

Anger, Irony, and Protest: Confronting the Issue of Efficacy, Again

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Street protests have long been performative expressions of anger. Recent anti-globalization and anti-war protest movements have used carnivalesque tactics to transform anger into humor, irony, and celebratory glee. Although carnivalesque protest has the potential and power to attract media attention, educate the public on targeted issues, and build community among activists, it is less successful in directly effecting changes in governmental and social policy. In this essay, I reconsider the relationship between anger and efficacy in the context of reported failures of specific carnivalesque protests.

Keywords: Activism; Carnivalesque Protest; Anger; Irony; Efficacy

On October 26, 2002, a collective of several anti-war activist groups in the New York City area rallied at the Washington Monument—or, the “BIG DICK,” as they called it. The event included scores of activists in drag, decked out in brightly colored bouffant wigs, calling themselves “Perms for Perma-War.” In canonical street rally fashion, they chanted, “Start the bombing now!” and “Dickheads for War!” Adding more layers of sarcasm—as their costumes and comportment demanded—they exclaimed, “We love bush, we love dick, all you peaceniks make us sick!” The organizers, who called the action “An Absurd Response to an Absurd War,” directed their rhetorical and performative energies toward irony and humor as primary strategies of resistance to the US government’s designs on (and for) war.¹

In his essay “Absurd Responses vs. Ernest Politics; Global Justice vs. Anti-War Movements; Guerilla Theater and Aesthetic Solutions,” activist Ben Shepard narrates the planning and procedures of the October 2002 direct action. Along the way, he argues that post-9/11 activism must abandon the old-standby tactics (e.g., tired chants and sit-ins) developed during the Vietnam War era resistance efforts. Shepard

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advocates instead a carnivalesque approach in order to “create a festive energy that dismantles social hierarchies” (“Absurd” par. 4).² He reminds us, “When all else is lost we still have our sense of humor,” and reports, “After a whole year of the politics of mind-numbing seriousness, the possibility of a joke’s capacity for catharsis was considerable” (par. 4). I, myself, don’t think I would have survived the last election and the infernal media campaigns without *The Daily Show*’s nightly comedic analysis, “Indecision 2004.”

Many activists shared Shepard’s views of the power of irony and humor to stymie the government’s plans to invade Iraq. Several accounts of “An Absurd Response to an Absurd War,” along with activists’ philosophies on protests, argue this same point (Anderberg; Gach and Paglen; Goll and Goll). But silliness in the streets only goes so far as public argument, and Shepard’s continued reflections in two follow-up essays start to mark just such a shortcoming. In an August 2003 essay, Shepard expresses an emerging skepticism about the power of carnivalesque protest as a form of efficacious public performance. Then, seven months later, with the “War on Terror” well underway, Shepard reports that he and his fellow activists believed that they were “facing the limits of camp” (“Post-Absurd” par. 1).

Allow me to pause here for citation identification and the essay forecast. In what follows, I highlight two perspectives on activism: one of a street activist, Ben Shepard; the other of a professor emeritus of political science, Robert Weissberg. Shepard is liberal—some would say “radically so”; Weissberg is conservative—some would say “staunchly so.”³ From their distinct political perspectives, both Shepard and Weissberg ultimately forward an argument that “carnivalesque” street protest does not possess the potential efficacy that activists and scholars often proclaim it does. Each provides reflections and analyses that prompt a painful question for performance studies scholars, performers, and street activists: Is carnivalesque protest—as a means for causing institutional change—becoming ineffectual (and, more painfully, was it ever effective)? As we inch closer and closer to M. Lane Bruner’s “humorless state,” performative responses by activists must adapt to this changing context. Perhaps now the humor that replaced anger in many street protest strategies (as a directive of postmodern irony?) must be shed so that anger can speak for itself in these humorless and pragmatic times. With this in mind, I highlight Shepard’s and Weissberg’s own language in this essay with the specific goal of allowing anger, dismay, and humorlessness to inhabit readers. Although I come down on the pessimistic side of the question of the political efficacy of carnivalesque protest, I nevertheless try to recuperate aspects of carnival and street performance in terms of their own virtues.

Shepard, in his August 2003 essay “From Global Justice to Antiwar and Back Again,” faces the fact that President Bush declared war despite months and months of activists’ efforts. On March 22, 2003—two days after the United States commenced bombing Iraq—activists planned to stage a Funeral Block on the streets of New York. Among those activists this time around, “few were feeling festive” (“From Global Justice” par. 10). Besides, the carnival approach didn’t meet the primary objectives they desired. A solemn approach was called for: “Bring your prayer beads and

talismans. Wear black. Grieve with Righteous Anger. And get ready to march for our ailing democracy” (par. 10). Two days before the rally was to occur, however, one activist sent out a different call for a different purpose. This new call was for a “French Block,” a direct action designed in response to the anti-French sentiments growing rapidly in the United States. This call read: “A wildly militant march of folks celebrating everything French, wearing berets, blue and white striped shirts, smoking Gauloises, and pumping their baguette-clenched fists up and down in the air, shouting ‘*Tous ensemble! Tous ensemble! Oui! Oui! Oui!*’” (‘All together! All together! Yes! Yes! Yes!’ is a chant made by French anarchist activists). Many of those who planned to partake in the Funeral Block seemed quick to drop their righteous anger for a chance to prance in celebration—perhaps a tacit example of self-defeatism, or maybe just a desire to maintain morale through the *communitas* of the carnivalesque.

The energy—We! Oui! Whee!—conjured by this festive approach overpowered that of the funeral march. Shepard admits: “While I was not as immediately ready to be silly, there was a certain ring to the ‘French kiss for peace’ and ‘eat the props’ chants members of the affinity group screamed as we munched on baguettes” (“From Global Justice” par. 11). Other activist groups were in attendance, mostly supporting each other—in the communitarian carnivalesque emergent possibility of “the multitude” that Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri so passionately describe—while presenting their own protests.⁴ For example, a group called The Glamericans, draped in campy boas, carried signs that read “War is Tacky, Darling,” and “Peace is the New Black.” By the time the multi-partied and multi-party parade had ended, however, the police intervened and, of the 250,000 anti-war protestors in attendance, Shepard dryly notes that “countless activists were arrested for standing in a park” (“From Global Justice” par. 11). Nevertheless, he characterizes the event as “joyous resistance” (par. 10) and ultimately declared the event “a great success” (par. 11). Shepard’s guarded optimism for the efficacy of joyous resistance diminished as the war raged on and democratic principles increasingly were chipped away. The question he and fellow activists faced was whether revelry and camp were the best expressions of anger. Or, does a serious situation demand a serious response?

By early 2004, in “A Post-Absurd, Post-Camp Activist Moment,” Shepard recounts the actions of New Yorkers to resist the infringement on civil liberties mandated by the USA Patriot Act. He tells us that it was the summer of 2003, and the anti-war movement was slowing down. After two years of protesting and “facing the limits of camp,” he and his fellow activists came to believe that, “Irony recedes in relevance when political situations become too dire or when there is an urgent need to engage in dialogue with the political mainstream” (“Post-Absurd” par. 2). Though protestors from Reclaim the Streets and other groups began their protestations in front of City Hall wearing “faux 1776-era garb” and flying a banner that read, “Patriots against the Patriot Act,” the activists had more tactics up their puffy shirt sleeves than just chanting, dancing, and wearing pins that read, “The Patriot Act is Sooo 1984” (par. 3). This time, the “radical” activists planned involvement with the “bourgeois,

reformist campaign” to persuade the City Council to pass the anti-Patriot Act ordinance, originally titled Resolution 909.

Alongside all manner of concerned citizens, the radical activists attended City Council meetings and refrained from deploying “radical” measures within the Halls of Justice. Outside these halls, however, the activists went to work, using both their old strategies as well as some new ones. In conjunction with multiple Patriot Act Free Zones rallies and parties, the activists employed the “civilized” tactics of democratic protest. When the activists realized that Resolution 909 would die in committee at the hands of Council speaker Gifford Miller, they began mobilizing from home offices to Miller’s office, making phone calls, sending e-alerts, and writing letters to the speaker asking him to “Pretty Please Support City Council Resolution 909” (one need not abandon humor completely).

These combined strategies of mobilization were so effective that, when the activists convened at City Hall on December 2 for a “Rally to Defend the Bill of Rights and Pass Resolution 909,” they were outnumbered vastly by a “large outpouring of New Yorkers from all walks of life who had been offended by the political misuse of 9/11” (“Post Absurd” par. 27). After months of delays, and continuous heat from New Yorkers against the Patriot Act, the resolution (now named Resolution 60) passed, making New York City the 250th legislative body to establish zones to protect civil liberties (“Post Absurd” par. 30).

It is impossible to say definitively what specific actions led to the passing of the resolution. One even could argue that the resolution would have passed without such mobilization efforts since the Patriot Act was being attacked on a nationwide scale. Nevertheless, it is imperative that we recognize Ben Shepard’s reflections on this particular mobilization in comparison with the others he previously described. After co-planning and participating in several carnivalesque anti-war protests, protests that did not result in the Bush administration abandoning their war plans, Shepard came to believe that irony enacted in carnival, as a method of resistance, “is limited” because it fails to demonstrate “what kind of world we really want to create” (“Post Absurd” par. 20). In partial defense of the strategy, however, Shepard tells us: “Irony works best as an inside joke to mobilize and appeal to a subculture” (par. 20). The carnivalesque helps keep activists’ spirits high and steadies morale. Yet, in a society that has become infused with irony, many activists from New York to California (see Gach and Paglen) agree that carnival—when used as a lone tactic—is no longer an acceptable vehicle of public anger, nor an effective means of persuasion in the streets.

These conclusions must be difficult to draw for activists like Shepard—activists who learned their craft from the street stylings of the internationally known AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP). As Shepard notes, “The lesson [from ACT UP] became that well-timed creative street theatre could reshape power structures. And along the road, ACT UP brought the dramaturgical lesson that to be successful good actions had to be good theatre” (“Absurb Responses” par. 5). Carnivalesque protest was a popular choice among their strategies; however, during the height of AIDS activism in the 1980s and 90s, anger expressed—rather than channeled into festive emotions—through street protests seemed to get the job done, policywise.

Protest groups like ACT UP and Gran Fury dared outrageous actions, regularly made for sensationalized news stories (e.g., throwing condoms in a church! My God!), and won changes in AIDS research and funding from federal agencies and institutions. Though ACT UP's numbers have dwindled, chapters still exist and direct actions are still performed around the world. Yet we don't *see* much from them these days. There are multiple reasons for this ranging from the death of members to the increase in other government policies and cultural oppressions to protest, to a decreased willingness of the popular media to cover the direct actions. I want to focus, however, on the possible relationship between the decreased use of street protest and the increased use of administrative actions. The direct actions of ACT UP have always been motivated by a tangle of social and cultural ills. It may be difficult to assess the extent and lasting effects of their efforts. And it may be that performance scholars and practitioners have overstated their success in an effort to craft some historical heroes and practical validation.

In *The Limits of Civic Activism*, political scientist Robert Weissberg conducts, one might say, a very "sensible" analysis of various types of civic activism. Quite generally, he finds the livelier types—i.e., carnivalesque street protest—ineffectual and even harmful when compared to more civilized approaches, such as lobbying and suing for changes in policy and law. Devoting half of his book to the "positive" and "negative" sides of the "AIDS Balance Sheet," his case study is ACT UP's various actions primarily of the late 1980s and early 1990s. To sum up: the "positive side" consists of policy changes in drug development and testing; the "negative side" consists of delays to policy and opinion change due to "rambunctious street theater types" (Weissberg 251) disrupting the flow of traffic to force people to confront gay identities and their own prejudices. In other words, according to Weissberg, activists who targeted social policy with stoic measures were far more successful than activists who targeted oppressive cultural representations with carnivalesque actions. The more successful activists were those who educated themselves on relevant medical, institutional, and federal matters in order to develop relationships with people on the inside—people who could directly influence changes in federal drug policies and monetary allocation for medical research. According to Weissberg, the "other" activists, those who decried homophobia and other cultural oppressions in the streets, cannot be credited with the more tangible advancements in the fight against AIDS.

Furthermore, Weissberg claims, street rallies—with their focus on gay identity and culture—most likely compounded the pandemic: "Brilliantly executed demonstrations do not kill viruses, and many of these gatherings may have even worsened matters by providing fresh sexual encounters" (296). Weissberg primarily blames street activism for "misleading militant-issued propaganda portraying unprotected sex as an unalienable civil right" (296), thereby pressuring bathhouses to stay open when, clearly, they should have been closed. If the "militant" activists hadn't been so popular and media-present, countless lives would have been saved—so his argument goes. And, he boldly asserts that AIDS activists Larry Kramer and Randy Shilts would agree with him when he appropriates an ACT UP missive and claims that "*at least some activists have blood on their hands*" (295; original emphasis).⁵

Weissberg ends his balance sheet assessment with a judgment of anyone who has or aims to go to the government for help, intervention, or policy change.

AIDS activists [primarily those who worked with politicians and scientists] did win some mighty victories, but to celebrate their accomplishments as proof that political participation “works” is a gross, and potentially disingenuous, misstatement. Tomorrow’s cure will not resurrect the dead. (297)

Throughout his analysis, the political scientist seems to acknowledge the relationship between oppressive *cultural* representation (in this case, homophobia, racism, and classism) and *social* policies and procedures (such as drug testing laws and mandating research budgets); however, he ultimately decries any complex attempt to target the realm of cultural representation in battles against the State. Even the non-violent Civil Rights protests of last century are a target of Weissberg’s critique (115–21).

Weissberg is equally unrelenting when it comes to assessing the efficacy of the recent anti-war protests like the ones Shepard describes:

[C]ountless well-attended, attention-getting rallies denouncing possible U.S. military intervention in Iraq occurred in March 2003. By the standard of attracting media exposure to these popular, well-scripted anti-war outpourings, they were a resounding tour de force. They certainly outnumbered pro-war rallies. Was this adept activism? Judged by the ultimate outcome—the U.S. did launch military action against Iraq—they *failed miserably* despite their tactical brilliance, and holding even more anti-war events after hostilities commenced scarcely slowed the pursuit of total military victory. Yet, activists might plausibly insist that opposition may prevent future military ventures. (Weissberg 128; emphasis added)

Consistently, Weissberg argues that activists would be better suited to succeed if they abandoned theatrical tactics in the streets and focused on developing constructive relationships with political insiders and officials. And, though he doesn’t use these exact words, Weissberg suggests that activists certainly would not hurt their cause if they engaged in what sociologist Josh Gamson calls “boundary-crossing” (362). That is, Weissberg argues that activists must leave the streets and frequent the halls of justice, administration, regulation, and order. They must develop working relationships with institutional types in order to have any effect at all. They must learn the science and the legalese, hold conferences, and keep “erstwhile but embarrassing supporters” at bay (Weissberg 245).⁶ In effect, Weissberg proposes a strange dichotomy between efficacy and visibility, the consistency of which seems to work only for those who can sail with the prevailing winds of ideology and institutionalized power.

Not only does Weissberg believe that taking it to the street “theatrically” is so much silliness and often does more harm than good, he also takes umbrage with scholars who glorify such tactics by claiming that they are effective forms of political participation. That is, he argues that activism scholarship ignores issues of efficacy and focuses on quantity: “Scholarship [...] is notably silent on its qualitative side though academics do occasionally mention ‘skill’ or ‘expertise’ as indispensable resources. In fact, terms like ‘stupidity’ and ‘blunder’ seem notably absent from scholarly portrayals” (Weissberg 127). Weissberg is upset with scholars’

“democratization” of all political acts “via counting every act equal to every other act” (36)—such as, say, the acts of casting a vote and not paying federal taxes that support the military budget. Finally, Weissberg accuses scholarship of failing to provide complete accounts of all methods of political participation, including, for example, litigation and economic investment. Unabashedly, and inexplicably using the royal “we,” Weissberg qualifies his portrayal of activism scholarship:

This political participation scholarship account has been decidedly negative. That leading scholars have published this research in prestigious journals further compounds our impertinence. For this faultfinding inclination we are unapologetic. [...] The overriding qualm in our collection of complaints is that these ivory tower treatises deny a plain to see reality, especially civic engagement’s downside. These inquiries are all-too-silent regarding dexterity, the obstacles awaiting would be activists, and, ultimately, success or failure. (41–42)

Perhaps Weissberg’s assessment is accurate. I don’t profess to be familiar with the majority of activism scholarship across all disciplines. I do know, however, a good amount of activism scholarship produced by performance studies scholars. Within our field, we can find the likes of activist scholar Donna Marie Nudd who, as a co-founder of the Mickee Faust Club, has engaged in performative protest events. A recent example of her (and co-author Kristina Schriver’s) reflexive analyses of performative protest can be found within the pages of this journal. In their essay, they examine the complexity of battling against the combined forces of cultural and social oppression—a complexity that eludes Weissberg.

Schrive and Nudd highlight a crucial distinction between two kinds of street activism, a distinction that Shepard implies in his analyses and that Weissberg slides over in his. There are *celebratory* performative protest events and there are *interventionist* performative protest events.⁷ The former, whether intended or not, has an internal focus that works as self-legitimation for the activists themselves. Gathering publicly in carnivalesque fashion energizes the activists while increasing public awareness of their existence and purpose. The latter form is designed to target and persuade the institutional powers to make changes. Rather than tabulating a “balance sheet,” as Weissberg would have it, they provide a more nuanced analysis of what resulted from their efforts. Weissberg would probably bristle at their thoughts on assessing efficacy but may be pleased with Schriver and Nudd’s thoughts on the importance of assessment:

The self-reflexivity we experienced in the aftermath of our [performative protests] forced us to grapple with a seemingly simple question—had our efforts been successful?—and grappling with this question revealed the value of utilizing a success continuum rather than the simpler “success”/“failure” labels. [...] The continuum moves from a simple awareness that some type of disturbance has occurred to effective media coverage to a fundamental change in current policy. (203)

Schrive and Nudd recognize that a continuum, rather than a balance sheet, helps activists understand “the symbolic interconnectedness contained in performative protest events” (203). Another way of saying this is that performative protests—even

with a specific agenda, like to increase government funding for AIDS research, or to stymie local government support of the USA Patriot Act—are battling simultaneously a tangle of oppressive cultural (representational) and social (institutional) forces, regardless of which force gets highlighted in the protest.

Protest is a form of public communication, “comprised of symbolic interconnect- edness,” and fueled by anger. Performing one’s protestations makes sense to those who recognize the tangled-ness of cultural representation and social policy. Performance is emotive, ambiguous, and confrontational. Its liminality provides and points toward possibilities, different ways of being in the world.⁸ When activist groups combine carnivalesque and bureaucratic tactics, a tangible efficacy—such as changes in FDA regulations or the creation of a Patriot Act Free Zone—occurs. Now is the time to encourage such combinations. Now, street theatre is not enough. Now is the time, perhaps, to perform the anger we feel from injustice of all kinds, rather than devote all of our energies to the manipulation of anger into celebratory glee. Most important, now is a time to remember that activism and its aftermath is never as simple as anyone—including myself—suggests.

Addressing an audience comprised of ACT UP sympathizers and gay activists in a speech given at Cooper Union in New York City on November 7, 2004, Larry Kramer expresses a painful ambivalence:

Yes, for one brief moment in time we got angry. Correction, a few of us got angry. Of all our many, many millions of gay people in this country, about 10,000 of us or so got angry enough to accomplish something. We got drugs. We got AIDS care. We got enough so we could continue fucking again. That, in the end, is what it amounted to. As soon as we got the drugs, you went right back to what got us into such trouble in the first place. WHAT IS WRONG WITH US? The cabal [U.S. government, policy makers, and drug companies] can’t believe their good fortune. (Towle para. 87)

Kramer has issued a call for the return of anger and he will help incite it if need be.⁹ However, in the same speech, Kramer explains that even anger is not enough. He chastises members of the audience: “You refuse to be part of any community. But if you don’t have any community, you have no political strength.” As Shepard and countless others attest, and even Weissberg acknowledges, carnivalesque protest is a powerful community-building force. As revelers gather in the street and give themselves over to the celebratory moment, bonds are formed almost instantaneously. This is reason enough to continue the party beyond what Weissberg (among others) hopes to be “last call.”

I disagree with many of Weissberg’s assessments, and I certainly dislike his characterizations of performative protests and protestors; however, I believe it is imperative to take seriously his criticisms. Weissberg tells us that carnivalesque protest, as a means for effecting institutional/governmental change, *does not work*. Shepard concludes that carnivalesque protest *is not working anymore*. Both conclusions deserve careful consideration by scholars and activists alike. Let us also benefit from the actions of and reports from groups such as the Mickee Faust Club, a long-running cabaret and carnival-enacting group of very funny, very powerful,

political performers. Schriver and Nudd are right: efficacy cannot be measured realistically by a “success”/“failure” balance sheet, but instead must be considered along a continuum that acknowledges a range of socio-politico-cultural goals.

Performance activists must be able to articulate why they want to fight (i.e., there must be a director’s vision crafting the public argument as a performance). Performance choices are as much rhetorical as they are aesthetic or political. Sometimes the best choice is to perform “bureaucrat,” but this choice must emerge from the vicissitudes of the public stage and audience sentiment. The performance context may demand to make the street a stage—taking it with glee to inform and build community, or taking it with anger to expose a wrong. I know four things for sure: boundary-crossing influences policy-makers, carnival creates community, violence doesn’t solve anything, and expressing felt anger mobilizes government more effectively than (gleefully ironic or otherwise) celebration. While festive street performance is a display of communal strength and a means of educating the public, no policy, or law, or budget will change unless the State feels threatened. Protest is born of anger, an emotion from which the State—humorless or not—deserves no protection.

Notes

- [1] The collective of activist groups included members from the New York chapter of Reclaim the Streets (RTS_NYC), Students for Undemocratic Society, The Converted & Jaded, Billionaire Liberation Front, and Future Veterans for War, among others. In addition to protesting the possibility of war, this collective aimed to counter the didactic and “shrill” protests organized by sectarian organizations such as the International Action Center that honed its “barking orders” skills at Global Justice rallies (Shepard, “Absurd” par. 7). Though both sets of collectives were anti-war, they were so for different reasons and their protest strategies differed.
- [2] Shepard is clearly influenced by Mikhail Bakhtin’s thoughts on carnival. At this point in his reflexive process, however, he does not acknowledge Bakhtin’s insight that carnival often reinforces the hierarchy it spoofs.
- [3] Ultimately, Weissberg argues that street activism directed toward the government is actually *mis*directed and that gripes regarding oppressive cultural representation (though he does not use such wording) should be handled in the private sphere. In fact, Weissberg finds the private sphere to be most accommodating for attaining what one needs in order to accomplish what one wants. Weissberg himself has benefited from the generosity of two private foundations (the conservative-leaning Earhart and Sarah Scaife) to the tune of over \$64,000 in the past nine years. What is glaringly apparent and problematic about Weissberg’s analyses and conclusions is that he judges from a position of economic, political, and sociocultural privilege: as a professor, as a conservative, and as white man. At this point, for the purpose of full disclosure, I must confess that I reject Weissberg’s political views (especially as evidenced in his writing for *Human Events: The National Conservative Weekly* found here <http://www.humaneventsonline.com/search.php?author_name=Robert+Weissberg>). My political views are more closely aligned with Shepard’s. Nevertheless, the tensions and tacit agreements between both authors are intriguing, and allowed me to approach Weissberg’s arguments with an appropriate openness, and Shepard’s with an appropriate critical lens.

- [4] Like Shepard implies, Hardt and Negri cite the 1999 protests at the World Trade Organization summit in Seattle as the “coming-out party of the new cycle [of struggles]” and the anti-war movement a continuation of that cycle (215). Rather than focusing on the differences among activists’ groups with a common goal, Hardt and Negri offer an optimistic rendering of the “cyclical” global anti-war movement as a unifying and generative force: “The war [against Iraq] represented the ultimate instance of the global power against which the cycle of struggles had formed; the organizational structures and communication that the struggles had established made possible a massive, coordinated mobilization of common expressions against the war. We should emphasize, once again, that what the forces mobilized in this new global cycle have in common not just a common enemy—whether it be called neoliberalism, U.S. hegemony, or global Empire—but also common practices, languages, conduct, habits, forms of life, and desires for a better future. The cycle, in other words, is not only reactive but also active and creative” (215).
- [5] Weissberg offers no citations of Randy Shilts or Larry Kramer to support his claim; though I understand how he may have drawn his conclusion. Both Shilts and Kramer caused (and in the case of Kramer, still causes) rifts within the gay/AIDS community (indeed, the definitive article “the” is misleading and problematic, but useful in characterizing particular agendas). From the *Los Angeles Times* obituary of Randy Shilts: “Although he was worshiped by many in gay circles for enlightening heterosexuals, Shilts was controversial among more radical members of the movement, some of whom labeled him a ‘gay Uncle Tom.’ In the mid-1980s, his stories suggesting that gay bathhouses in San Francisco were breeding grounds for AIDS made him a pariah, unable to walk through the city’s Castro District without being jeered or spat upon” (Warren and Paddock par. 13). Weissberg does not recognize, however, that Kramer has a very complicated view of what ACT UP and the gay community did in the 1980–90s and what they can and should do today. See <http://towleroad.typepad.com/towleroad/2004/11/larry_kramer_sp.html> for a reprint of Kramer’s speech at Cooper Union, New York City, November 7, 2004. See <<http://www.aegis.com/pubs/gmhc/1995/GM090204.html>> for a 1995 interview in which Kramer assesses the state of ACT UP. See <<http://www.villagevoice.com/news/0450,solomon,59216,6.html>> for a more recent interview in *The Village Voice*, with Alisa Solomon, December 15–21, 2004.
- [6] Unlike Weissberg, Gamson, in his analysis of AIDS activism, makes clear that boundary-crossing is a tactic that was utilized mainly by white, middle-to-upper-class, gay men. Gamson further notes that because gayness is not as visible as other stigmatized identities, gay people who appear to be of dominant groups (white, middle-to-upper-class, men) can work within the dominant discourse for change. He states that boundary-crossers “draw on a knowledge of mainstream culture born of participation rather than exclusion and, thus, a knowledge of how to disrupt it using its own vocabulary” (362). Some readers may be reminded of bell hooks in Gamson’s assessments. See her “Marginality as a Site of Resistance” for another take on the power of knowing both the margin and the center.
- [7] Richard Schechner makes a similar move when he distinguishes between neocarnival direct theatre (classic carnival) and political direct theatre (revolutionary carnival) in *The Future of Ritual* (87–88). See Baz Kershaw’s *The Radical in Performance* (107–09) for an insightful critique of Schechner’s dichotomy—a critique with which I believe Schriver and Nudd would agree.
- [8] See Jon McKenzie’s *Perform or Else* for a more critical perspective on performance studies’ devotion to “liminality.” He argues, “Paradoxically, the persistent use of this concept within the field *has made liminality into something of a norm*. That is, we have come to define the efficacy of performance and of our own research, if not exclusively, then very inclusively, in terms of liminality” (50). He refers to such a tendency as the “liminal-norm” of performance studies. I agree with his sentiment, but not his critique of this tendency. My detailed response will have to wait for another time due to lack of space here.

- [9] See Andy Towle's weblog *Towleroad: A Blog with Homosexual Tendencies* for a transcription of Kramer's speech as well as reader/listener's varied responses.

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