of performative action that transcend the confines of nation-states. The US American collective Electronic Disturbance Theater performs an online protest against the Mexican Government in which people from all over the world participated. At the same time, as my discussion of activist performance intends to show, these transnational public spheres need in turn always also be considered as inextricably connected to physical political realities offline. In my analyses of three case studies of contemporary forms of activist performance this emergence of multiple public spheres and its effect on the notion of performance and political protest will loom large. While corporate power ignores national boundaries and in particular the agency of citizens seems jeopardized, at the same time, the emergence of new public spheres offers new possibilities for citizens to become engaged in political action. With my subsequent examination of three different yet very particular forms of protest, I demonstrate how the cultural work of performance can also function as a powerful collective practice of engaged citizenship.

In the same way that bodies would take up space, say in real life, these kinds of questions, this kind of reloading takes up the space" (Dominguez 388). In other words, the performance created an act of remembrance for those people the Mexican government did not acknowledge to remember. Concomitantly to the bodies of victims of the massacre who needed a space of remembrance, the protesters forcefully blocked access to the virtual, but nonetheless representative space of the Mexican government and literally occupied this space in form of the records their 404 requests produced on the server. But also with regard to another aspect this virtual attack did not pass unnoticed. Dominguez elaborates on the tactical considerations underlying their action: "We don't have massive PR firms or the ears of *The New York Times.* So we have to make gestures that are attractive to the media" (qtd. in Tribe and Jana 40). Strikingly, their online-performance did indeed attract the attention of mainstream media as *The New York Times* printed a large-scale article about the group's electronic protest on the front page (see Harmon A1).

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