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From Public Sphere to Public Screen: Democracy, Activism, and the "Violence" of Seattle

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□–*The WTO protests in Seattle witnessed the emergence of an international citizens' movement for democratic globalization. With the tactical exploitation of television, the internet, and other technologies, Seattle also witnessed the enactment of forms of activism adapted to a wired society. In the wake of Seattle, this essay introduces the "public screen" as a necessary supplement to the metaphor of the public sphere for understanding today's political scene. While a public sphere orientation inevitably finds contemporary discourse wanting, viewing such discourse through the prism of the public screen provokes a consideration of new forms of participatory democracy. In comparison to the public sphere's privileging of rationality, embodied conversations, consensus, and civility, the public screen highlights dissemination, images, hypermediacy, publicity, distraction, and dissent. Using the Seattle WTO protests as a case study and focusing on the dynamic of violence and the media, we argue that the public screen accounts for technological and cultural changes while enabling a charting of the new conditions for rhetoric, politics, and activism.*

FROM November 30 to December 3, Seattle, high-tech capital of the present future, became the site of a contested New World Order as the forces of global capital, meeting under cover of the anonymous acronym WTO (World Trade Organization), were surprised by a cacophonous cadre of international grassroots activists in a pitched battle over visions of the future. Images flashed worldwide—crowds of thousands clogging the commercial center of Seattle and stranding WTO delegates in the mass of humanity; sea turtles and hard hats linking arms and marching together; black-clad anarchists trashing the material manifestations of corporate global dominance: Starbucks, Nike Town, McDonald's; shaken government officials decrying the outbreak of participatory citizenship; black-booted sci-fi stormtroopers marching in goose step and restoring order via tear gas, rubber bullets, and concussion grenades.

Seattle and subsequent fair trade and democratic globalization protests[1] around the world are striking crystallizations of a complex confluence of social, economic, technological, environ-

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mental, and political processes. These protests illustrate contemporary public acts of global citizenry that suggest new conditions for the possibility of participatory democracy in a corporate-controlled mass-mediated world. Chief among these new conditions are transformed economic/political and technological realities.

First, the activists recognize transnational corporations as the dominant powers of the new millennium. Seattle protesters pointedly smashed the windows of "Nike Town." Although corporations have been important players for some time, they are now clearly the dominant political, social, economic, and environmental forces on the planet, eclipsing the nation-state (Hardt and Negri, 2000; Friedman, 1999; and Greider, 1997). There are numerous indicators of this change in sovereignty. The wealth of a number of companies exceeds that of many nations. For example, as of 1999 Microsoft's market value was equivalent to the gross domestic product of Spain, GE's to Thailand, Wal-Mart's to Argentina, and Hewlett-Packard's to Greece (Morgenson, 2000). The laws of countries are struck down if they impede free trade ("Behind the Hubbub in Seattle," 1999; "Messages for the W.T.O.," 1999). In the United States the defense industry de facto sets budget priorities and military policy, so that the collapse of the Soviet Union hardly impacts defense spending and citizens are left to wonder whatever happened to the "peace dividend" (Center for Defense Information, www.cdi.org).

Corporate control of our democratic government's policies is evident on many other issues. With respect to environmental issues, strong pro-environmental sentiments among the general populace (Dunlap, 2000) are trumped by corporate prerogatives, with the lobbyists of industry dictating environmental legislation. In a recent example, Enron founder Kenneth Lay had private meetings with the Bush Administration to help formulate an energy policy with extensive environmental implications (Slocum, 2001; Milbank and Kessler, 2002; Rich, 2002). Even science, reputedly the last redoubt of objectivity and pure knowledge, is funded and circumscribed by corporate desire. Swiss pharmaceutical giant and biotech pioneer Novartis literally underwrites the University of California, Berkeley Department of Plant and Microbial Biology. UCal, Berkeley also has the BankAmerica Dean of the Haas School of Business. The controversial mining company Freeport McMoran funds a chair in environmental studies at Tulane University. Conservative media mogul Walter Annenberg bankrolls the Annenberg Schools of Communication at the University of Pennsylvania and University of Southern California. University of Pennsylvania's Center for Bioethics is sponsored by Monsanto, de Code Genetics, Millennium Pharmaceuticals, Pfizer, and Geron Corporation (Press and Washburn, 2000; Gelbspan, 1997; Elliott, 2001). In short, from environmental regulation on the local and global level to university research agendas, corporate interests are inextricably entwined in "public" activities, a process that sociologist Boggs terms "corporate colonization"–the "increased corporate penetration into virtually every corner of modern American life" (2000, p. 9).

Second, global democratization and fair trade activists recognize the TV screen as the contemporary shape of the public sphere and the image event designed for mass media dissemina-

tion as an important contemporary form of citizen participation. Aside from writing letters to political representatives, attending public forums, and voting, the activists acknowledge the imperative to appear on the television screen alongside the staged image events of governments and corporations. In the case of Seattle, the protesters realized the need to contest the WTO meeting as a crowning image event for President Clinton and free trade. In staging a competing image event, the activists enacted what has become a fact among media scholars: "A media culture has emerged in which images, sounds, and spectacles help produce the fabric of everyday life, dominating leisure time, shaping political views and social behavior, and providing the materials out of which people forge their very identities" (Kellner, 1995, p. 1).

In recognizing the dominance of corporations and new technologies, the activists acknowledge the change in sovereignty on the world stage and enact a transformation of citizen participation. The purpose of this essay will be to discuss and delineate those changes and their consequences for the public sphere and participatory democracy. More specifically, this essay will introduce the "public screen" as a necessary supplement to the metaphor of the public sphere for understanding today's political scene. The concept of the public screen enables scholars to account for the technological and cultural changes of the 20th Century, changes that have transformed the rules and roles of participatory democracy. Our introduction of the public screen is an act infused with hope. The writings of many critics of public discourse are wracked with despair over the state of contemporary politics and culture. Boggs's judgment is typical: "As the twenty-first century dawns, American politics is in an increasingly pathetic condition. . . . Measured by virtually any set of criteria, the political system is in a (potentially terminal) state of entropy. . . . the deterioration of the public sphere has potentially devastating consequences for citizen empowerment and social change, not to mention the more general health of the political domain itself" (2000, pp. 1, vii). Decline is not the only possible narrative. Viewing contemporary public discourse through the prism of the public screen provokes a consideration of the emergence of new forms of participatory democracy. In what follows, we present an overview and criticism of the public sphere, introduce the characteristics of the public screen, and then treat the "violent" Seattle protests as a case study of participatory politics on the public screen.

From Public Sphere to Public Screen

The public sphere is ubiquitous in contemporary social theory. The most cursory of searches turns up a plethora of titles trumpeting its presence: *The Black Public Sphere*; *Masses, Classes, and the Public Sphere*; *America's Congress: Actions in the Public Sphere, James Madison through Newt Gingrich*; *Uncivil Rites: American Fiction, Religion, and the Public Sphere*; *The Public Sphere in Muslim Societies*; *Hindu Public Sphere*; *Spaces of their Own: Women's Public Sphere in Transnational China*; *From Handel to Hendrix: The Composer in the Public Sphere*, and *Necro Citizenship: Death, Eroticism, and the Public Sphere in the Nineteenth-Century United States.* Despite this bewildering array of permutations, the initial conceptualization of the public sphere

had a certain focused coherence. Inaugurated by Jürgen Habermas's *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, ideally the public sphere denotes a social space wherein private citizens gather as a public body with the rights of assembly, association, and expression in order to form public opinion.[2] The public sphere mediates between civil society and the state, with the expression of public opinion working to both legitimate and check the power of the state. This public opinion is decidedly rational: "the critical judgment of a public making use of its reason" (Habermas, 1989, p. 24). The public sphere assumes open access, the bracketing of social inequalities, rational discussion, focus on common issues, face-to-face conversation as the privileged medium, and the ability to achieve consensus. It is important to remember that Habermas's book was an historical study of the rise of the bourgeois public sphere and its decline in late capitalist society. Habermas laments the passing of the bourgeoisie public sphere and the rise of mass media spectacles, a turn of events he sees as the disintegration or refeudalization of the public sphere–a return to the spectacle of the Middle Ages. He argues that the activity of the public sphere has been replaced with consumerism: "Rational-critical debate had a tendency to be replaced by consumption, and the web of public communication unraveled into acts of individuated reception, however uniform in mode" (1989, p. 163).

Despite its unfortunate historical fate, the public sphere has become a vital concept for social theory, with two takes predominating: uncritical acceptance and critical acceptance. The former position involves the taking-for-granted of an unexamined public sphere and importing it uncritically for contemporary social theory (as is suggested by its promiscuous use in the above list of titles). The latter position is of more interest to us. It involves the curious dynamic of subjecting the public sphere to scathing criticisms, but then declaring it to be absolutely necessary. Michael Schudson, for example, who suggests that at least in America there has never been a public sphere, nevertheless concludes, "I find the concept of a public sphere indispensable as a model of what a good society should achieve. It seems to me a central notion for social or political theory" (1992, p. 160). The position, then, is that Habermas's conceptualization and history of the public sphere has many flaws, foremost among them his privileging of dialogue and fetishization of a procedural rationality at the heart of the public sphere. These flaws produce an exclusionary and impoverished normative ideal that shuns much of the richness and turbulence of the sense-making process; still, the concept of the public sphere remains essential. As Nancy Fraser argues in a 33-page essay detailing the flaws of the public sphere, "something like Habermas's idea of the public sphere is indispensable to critical social theory and democratic political practice" (1992, p. 111). Kendall Phillips reenacts this dynamic, making a compelling argument that the public sphere's privileging of consensus silences dissent and condemns resistance, yet insisting that "a wholesale rejection of the public sphere or consensus seems little better than blind faith in the exemplar and its foundation" (1996, p. 233; for useful criticisms of the public sphere, see Curran, 1991; Eley, 1992; McLaughlin, 1993; Pateman, 1988; Peters, 1993; and Ryan, 1992).

Still, is it wise to retain the concept of the public sphere for a televisual world characterized by image and spectacle? Habermas suggests not, finding "the world fashioned by the mass media is a public sphere in appearance only" (1989, p. 171). Although not advocating wholesale rejection, we think the public sphere needs a supplement. Before introducing the public screen, we want to elaborate on our reasons for supplementing the concept of the public sphere.

Our reservations revolve around the power of terms to shape and confine thinking. Certainly, the public sphere evokes echoes of ancient Greece. In so many ways, the small city-state of Athens has stunted the Western imagination, especially with respect to what constitutes political activity and citizenship. In evoking ancient Athens, the public sphere evokes a particular vision of politics. The Athenian agora models our metaphoric marketplace of ideas, an open and diverse (though not in terms of class and gender) space of multiple activities, including trade, laws, entertainment, and politics. As cultural historian Richard Sennett notes, it was a space of " 'sword-swallowers, jugglers, beggars, parasites, and fishmongers . . . [and] philosophers. . . . The evolution of Athenian democracy shaped the surfaces and the volume of the agora, for the movement possible in simultaneous space served participatory democracy well. By strolling from group to group, a person could find out what was happening in the city and discuss it" (1994, pp. 54–55).

The Pynx, Athens' theater of democracy, calls forth our attachments to the New England town meeting on the village square or the public forum. A sloped, bowl-shaped theater, literally "a place for seeing," the architecture of the Pynx amplified the one voice addressing a seated, captive audience (the structure functioned as a stone microphone, if you will). It was a democratic space in that any citizen could answer the herald's call, "Who wishes to speak?", yet unlike in the agora, the theater amplified the power of the voice of the speaker. "Yet the Pynx, whose clear design emphasized the seriousness of attending to words, put the people literally in a vulnerable position. Rhetoric constituted the techniques for generating verbal heat. . . . This body-art deployed 'tropes,' or figures of speech, in such a way that a mass of people could become aroused" (Sennett, 1994, pp. 66, 63).

Despite the significant differences in methods and purposes of the agora and Pynx, we want to underline that they both privilege words in the form of embodied voices. Contemporary techno-industrial culture shares that privileging. When people imagine the ideal public sphere as the seat of civic life, the soul of participatory democracy, whether it be the marketplace of ideas wherein multiple knots of private conversations in coffee houses and salons add up to a public, or town meetings wherein anyone can say his or her piece, the public sphere is imagined as a place of embodied voices, of people talking to each other, of conversation. This is a deep impulse and a beautiful dream and it is endemic to our vision of the public sphere, of democracy, of even communication itself. This is evident in our televised presidential election town meetings, wherein the "live" audience in the room makes the event authentic, real. John Dewey imagined the primordial act of communication as two people sitting on a log, face-to-face, talking. As Habermas puts it, "A

portion of the public sphere comes into being in every conversation in which private individuals assemble to form a public body" (1974, p. 49). Even the postmodern prophet of simulacra, Jean Baudrillard, falls under the spell of bodily presence. In remarking on the 1968 protests in France, he critiques the mass media as transmission systems at a distance and praises posters and notices printed on walls as immediate and thus the "real revolutionary media . . . everything that was an *immediate* inscription, given and returned, spoken and answered, mobile in the same space and time, reciprocal and antagonistic" (1972/1981, p. 176). Baudrillard's emphasis on immediacy, the spoken and answered, idealizes the face-to-face encounter and privileges such speech as authentic. The Baudrillard example is compelling in that he discusses written forms of communication as if they were spoken. Posters and notices are "spoken and answered." They are better than mass media because they are not distant but immediate, like speech. Similarly, although the public sphere includes written forms of communication, embodied conversation functions as the ideal baseline. Yet the dream of the public sphere as the engagement of embodied voices, democracy via dialogue, cloisters us, for perforce its vision compels us to see the contemporary landscape of mass communication as a nightmare.

If envisioning a public sphere of embodied voices makes sense within the Western imaginary, Jacques Derrida and John Peters gift us with a second seeing of our situation. Much of Derrida's work traces and deconstructs the privileging of face-to-face speech in the history of Western thought, what he terms a "logocentrism which is also a phonocentrism: absolute proximity of voice and being, of voice and the meaning of being, of voice and the ideality of meaning" (1976, pp. 11–12). Peters, in his history of communication as "a registry of modern longings" (1999, p. 2), traces and critiques a similar history of the privileging of presence, of "the dream of communication as the mutual communion of souls" (1999, p. 1; see also Schudson, 1997). As Peters notes, "dialogue has attained something of a holy status. It is held up as the summit of human encounter, the essence of liberal education, and the medium of participatory democracy" (1999, p. 33). Both Derrida and Peters offer dissemination as the primordial form of communication, the first turn before dialogue. Their point, an insight highlighted in an age of mass communication, is that communication/transmission/reception/meaning/understanding/ communion may never happen, "that a letter can always not arrive at its destination, and therefore it never arrives. And this is really how it is, it is not a misfortune, that's life, living life" (Derrida, 1987, p. 33). In counterpoint to a public sphere underwritten by consensus through communication or communion via conversation, dissemination reminds us that all forms of communication are founded on the risk of not communicating.

Taking dissemination rather than dialogue as characteristic of contemporary communication practices, then, necessarily alters the trajectory of our thinking about politics and society. The public screen is an accounting that starts from the premise of dissemination, of broadcasting. Communication as characterized by dissemination is the endless proliferation and scattering of emissions without the guarantee of pro-

ductive exchanges. Peters cites the parables of Jesus as the paradigmatic example of dissemination in order to suggest that dissemination offers a model of communication that is more democratic, open, public, equitable, receiver-oriented, and in tune with humanity's multiple communication practices (1999, pp. 35, 51–59, 267–68). As Peters concludes,

> Dialogue still reigns supreme in the imagination of many as to what good communication might be, but dissemination represents a saner choice for our fundamental term. Dissemination is far friendlier to the weirdly diverse practices we signifying animals engage in and to our bumbling attempts to meet others with some fairness and kindness. Open scatter is more fundamental than coupled sharing; it is the stuff from which, on rare, splendid occasions, dialogue may arise. Dissemination is not wreckage; it is our lot. (1999, p. 62)

In short, although an historically and culturally understandable desire, the fondness for bodily presence and face-to-face conversations ignores the social and technological transformations of the 20th century that have constructed an altogether different cultural context, a techno-epistemic break. The preceding few pages were meant to suggest the limitations of the public sphere as a guiding metaphor for social theory because it holds static notions of the public arena, appropriate political activity, and democratic citizenship, thus ignoring current social and technological conditions. Further, as a normative ideal, the public sphere promotes as unquestioned universal goods several deeply problematic notions: consensus, openness, dialogue, rationality, and civility/decorum. As a supplement, we want to introduce the public screen as a metaphor for thinking about the places of politics and the possibilities of citizenship in our present moment.

Remediation, Hypermediacy, and Images

The public screen. Such a concept takes technology seriously. It recognizes that most, and the most important, public discussions take place via "screens"–television, computer, and the front page of newspapers. Further, its suggests that we cannot simply adopt the term "public sphere" and all it entails, a term indebted to orality and print, for the current screen age. The new term takes seriously the work of media theorists suggesting that new technologies introduce new forms of social organization and new modes of perception.

Our starting premise, then, is that television and the Internet in concert have fundamentally transformed the media matrix that constitutes our social milieu, producing new forms of social organization and new modes of perception. As art historian W.J.T. Mitchell suggests, "The difference between a culture of reading and a culture of spectatorship, for instance, is not *only* a formal issue; it has implications for the very forms that sociability and subjectivity take, for the kinds of individuals and institutions formed by a culture" (1995, p. 3). These implications can be extrapolated both forward to the Internet and back to the avalanche of communication technologies of the 19th and 20th centuries, especially photography, telegraph, telephone, radio, and film.

These technologies have intensified the speed of communication and obliterated space as a barrier to communication (Kern, 1983; Carey, 1989). They physically shrink the world while simultaneously mentally expanding it, producing a vast expansion of geographical consciousness. Thoreau's caustic comments about the telegraph have come true. We know and care when

Princess Di has a car crash. Texas may not have much to say to Maine, but it is transmitted nevertheless. Further, segregated space is breached, flattening multiple forms of hierarchy (Meyrowitz, 1985). As media scholar Ian Angus explains, "Media of communication constitute primal scenes, a complex of which defines the culture of a given place and time, an Epoch of Being" (2000, p. 190).

This quotation warrants elaboration. Angus is stating that at any historical moment a plurality of media coexist and interact. This point, suggested by McLuhan's observation that "the 'content' of any medium is always another medium" (1964, p. 23), is usefully extended by Bolter and Grusin's discussions of remediation and hypermediacy. Remediation is "the representation of one medium in another" (1999, p. 45) and examples include computer games like *Myst* or *Doom* that remediate photography and film or web sites that remediate television. Importantly, Bolter and Grusin argue that remediation is not a linear process and that "older media can also remediate newer ones" (1999, p. 55). For example, newspapers like *USA Today* remediate both television and the Windows layout of computer screens. Remediation is closely linked to the logic of hypermediacy: "contemporary hypermediacy offers a heterogeneous space, in which representation is conceived of not as a window on to the world, but rather as 'windowed' itself–with windows that open on to other representations or other media. The logic of hypermediacy multiplies the signs of mediation" (Bolter and Grusin, 1999, p. 34).

The notions of remediation and hypermediacy are crucial to our discussion of the public screen, for when we discuss the public screen primarily through television and newspaper examples, it is with three understandings. First, TV is never simply TV, but a medium immersed in the process of remediations among multiple media. Second, the public screen is a scene of hypermediacy. Third, at a meta-level, remediation provides a frame for conceptualizing the relation between the public sphere and the public screen. The latter neither simply succeeds the former nor are they utterly distinct arenas. Rather, the public screen and the public sphere exist in a dialectic of remediation. To herald the emergence of the public screen is not to announce the death of the public sphere, though it may suggest its eclipse.

Angus, in making the now common observation that media do not merely transmit information and represent reality but fundamentally constitute it, goes one step further. Yes, media produce culture, but they are also the primal scene upon which culture is produced and enacted. In other words, in techno-industrial culture media become the ground of Being. To push this point, media are not mere means of communicating in a public sphere or on a public screen; media produce the public sphere and public screen as primal scenes of Being. Particular configurations of media institute the scene or open the spaces from which epistemologies and ontologies emerge.

Today's scene is predominantly a visual one. TV trades in a discourse dominated by images not words, a visual rhetoric. In our television culture, we are experiencing a shift from Rorty's "linguistic turn" to what Mitchell terms a "pictorial turn" (1995, p. 11). TV's imagistic discourse has become so dominant that even newspapers can do no better than imitate TV, moving

to shorter stories and color graphics. The epitome of this trend is the national newspaper, *USA Today*, but even the grey *New York Times* now prints color photographs on the front page. If we take remediation seriously, Susan Sontag's observations on photography are also illuminating with respect to the ceaseless circulation of images in our media matrix: "Industrial societies turn their citizens into image-junkies. . . . turn experience itself into a way of seeing. . . . an event has come to mean, precisely, something worth photographing," something that has appeared on the public screen (1977, pp. 24, 18–19). Baudrillard pushes this point: "Photography brings the world into action (acts out the world, is the world's act) and the world steps into the photographic act (acts out photography, is photography's act)" (2000, p. 3). These comments are suggestive for thinking about a public discourse of images. John Hartley's provocative analysis of the politics of pictures more explicitly gets at the transition from public sphere to public screen. Hartley suggests that there is no real public, but, rather that the public is the product of publicity, of pictures. The public's fictional status, however, should not be "taken as a disqualification from but as a demonstration of the social power (even truth) of fictions" (Hartley, 1992, p. 84). Images, then, are important not because they represent reality but create it: "They are the place where collective social action, individual identity and symbolic imagination meet–the nexus between culture and politics" (Hartley, 1992, p. 3).

Transforming Publicity

So what do these technological transformations portend for democracy? Advocates of the public sphere often criticize the contemporary political imagescape by evoking the fullness of the public sphere ideal and a past golden age. Michael Schudson cites a representative example:

> Christopher Lasch, for instance, bemoans "the transformation of politics from a central component of popular culture into a spectator sport." What once existed but has been lost, in Lasch's view, is "the opportunity to exercise the virtues associated with deliberation and participation in public debate." What we are seeing is "the atrophy of these virtues in the common people–judgment, prudence, eloquence, courage, self-reliance, resourcefulness, common sense." (1992, p. 142)

Of course, Lasch's position suggests that our fall from grace could be rectified by a collective act of will. Studying media suggests not. New technologies have transformed our social context, generating new forms of social organization and new modes of perception. TV places a premium on images over words, emotions over rationality, speed over reflection, distraction over deliberation, slogans over arguments, the glance over the gaze, appearance over truth, the present over the past.

Yet even theorists aware of the structural transformations introduced by technologies fall into Lasch's reactionary pose. Kathleen Hall Jamieson, after skillfully explaining how TV has rendered traditional public address obsolete, concludes that we need more occasions for traditional public address (1988, pp. 238–255). Neil Postman, in his book *Amusing Ourselves to Death* (1985), understands the new context but tips his hand with his title and frames his discussion in terms of the loss of the pre-TV golden age of the Lincoln-Douglas debates [Schudson nicely explodes that myth (1992)].

These critics base their critiques on

the assumption of an idealized public sphere predicated on rationality, face-to-face talk, consensus, equality, contemplation, and the bracketing of power relations. Such a frame unnecessarily limits understanding of the possibilities of participatory politics in a mass-mediated society. Technological and social changes have produced the public screen. For a cultural critic, the key response to the structural transformations of our moment is neither to adopt a moral pose nor to express yearnings for a mythical past, but to explore what is happening and what is possible under current conditions. If embodied gatherings of culturally homogenous, equal citizens engaged in rational dialogue with the goal of consensus is no longer a dominant mode of political activity, what constitutes politics today? One answer is the public screen. Groups perform image events (DeLuca, 1999) for dissemination via corporate-owned mass media that display an unceasing flow of images and entertainment. Although today's televisual public screen is not the liberal public sphere of which Habermas dreams, wherein a rational public through deliberative discussion achieves public opinion, neither is it the medieval public sphere of representative publicity that Habermas fears, a site where rulers stage their status in the form of spectacles before the ruled. Rather, on today's public screen corporations and states stage spectacles (advertising and photo ops) certifying their status before the people/public *and* activists participate through the performance of image events, employing the consequent publicity as a social medium for forming public opinion and holding corporations and states accountable. Critique through spectacle, not critique versus spectacle. Greenpeace's image fare against Soviet and Japanese whalers (DeLuca, 1999), college students' shantytown campaign against corporate and institutional investment in apartheid South Africa (Williams, 1986), and Act Up's in-your-face activism against AIDS indifference (DeParle, 1990) attest to the possibilities of such practices.

Note that the public screen contains a shift in the function of public opinion. In Habermas's public sphere, public opinion is designed to criticize and control the power of the state. As already argued, in the present historical moment corporations have eclipsed nation-states in many respects as the dominant players on the world scene. For Habermas, the rise of corporations has corrupted the public sphere:

> "Public opinion" takes on a different meaning depending on whether it is brought into play as a critical authority in connection with the normative mandate that the exercise of political and social power be subject to publicity or as the object to be molded in connection with a staged display of, and manipulative propagation of, publicity in the service of persons and institutions, consumer goods, and programs. (1989, p. 236)

Although not disagreeing with Habermas's account, we think it is only partial and neglects the opportunities the public screen engenders for citizens to hold corporations accountable. The publicity activists generate via the public screen is just as often directed toward corporations as toward governments. Given the importance of image on the public screen, even powerful corporations are vulnerable to image-fare and must be protective of their public image (for examples, see Beder, 1997; Greider, 1992). A compelling recent example has been the campaign against sweatshop labor. Activists,

many of them college students, have used the public screen to generate public opinion against the use of sweatshop labor by global corporations, including Nike, Wal-Mart, and the GAP (Gourevitch, 2001; the major groups in this effort are United Students Against Sweatshops, the National Labor Committee, the Fair Labor Association, and the Worker Rights Consortium).

Image Events in a Time of Distraction

The public screen is a constant current of images and words, a ceaseless circulation abetted by the technologies of television, film, photography, and the Internet. These technologies' speed, stream of images, and global reach create an ahistorical, contextless flow of jarring juxtapositions. The public screen promotes a mode of perception that could best be characterized as "distraction." The public sphere, in privileging rational argument, assumed a mode of perception characterized by concentration, attention, and focus. German social theorists contemplating the effects of film, radio, photography, and urbanism recognized the emergence of a new mode of perception. Horkheimer and Adorno lamented the effects of film,

> Real life is becoming indistinguishable from the movies. The sound film, far surpassing the theater of illusion, leaves no room for imagination or reflection on the part of the audience, who is unable to respond within the structure of the film. . . . They are so designed that quickness, powers of observation, and experience are undeniably needed to apprehend them at all; yet sustained thought is out of the question if the spectator is not to miss the relentless rush of facts. (1972, pp. 126–127)

Observing the state of middle-class Germany amidst the new technologies and the culture industry in the 1920s and 30s, Siegfried Kracauer wrote of people living in a state of distraction: "Society does not stop the urge to live amid glamour and distraction, but encourages it wherever and however it can" (1998, pp. 89).

Eschewing mere judgment, Walter Benjamin sought to understand distraction as the mode of perception most appropriate to the technologically transformed conditions of the 20th century. Benjamin conceived of the audience as "a collectivity in a state of distraction" and asserted that "the tasks which face the human apparatus of perception at the turning points of history cannot be solved by optical means, that is, by contemplation, alone. They are mastered gradually by habit, under the guidance of tactile appropriation" (1968, pp. 232, 233). Benjamin is suggesting that the focused gaze has been displaced by the distracted look of the optical unconscious, the glance of habit, which is tactile in the sense that one is not an observer gazing from a critical distance, but an actor immersed in a sea of imagery, a self pressed upon by the play of images and driven to distraction to survive. The self utilizes "a way of looking and experiencing the world in which the eye does not act to hold external objects in a firm contemplative gaze, but only notices them in passing and while also keeping a series of other objects in view" (Latham, 1999, p. 463; see also Abbas, 1996).

The key point is that these theorists understand distraction not as a lack of attention but as a necessary form of perception when immersed in the technologically induced torrent of images and information that constitutes public discourse in the 20th and 21st centuries. Speed and images, singly and in concert, annihilate contemplation. Al-

though distraction and the glance are antithetical to the public sphere and were read negatively by theorists such as Horkheimer, Adorno, and Kracauer as signs of the decline of civilization, the dialectic of Enlightenment, we suggest that they be read not morally but analytically as signs of the emergence of a new space for discourse, the public screen, that entails different forms of intelligence and knowledge.

Given that in modern industrial society people "directly know only tiny regions of social life" and that of "all the institutions of daily life, the media specialize in orchestrating everyday consciousness. . . . They name the world's parts, they certify reality as reality" (Gitlin, 1980, pp. 1–2), the public screen is an unavoidable place of politics. As Gronbeck bluntly puts it, "The telespectacle, for better or worse, is the center of public politics, of the public sphere. . . . we must recognize that the conversation of the culture is centered not in the *New York Review of Books* but in the television experience" (1995, p. 235). Citizens who want to appear on the public screen, who want to act on the stage of participatory democracy, face three major conditions that both constrain and enable their actions: 1) private ownership/monopoly of the public screen, 2) Infotainment conventions that filter what counts as news, and 3) the need to communicate in the discourse of images.

These are formidable constraints; yet they are also rich opportunities. Yes, ownership often restricts content that is against the interests of the transnational corporations that own and advertise on the media. Yes, the fact that private companies driven by profits own the media restricts access for citizens and most activist groups that simply cannot afford to buy time (McChesney, 1999). Yes, the visual bias of TV works against those deploying traditional, word-based forms of argument. Still, there are opportunities. First, the need for media companies to be competitive and attract audiences opens up the public screen to stories beyond the narrow ideological interests of transnational capital. Further, although certain news conventions work against activist groups, others, most notably the emphasis on the new, drama, conflict, objectivity, and compelling visuals, open up the public screen. Finally, TV amplifies voices, enabling one person (Dr. Kevorkian) or small groups to communicate to millions via the public screen.

This understanding of mass media has translated into a practice of staging image events for dissemination. In a book written shortly before Greenpeace's first image event, early Greenpeace Director Robert Hunter argued that the mass media provide a delivery system for image events that explode "in the public's consciousness to transform the way people view their world" (1971, p. 22). As fellow activist Paul Watson elaborated, "The more dramatic you can make it, the more controversial it is, the more publicity you will get. . . . The drama translates into exposure. Then you tie the message into that exposure and fire it into the brains of millions of people in the process" (quoted in Scarce, 1990, p. 104).

Greenpeace is an early example of a group lacking organization, resources, and a large membership deploying dramatic visuals and an understanding of the public screen to achieve astonishing successes. The fair trade/democratic globalization protests provide a contemporary opportunity to study the possibilities and consequences of the

public screen. The Seattle WTO protests provide a particularly rich example, in part because the public screen is more developed and complex than it was in the 1970s and in part because Seattle was a contested image event wherein several groups competed over its meaning: the Clinton Administration, corporate sponsors, peaceful protesters, uncivil disobedience activists, and anarchists. Further, a key component of Seattle was violence (in various forms), a type of "communication" *a priori* ruled out of the public sphere. In part, then, our analysis will focus on violence and how it works on the public screen.

The Battle in Seattle: The Uses of Violence

There are so many legal precautions against violence, and our upbringing is directed towards so weakening our tendencies toward violence, that we are instinctively inclined to think that any act of violence is a manifestation of a return to barbarism. . . . almost uninterruptedly since the eighteenth century, economists have been in favour of strong central authorities, and have troubled little about political liberties. It may be questioned whether there is not a little stupidity in the admiration of our contemporaries for gentle methods.

–Georges Sorel, *Reflections on Violence*

Violence is never an appropriate way to settle differences. I know that the violence comes from a tiny segment who through such actions detract from those who have come there to constructively protest. The World Trade Organization has sought in recent years to expand its contacts with people from all segments of society. Our efforts at transparency have not been perfect. More work needs to be done. But progress in this area can only be made through constructive dialogue.

–Mike Moore, Director-General,
World Trade Organization

A little broken glass in the streets of Seattle has transformed the World Trade Organization into a popular icon for the unregulated globalization that tramples human values on every continent, among rich and poor alike.

–William Greider,
"The Battle Beyond Seattle"

When thinking about the WTO in Seattle, we must first recognize that it was designed by the Clinton Administration as an image event. As politicians and their advisers clearly understand, with the advent of television, dramatic visuals have become required fare. For example, when then-President Bush wanted to announce clean air legislation he traveled to Arizona to use the Grand Canyon as a visual backdrop. Seattle, export capital of the U.S., was consciously chosen as the scene for Clinton's triumphant procession. Success was scripted, with Clinton as the star in the heroic tale of free-trade prosperity. The title of the production was to be the "Clinton Round," the sequel to the founding "Uruguay Round" in 1995. Corporate sponsorship was secured, with companies such as General Motors, Boeing, and Microsoft paying as much as $250,000 for access to heads of state, ministers, and delegates during the conference (Lean, 1999). Seeing the stage set, however, a diverse range of activists decided it would be the perfect opportunity to launch their issues onto the public screen.

In an example of the hypermediacy of the public screen, the plan for Seattle was clearly laid out on the internet and in alternative newspapers, handbills, and flyers circulating in Seattle for weeks before November 30th.[3] Organizers anticipated that tens of thousands of people would converge on downtown Seattle and "transform it into a festival of resistance with mass

nonviolent direct action, marches, street theater, music and celebration" ("Resist the World Trade Organization" handbill).[4] Even with extensive discussions of nonviolent tactics, organizers expected violence–from the police. The rules of enactment were explicitly laid out. In their "colorful festival" of civil and uncivil disobedience, the protesters would provide the provocation and the violence would come from the police.[5] As anyone with a television or access to a newspaper during those few days in 1999 will readily agree, the protest did not turn out exactly as planned. The festival of color was punctuated with black-clad anarchists and the nonviolent direct action was upstaged by images of smashed windows, burning trash bins, and brutal interactions with the police.

Both establishment voices and nonviolent activists denounced the violence, especially the symbolic violence of the anarchists. (By symbolic violence, we mean acts directed toward property, not people, and designed to attract media attention.) The dominant response lamented the violence as drowning out the message of the nonviolent protesters. An editorial in the *Seattle Times* opined, "It took thousands of peaceful protesters to shut down the opening ceremonies of the World Trade Organization. It took only a few hundred punks, vandals, and self-proclaimed anarchists to turn downtown Seattle from a festive Christmas scene to a dump" ("WTO Seattle becomes a playpen for vandals," 1999, B4). Activist Cathy Ahern complained, "I am so disappointed how this turned out. We had weeks of training how to do this correctly. It was supposed to be peaceful. . . . It's been completely destroyed. Our message is not going to get out and I'm so mad" (as quoted in Postman, Broom and Davila, 1999, p. A13). Arlie Schardt, president of Environmental Media Services, concurred, "I just think it's tragic that all the news here is about a handful of anarchists and not the tens of thousands of activists who conducted model marches" (as quoted in Cooper, 1999, A 2). Such criticisms fail to consider important elements of politics and social change on a global and televisual public screen. The WTO protests are an instructive example of the productive possibilities of violence on today's public screen.

By definition, the news is about what is new, what is out of the ordinary. The news is attracted to disturbers of order and deviation from the routine. As the news adage goes, "if it bleeds, it leads" (Kerbel, 2000). Aside from bloodshed, nothing fits these parameters more precisely than symbolic protest violence and uncivil disobedience. In Seattle, such acts served to highlight the lack of citizen access and input in the WTO decision-making process. These acts also encouraged the police response of tear gas and concussion grenades that made for some of the most compelling images coming from the WTO protest. The symbolic violence and uncivil disobedience worked together in a nuanced fashion. The non-violent protesters served to provoke the police at least as much as the anarchists did. Indeed, police violence against nonviolent protesters performing uncivil disobedience started before the anarchists acted. We suspect that the anarchists' symbolic violence justified intense media coverage of the police violence because media framing often portrayed the police violence as a response to the anarchists. In other words, the presence of the anarchists allowed the media to provide some sort of explanation, however inadequate, of a

police force out of control. Police violence against activists at the IMF/World Bank protest in Washington, D.C. the following spring went largely unreported. The event also lacked symbolic anarchist violence. In Seattle, then, symbolic violence and uncivil disobedience in concert produced compelling images that functioned as the dramatic leads for substantive discussions of the issues provoking the protests.

Since the civil rights and antiwar protests of the 1960s, activists have learned the lessons of images. They understood Seattle as an occasion not for warfare but for imagefare. The protesters' chants of "The whole world is watching" clearly echo the 1960s. The whole world did watch–not because thirty thousand protesters gathered in one location, but because uncivil disobedience and symbolically violent tactics effectively disrupted the WTO, shutdown Seattle, provoked police violence, and staged the images the media feed upon. An analysis of media coverage of the WTO protests reveals such tactics as necessary ingredients for compelling the whole world to watch.

TV Screens

Analysis of the television evening news coverage for the first day of violence, November 30, suggests the productive role of violence in social protest on the public screen. Combined coverage time on CNN, ABC, CBS, and NBC increased by 26% from Monday's coverage and the placement of the story improved from the third, fourth, or fifth story to the lead or second story. The opening images were clearly ones of violence and conflict: protesters smashing a Starbucks; police in sci-fi riot gear shooting tear gas canisters and concussion grenades; police roughing up protesters. Other images did get through, though: thousands in the labor march; environmentalists in sea turtle costumes; protesters nonviolently blocking streets. Significantly, the protesters' criticisms of the WTO received an impressively extensive and sympathetic airing–the claim that the WTO is an undemocratic organization with a pro-corporate agenda that in practice overrules national labor, environmental, and human rights laws was broadcast to an international audience. In addition to the power of the images themselves, this airing happened in two ways. First, among the images of violence were interspersed quotations from the protesters. On NBC, for example, dramatic images of violence yielded to a female protester declaring, "We're just normal people who are tired of the exploitation of the multi-national corporations throughout the world." Second, the "breaking news" stories focusing on violent images were invariably followed by background stories focusing on the issues that make the WTO controversial. ABC reporter Deborah Wong concluded one such story: "For these protesters, this single organization, the WTO, has come to symbolize just about all that is wrong in the modern world. So in this global economy, where bigger is better and only the fittest survive, these people complain they have less and less control over their jobs and the laws which protect their communities." Such background stories sought out the perspectives of protesters. On ABC, a female protester remarked, "There is a general dissatisfaction here with corporate culture, absolutely, and we're not going to have that slammed down our throats." CBS interviewed unemployed Mary Fleure

of the United Steelworkers of America, who explained, "We're just being swallowed up by corporate greed. We can't compete. I can't feed my family."

To think that the WTO protests would have been lead stories and would have received such extensive airtime without symbolic violence (there was difficult competition from mass graves in Mexico) is to neglect the dynamics of the news media. Far from discrediting or drowning out the message of the WTO protesters, the symbolic violence generated extensive media coverage and an airing of the issues. Comparing television coverage in Seattle with succeeding protests in Washington, D.C. and Qatar is suggestive.

The pattern of TV evening news coverage reveals that although the major networks (CNN, ABC, CBS, NBC) expected a significant story in Seattle, they did not anticipate the extent of the protests and the outbreaks of both anarchist and police violence. The Sunday and Monday nights preceding the opening day of the WTO meetings received 10:40 and 13:10 minutes of airtime, respectively. Tuesday, the first day of protests and violence, saw an increase in coverage to 17 minutes and the WTO was the lead or second story on all four networks. On Wednesday, when the extent of Tuesday's "mayhem" became clear, coverage reached 28:30 and the WTO protests were the lead story on all four networks. On Thursday, the WTO remained the top story on three of the four networks and garnered 16:40 minutes of coverage. On these nights, most reports followed the two-part structure already illustrated in the analysis of the Tuesday coverage: an opening story with a focus on the violence followed by a background story to cover the substantive issues of the protesters.

After Seattle, the next major globalization event was the World Bank/International Monetary Fund (WB/IMF) spring meetings in Washington, D.C. The coverage pattern was almost the reverse of that in Seattle and suggests the crucial role of violence in garnering time on the public screen. On the Saturday and Sunday preceding the Monday opening, the WB/IMF protests were the lead story on six of the seven broadcasts (NBC did not have a Sunday evening broadcast) and received 10 and 13:20 minutes of coverage, respectively. Coverage peaked on Monday with the opening of the meetings. Although receiving 17:30 minutes of coverage, the WB/IMF protests were not the lead story on any network. Notably, due to a variety of factors, there was no active anarchist presence and much less police violence. Although the meetings and protests continued on Tuesday, there was no coverage at all that evening. Apparently, without violence or the threat of violence, the protests were not even worthy of coverage despite the significance of the issues being discussed. This pattern has repeated itself at other globalization events and protests. The most recent round of WTO meetings were held November 9–14, 2001. Doha, Qatar was purposefully chosen as the site in order to reduce the likelihood of protests and violence. That goal was achieved, as there were just small protests and no violence. Consequently, there was absolutely no TV evening news coverage by the four major networks.

Although these three events included varying contextual factors, the results are very suggestive. In the Seattle and Washington, D.C. cases, preliminary coverage was modest. When violence broke out in Seattle, coverage esca-

lated. When dramatic violence did not occur in DC, coverage disappeared. In Qatar, where violence was ruled out *a priori* by the choice of venue, television coverage was nonexistent. Clearly, then, the symbolic violence and police violence did not detract from more substantive coverage of the protesters' issues. On the contrary, without such violence or its threat, TV news coverage quickly evaporated.

Newspaper Screens

Interestingly, *The New York Times* in their lead editorial comes to the same mistaken conclusion as the peaceful protesters: "The violence and property destruction diverted attention from the basic point the demonstrators sought to make–the need to reform the W.T.O.'s procedures and values" ("Messages for the W.T.O.," 1999, p. A30). The editorial, in its remaining six paragraphs, details the grievances of the non-violent protesters, argues for the need to respond substantively, and concludes: "vital issues affecting the health and prosperity of the planet deserve a visibly fair hearing" (p. A30). This editorial serves as a microcosm of the newspaper coverage generally: the violence serves as a dramatic lead that opens into expansive and extensive coverage of the issues surrounding the WTO protests.

As was true for television, images played a dominant role in the print media coverage of the WTO protests. Headline stories were accompanied by quarter-page images (some as large as ten and a half inches across) of police and protesters facing off in teargas-fogged streets. From November 28th, 1999 to December 2nd, 1999, *The New York Times, Washington Post*, *Los Angeles Times*, and *USA Today* ran sixty-five images of the WTO convention and related protests in downtown Seattle. Of those sixty-five images, the vast majority, forty-one, were uncivil disobedience shots. Eight were of peaceful protests. Ten of the pictures documented the negotiations of the delegates, the proceedings taking place in the convention, and the address of President Clinton. Three images were of the anarchists and their actions. This emphasis on images supports notions of remediation and hypermediacy–viewers witness the events in Seattle through the public screens of both their televisions and newspapers.

Prior to the anarchists' symbolic violence, the uncivil disobedience, and the violent police response of Tuesday November 30th, newspaper coverage was fairly limited (thirteen images and twenty-four articles). Judging by the number of articles covering the WTO convention (three on the 28th, 12 on the 29th, and 9 on the 30th), the newspapers' interest in the protest was beginning to wane by the morning of the 30th until the violence in the streets shifted the coverage dramatically. The aggressive direct action protests and symbolic violence (which intensified the police response) catapulted the protests into national headlines. For the first time, on December 1st all four newspapers ran front-page images of the convention, each opting to display pictures of the violent interaction between police and protesters. Fifteen of the images that accompanied the eighteen articles covering the WTO were of acts of uncivil disobedience or of the violent police response. Two images were of the anarchists and their actions. Two images were of the convention proceedings. Although violence was a focus of the photographs and the lead stories, the papers reported criti-

cisms of the WTO and the predominantly peaceful character of the protests was emphasized. This trend continued on December 2nd, with the four newspapers running a noteworthy *sixteen* images of uncivil disobedience. If we are thinking of the newspapers through the metaphor of the public screen, then the front page becomes particularly important. Out of thirteen front-page images during the days of protest, eight were of uncivil disobedience, two were of peaceful protest, two were of the convention proceedings, and one was of an anarchist.

This attention to the conflict outside of the conference not only increased scrutiny of the action of the protesters and police, but also increased coverage of the WTO in general. For example, *The New York Times* ran two articles on the WTO on November 28th, four on the 29th, four on the 30th, seven articles, editorials and letters to the editor on December 1st, and a remarkable fourteen documents on December 2nd. The shocking close-up of a woman's bleeding face on A1 in the *L.A. Times* directs readers to A18 where another image of protesting in the streets draws readers' attention to the column, "WTO: What's at Issue?" The column lists and briefly explains the major issues facing the trade ministers in Seattle: agriculture, Uruguay round assessment, anti-dumping measures, labor and environment, WTO reform, intellectual property and China (Iritani, 1999). *The New York Times* makes a similar move on the 1st, creating a chart listing "Who's Protesting and What They Object To" in the first column and "What They Want" in the second ("Behind the Hubbub in Seattle," 1999). The article focuses solely on the issues of worker, environmental, and consumer groups. A similar dynamic was at work in the *Washington Post* and *USA Today*. "This weird jamboree" inspired *USA Today* to detail the issues of unions, environmentalists, steel workers, food-safety advocates, and poor countries ("Cover Story: This weird jamboree," Cox and Jones, 1999, p. 1A). Far from stealing the limelight from the legitimate protesters, the compelling images of violence and disruption increased the news hole and drew more attention to the issues.

This increase in coverage can be compared to the coverage of the WB/IMF protests in Washington, D.C. the following spring. Police cracked down on activists before the start of the conference by closing down protest headquarters and making preemptive arrests. These preventive strikes by the Washington, D.C. police curtailed most of the symbolic violence and direct action seen on the streets of Seattle. Backing our claim that the violence in the streets of Seattle actually produced more media coverage, the reporting on the WB/IMF conference did not spike as it did in Seattle. For example, in *The New York Times* coverage remained modest as the conference went on: three articles April 15th, six on the 16th, six on the 17th, six on the 18th, and three on the 19th.

In even starker contrast to the protest in Seattle was the recent WTO meeting in Qatar, where the protesters who did attend were reduced to handing out anti-globalization pamphlets. The entire WTO-Qatar coverage in *The New York Times* from November 10th to November 15th 2001 was less than that of December 2nd, 1999 alone (thirteen documents). None of the articles graced the front page of the newspaper and nearly half the documents (six) were in the C section of the paper. The *Los Angeles Times* gave the talks

even less attention, with a mere six articles covering the convention. This again reinforces our claim that the World Trade Organization and its far-reaching agreements fall below the level of consciousness of most media organizations in the absence of the compelling images constructed through the symbolic violence and uncivil disobedience that marked the convention in Seattle. As we found in the television coverage, such protest actions did not detract from the message. On the contrary, they increased the visibility and extensiveness of newspaper coverage of the protesters' criticisms of the WTO.

Screen Effects

The WTO protests accomplished much. On an immediate level, ordinary citizens excluded from the meetings managed through protest to affect those meetings and contribute to their failure. As European Union trade commissioner Pascal Lamy admitted, "What's happening outside is having an effect on the negotiations" (quoted in Sanger and Kahn, 1999, p. A14). At a more general level, on the difficult terrain of a corporate-dominated public screen, thousands of global citizens managed to turn a summit dedicated to streamlining the world for corporate profits into an unruly "forum" on human rights, environmental standards, and social justice in the emerging new world. In exposing the often arcane issues of trade policy to the glare of the media, the protests provoked a debate over free trade versus fair trade. Public discussions about trade are now considering environmental concerns as well as profit concerns, human rights as well as property rights. Indeed, President Clinton was moved to echo many protester concerns in his speech to the WTO. Clinton called for economic justice, worker rights, human rights, environmental protections, and an open and accessible WTO (1999). This public discussion has continued. *The American Prospect*'s recent special issues on globalization and its critics, *The Face of Globalism* (Summer 2001) and *Globalism and the World's Poor* (Winter 2002), are examples of some of the fallout of Seattle.

On a global level, the Seattle protests have sparked an international pro-democratic globalization movement that has staged protests in Washington, D.C., Prague, Quebec City, Salzburg, Genoa and other cities around the world. A front page story in the *Washington Post* prior to the WB/ IMF meetings opened: "The last time opponents of global capitalism confronted the ranks of domestic law enforcement–in Seattle, Nov. 30 to Dec. 3–the results were clouds of tear gas, volleys of rubber bullets and the makings of a mass protest movement whose energy and appeal have surprised even some of its organizers. Round 2 is scheduled for April 16 and 17 in Washington." Though the article dismisses the anarchists as "vandals" and "looters" "running amok," it also admits that they have changed the topography of the political terrain: "Last year, as every year, a demonstration was called during the IMF and World Bank spring meetings in Washington. Twenty-five people showed up." A veteran critic of the World Bank and IMF remarks, "Something has changed. We may fancy ourselves good organizers, but I don't think we could have planned for this" (Montgomery and Santana, 2000, pp.1, 5).

In provoking an international maelstrom over globalization, activists have

accomplished a substantial political achievement. The activists in Seattle and since have been able to link sweatshops, union-busting, human rights violations, environmental degradation, and poverty as consequences of corporate globalization. In short, they have unified farm and environmental and union and anti-colonial groups into a voice that has effectively named corporate globalization as a problem and site of struggle, not an inexorable natural process. The activists have punctured the claims of corporate globalization to universality and to inevitability by giving voice to those left out.

Finally, the symbolic violence and uncivil disobedience of protesters exposed the violence of the state and transnational capital as the allegedly progressive haven of Seattle cracked down with a show of force worthy of 1960s Birmingham or Los Angeles. The trashing of civil liberties, not Starbucks, may be the lasting image of Seattle. Violence often helps foment activism and form community (Browne, 1996). In addition to exposing the violence of the state on behalf of corporate interests in Seattle, in challenging the WTO the protesters have sparked a conversation about the violence of global corporations in their daily practices. A smashed Nike storefront dims in comparison to the violence of sweatshop labor around the world. Yes, violence is disturbing. But for people excluded by governmental structures and corporate power, symbolic protest violence is an effective way to make it onto the public screen and speak to that power. Such symbolic protest violence is often a necessary prerequisite to highlight the nonviolent elements of a movement that might otherwise be marginalized in the daily struggle for media coverage. In the "Battle for Seattle," symbolic violence helped make real the protest chant "Whose world? Our world! Whose streets? Our streets!"

Dense Surfaces: Contemplating Image Events

As the preceding content analysis suggests, the symbolic violence and the uncivil disobedience fulfilled the function of gaining the attention of the distracted media. Counter to charges by peaceful protesters, then, such image events did not drown out their message, but enabled it to be played more extensively and in greater depth. Media coverage of this issue was not a zero-sum game. Uncivil disobedience and the anarchists' actions expanded the totality of coverage. If we take image events seriously as visual discourse, however, we cannot simply reduce them to the function of gaining attention for the "real" rhetoric of words. It is our claim that image events are a central mode of public discourse both for conventional electoral politics (Dahlgren, 1995; Donovan and Scherer, 1992; Gronbeck, 1995; Jamieson, 1988; Postman, 1985) and alternative grassroots politics in an era dominated by a commercial, televisual, electronic public screen (Szasz, 1995; DeLuca, 1999). We must consider image events, then, as visual philosophical-rhetorical fragments, mind bombs that expand the universe of thinkable thoughts.

Image events are dense surfaces meant to provoke in an instant the shock of the familiar made strange. They suggest a Benjaminian sense of time, where any moment can open up on eternity, any moment can be the moment that changes everything, the moment that redeems the past and the

future. And it is all there on the surface. In a familiar city, Seattle, home of the Mariners, computer geeks, airplanes, rain, and coffee, a familiar place, Starbucks, the national neighborhood coffee shop, is shattered by a hammer, everyday object and sign of national industriousness. The familiar made strange, the shock of recognition that the familiar is not necessarily innocuous, the hint of the "banality of evil." The chain of targets reinforces the message: Nike Town, Old Navy, McDonalds, Banana Republic, Planet Hollywood (for a detailed explanation of the choice of targets, see Hawken, 2000).

This is made clear in the intentions of the anarchists. Though intentionality cannot dictate meaning or effect, it can help us glimpse possible surfaces of the multi-faceted image event. In a 13-minute *60 Minutes II* report on "The New Anarchists," reporter Scott Pelley frames the story with these opening words: "Who were those masked men and women in Seattle? Those violent demonstrators who attacked downtown, toppled a police chief, and wrecked the Clinton Administration's cherished trade conference?" The story itself consists mostly of stunning video of the protests (shot by the anarchists) and of interviews during which the anarchists explain their positions. After images of people in black shattering storefronts, the reporter asks, "What is the point?" An anarchist responds, "Economic incentive to not hold meetings like that at all. Psychological incentive to reconsider the kind of society we live in that fills our world with Starbucks and McDonalds." The psychological impact is emphasized again in the words of an anarchist that close the story: "You stare at a television and you see logos and you're in a daze and these symbols pop up everywhere in your life. When that is shattered, it breaks a spell and we're trying to get people to wake up before it's too late."

These comments display an acute appreciation of the public screen and image events. The anarchists' image event of shattering windows obeys the rules of the public screen. It both participates in and punctures the habit of distraction characteristic of the contemporary mode of perception. It participates in order to be aired–it is brief, visual, dramatic, and emotional. It punctures to punctuate, to interrupt the flow, to give pause. It punctures by making the mundane malevolent, the familiar fantastic.

Charting the Public Screen

The point of this essay has been to explore the constraints and opportunities of the public screen, a current place for participatory democracy. It is incumbent upon activists, academics, indeed, all citizens of the world, to understand the new topography of political activity. Under contemporary conditions, the public screen is the essential supplement to the public sphere. In comparison to the rationality, embodied conversations, consensus, and civility of the public sphere, the public screen highlights dissemination, images, hypermediacy, spectacular publicity, cacophony, distraction, and dissent. We have focused on the image event as one practice of the public screen because it highlights the public screen as an alternative venue for participatory politics and public opinion formation that offers a striking contrast to the public sphere. Our account, however, is not an exhaustive treatment of the public screen. This is true even with respect to Seattle.

The public screen includes the pundits on talking head TV, whose political discourse is molded as much by the requirements of the public screen as by the rationality of the public sphere. It includes the staged campaigns of electoral politics, managed by contemporary wizards of oz such as Michael Deaver, Lee Atwater, and James Carville. It includes sitcoms and other entertainment TV, where national "discussions" on race, class, feminism, and sexual identity take place on *Cosby*, *Roseanne*, *Ally McBeal*, and *Ellen*. It includes films that deliver the definitive verdict for public memory on such key moments as the Holocaust (*Schindler's List*), World War II (*Saving Private Ryan*), the Kennedy assassination (*JFK*), and the 60s (*Forrest Gump*).

The public screen includes the advertising and public relations of corporations, arguably the dominant discourses of our time (Ewen, 1996; Beder, 1997). This statement rings truer when one considers how the structure of newspapers in the United States is built around advertising and public relations. Newspapers (as well as TV news) are financially dependent on advertising, with the news hole dependent on the amount of advertising. Consequently, as a rule advertising comprises at least 50% of page space in most newspapers. Though not as visually obvious, public relations releases comprise much of the news in newspapers and television. For instance, one study found that more than half of the *Wall Street Journal's* news stories were based on news releases (Beder, 1997, pp. 112–113, 116–117). The enormous expenditures of corporations on advertising and public relations are evidence of the importance corporations attribute to the public screen. McDonald's and Coke, owners of two of the most recognizable icons in the world today (rivaling the Christian cross), annually spend over $1 billion and $800 million, respectively, on advertising alone (Farley and Cohen, 2001, p. 26). It is worth noting that advertising and public relations become dominant discourses with the advent of 20th Century mass communication technologies–the very same technologies that Habermas argues contribute to the decline of the public sphere.

Even the conversation of book culture is centered not in the *New York Review of Books* but on the public screen, as acclaimed novelist Barbara Kingsolver laments while on book tour:

> Can modern literary success really come down to this, an author's TV persona? In a word, yes. . . . but what criteria that could possibly fit in a fifty-eight-second TV spot will guide them to an informed choice? The quality of a book's prose means nothing in this race. What will win it a mass audience is the author's ability to travel, dazzle, stake out name recognition, hold up under pressure, look good, and be witty–qualities unrelated, in fact, to good writing, and a lifestyle that is writing's pure nemesis. . . . Where would we be now if our whole literary tradition were built upon approximately the same precepts as the Miss America competition? Who would win: Eudora Welty or Vanna White? (1995, pp. 163–164).

This essay is an opening sketch in a needed exploration of the conditions of possibility for rhetoric, politics, and participatory democracy in the techno-industrial corporate-controlled culture that bestrides the planet. As Kingsolver's dismay displays, measuring contemporary discourse by the criteria of an idealized public sphere and romanticized past merely produces despair and nostalgia. Such dismay and nostalgia are characteristic reactions of critics of the contemporary "corrupted"

public sphere, which always falls short of an imagined golden past, a Lake Wobegon polis. A public sphere orientation inevitably finds current discourse wanting.

Thinking about rhetoric, politics, and culture through the prism of the public screen, however, enables a seeing of the world anew. Pro-democratic globalization protests, TV sitcoms, Hollywood films, advertising, and public relations do not represent lack, multiple signs of the decline of civilization. Instead, thought through the metaphor of the public screen, such practices are productive of new modes of intelligence, knowledge, politics, rhetoric, in short, new modes of being in the world. It is not a simple seeing, however. The descriptor "new" is not attached with a moral meaning of "good" or "bad;" rather, "new" is an analytical term marking the emergence of difference. Similarly, the concept "public screen" is neither working within a moral economy nor positing a normative ideal, but is opening a space for retheorizing the places of the political. The public screen images a complex world of opportunities and dangers. This complexity is evident in the very term "public screen." In the move from public sphere to public screen, retaining the term "public" is problematic. The airwaves in the United States are by law the property of the public, but they are leased in such a way that media companies own them for all intents and purposes. The Walt Disney Co. need not grant us a soapbox from which to air our views. Although the airwaves are privately controlled territory, they now function as the sites of public space, much the way a shopping mall does in the stead of the town square. Clearly, in many ways this is unfortunate for democracy (McChesney, 1999; Boggs, 2000). In addition, both theoretically and practically the very distinction between public and private has eroded. Still, the public screen, though privately controlled, is public. The complexity of the public screen warrants neither bemoaning a lost past nor celebrating a technological utopia. The charge for critics is not to decry a lacking present or embrace a naive future. The charge for critics is to chart the topography of this new world. □

Notes

[1]Our choices of the terms "fair trade" and "democratic globalization" to describe the protests is a political and intellectual move designed to work against the labeling of such protests in the mass media as "anti-globalization" or "anti-trade." Such media labels are the first step to dismissing the protesters as Luddites, Nativists, simpletons, or unruly college kids who simply are against things and do not understand the realities of the world. Our terms recognize the specificity of the protests, the comprehensiveness of the critique, and the global nature of this activist movement.

[2]Although Habermas is credited with the term public sphere, concern over the public has a long history that can be traced at least to Aristotle. The 1st Amendment of the United States can be read as a theory of the role of the public in a democracy (Jhally, 1989). In the first half of the 20th Century, John Dewey, Walter Lippmann, and Hannah Arendt were important theorists of the public in a mass-mediated democracy.

[3]The following analysis focuses on televison and newspaper coverage. This is largely a practical decision. Internet information is notoriously ephemeral. Sites that had extensive WTO protest coverage now have, at most, abbreviated archives (zmag.org; indymedia.org). Since we argue that the public screen and its technologies are characterized by hypermediacy and remediation, the ephemeralness of internet material is not analytically decisive.

[4]The organizations responsible for planning the direct action and printing the literature were all

identified as cosponsors: Direct Action Network, Global Exchange, Rainforest Action Network, Ruckus Society, Project Underground, National Lawyer's Guild, Green Party (Seattle), Earth First! (Seattle), Adbusters, Center for Campus Organizing, Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador, 50 Years is Enough, Industrial Workers of the World, and Mexico Solidarity Network.

[5]Uncivil disobedience includes such tactics as verbal harassment and blocking streets and buildings in the hopes of provoking a response and creating an image event and is in contrast to peaceful protests like marches. Besides being more disorderly, it is also qualitatively different from the respectful civil disobedience espoused by Martin Luther King Jr., though the latter is often designed to provoke a violent response. King's civil disobedience was founded on love of one's opponents and predicated on the belief that one's opponents were fundamentally good and could be converted from their erroneous practices. Democratic globalization activists are motivated by the irreconcilable conflicts between the goals of capitalist corporate globalism and the values of democracy, fair trade, and environmental sustainability.

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