

CHAPTER ONE:
SEMIOTIC STREET FIGHTS

For many people in Canada and the US, evidence of the anti-globalization movement first took the form of dramatic street-level confrontations that challenged both the ambassadors of neo-liberalism and the police. From smashed Starbucks windows in Seattle¹⁰ to the collapse of the security fence behind which delegates to the Summit of the Americas in Quebec City had hidden,¹¹ anti-globalization activists gained recognition (and notoriety) through skirmishes with power and the ensuing trail of debris. But alongside these struggles at the barricades, there was another struggle—admittedly less stunning but no less significant.

I am speaking here about the struggle of representation. In the following chapter, I focus on state and media attempts to make sense of the anti-globalization activist between 1999 and the end of 2001. I point out how, for the dissidents involved in these encounters, more than public relations were at stake. Framed by the “Battle of Seattle” and the attack on the World Trade Center, the period of investigation is itself significant. From euphoria to disorientation, these short years marked the movement’s abrupt coming of age. Battles over representation—semiotic street fights, as I have called them—were a crucial part of this short history.

Considering state accounts during this period, it’s possible to see an obvious attempt to make sense of activists through the Framework of criminality and, on occasion, through the lens of “terrorism.” Emblematic of these attempts, I focus here on two publicly available Canadian Security Intelligence

Service (CSIS) documents, as well as comments made by Canadian Members of Parliament during debates in the House of Commons. In each case, I point out how, by producing abstract and ideological conceptions of movement participants, these accounts sought to enter *the activist*—rendered as a discrete and transferable conceptual category—into a series of socially coordinated and regulatory practices. By generating a specific conceptual content for *the activist*, the state was able to make sense of protest itself through regulatory texts like the Criminal Code of Canada or—in the US—through new “anti-terrorism” legislation like the USA PATRIOT Act.

The process by which conceptual and textual organization makes criminalization possible is not new. However, the ease with which this was accomplished in the case of anti-globalization struggles highlighted the fragility of activist claims grounded in the representational framework of rights. Representing activists as criminals and security threats (a category that takes on its full significance under the society of control) allowed state actors to initiate legal courses of action designed to more effectively regulate dissent. In the aftermath of September 11, as politicians aimed to extend the scope of “anti-terrorism” legislation to cover anti-globalization protest scenarios, the fight to add a criminal dimension to representations of *the activist* became increasingly acute.

In order to get a sense of how these new conditions affected movement organizing efforts, it’s useful to consider the case of Sherman Austin, the California-based activist whose house was searched by the FBI in January of 2002 under warrant and at gunpoint. His crime? Being connected to raiseheft.org—an activist website onto which a user (who was not Austin) had posted bomb making instructions widely available on the Internet. When Austin traveled to New York for the mass demonstrations against the World Economic Forum one month later, he was immediately picked up by police and brought into custody. In a report for *Z Magazine*, Austin recounts how, “while I was in jail, they handcuffed me and took me to a backroom where a detective from the FBI and a Secret Service agent interrogated me for about three or four hours...”

During this whole time, I kept noticing more and more FBI agents walking in and out of the room. They asked me stupid questions like whether I was a terrorist or involved in any terrorist organizations. I told them, ‘No,’ and one of the agents looked at me like I was seriously a terrorist and that I was lying to him. (Frank 2005)

Around the same time, Toronto-based Ontario Coalition Against Poverty (OCAP) organizer John Clarke recounted how he was detained at the Canada-US border while trying to travel to a speaking engagement at the University of Michigan. In a first-person testimonial that circulated widely over the Internet, Clarke recounted how customs officers went about making sense of him. Upon scanning his identification, he quickly became a threat to Homeland Security.

An officer asked me more questions about my intentions in the US, what anti globalization protests I had attended and whether I opposed the ‘ideology of the United States.’ My car was searched and I was taken into a room and thoroughly (though not roughly) frisked. I was then told that I would be denied entry to the US and that the FBI and State Department wanted to speak to me.

During his time in custody, Clarke reports how security officials frequently connived to get him to disclose information or to contradict information they already possessed so that they could arrest him. On a number of occasions, their line of questioning pertained to the activities of other high-profile Canadian activists and to the activities of US organizations like the Direct Action Network (DAN). However, it was just when Clarke thought he would be able to leave that things turned truly absurd. “Out of the blue, [the interrogator] demanded to know where Osama Bin Laden was hiding. I knew where he was, he insisted. If I grew a beard I would look like Bin Laden. I was holding back on telling him why I was going to the university and who I was going to meet there. If I didn’t want to go to jail, it was time to tell him the real story” (Clarke 2002).

Although Austin and Clarke’s cases became frequent topics of conversation during this period, their experiences were far from unusual. From the beginning of the anti-globalization movement to its rapid demise, countless radicals (and many others besides) became familiar with the repressive capacities of state organizations. However, while their experiences were not unique, what Sherman and Clarke’s encounters reveal is the willingness of security forces to use the threat of *misrecognition*—a threat that takes as its premise the interchangeability of *activist* and *terrorist*—in order to tighten the screws of regulation. And while it seems unlikely (in these instances) that the conflation was meant to produce anything other than a rupture in otherwise calm demeanor, it is nevertheless evident that the possibility of producing a

meaningful conflation has become a valuable asset to the society of control.

In order to make sense of state attempts to represent *the activist* as a criminal or terrorist element, it's useful to consider Dorothy Smith's approach to reading the "ideological" practices of ruling regimes. Ideology, in Smith's sense, is not so much an expression of belief as it is a social practice aimed at abstracting accounts of the world from lived experience and recasting them in a universalized textual domain (1990: 35–36). For instance, by advancing a specific criminal meaning of *the activist* within the law, both CSIS and Canadian politicians have managed to limit the scope of the possible within the realm of dissent. Ideological accounts that make dissident practices recognizable from the standpoint of the conceptual relevances of the Criminal Code provided the basis for regulatory courses of action.

Throughout the course of their semiotic street fights, activists occasionally made efforts to counter state representations that cast them as criminals. Nevertheless, it appears that it has been the institutional ambiguity of the neo-liberal state itself that has, to date, posed a much greater obstacle to attempts at regulating protestors through criminalization. In a context where protest is esteemed as a visible expression of democratic rights and freedoms, the attempt to make activists identical to criminals inevitably runs counter to the authenticating gestures of the state. It is therefore not surprising to find figures like Liberal Senator Sharon Carstairs (Manitoba) drawing the distinction between good and bad protestors in no uncertain terms. While bad protestors could not be countenanced, the good protestors—who inadvertently played the role of legitimating supplement—were absolutely indispensable.

During Senate debates immediately following the protests at the Summit of the Americas in Quebec City in April of 2001, Carstairs began by indicating that she thought "the Summit of the Americas was a great success with respect to the manner in which the police forces behaved and with respect to the way in which those individuals who were peaceful demonstrators—and they were by far the vast majority of participants in Quebec City—behaved."

One very poignant moment for me was when one young student, who clearly was there for peaceful activism, waved his hand to gain the attention of violent protestors and said, "Don't you understand? You are ruining it for the rest of us."¹²

Faced with the improbability of accumulating sufficient political power—at least in the short term—to unsettle judicial and carceral regimes, it's understandable that many anti-globalization activists opted to cast themselves as the "respectable" protestors intended by liberal rights discourse and enshrined in Carstairs's comment. However, from the standpoint of movement coherence, this conciliatory strategy had profound consequences. This is so not least because the state seized upon the ambiguities of activist self-identification and subdivided its conceptual categories in order to draw both deeper and more malleable distinctions between the "good" law-abiding protestor and the "bad" terrorist element.

Animated by its own concerns, the state has not always drawn these distinctions in response to activist claims or identity crises. Nevertheless, it's troubling that the organizational nomenclature adopted by activists in one instance can become a policing strategy in the next. During the protests against the Summit of the Americas in Quebec City, organizers divided the demonstration into three separate zones, each designated by a different color (red, yellow, green) and different degree of anticipated confrontation. The zones were created in the interest of making the demonstration as accessible as possible to different kinds of participation. Just over a year later, police at the G8 meeting in Kananashtik, Alberta used this same color code to generate a risk-based taxonomy of troublemakers. Added to the color scheme—and to the top of the list—were the gold-colored terrorists.

It would be one thing if these designations meant that the state aimed to focus its energy on those that the taxonomy deemed threatening. However, since the goal of designation is not so much to recognize as to regulate the designated object, and since state officials reasoned that "terrorists" might embed themselves within the law-abiding crowds of the green zone, it followed that the vigilance of law enforcement officers needed to extend to "good" protestors as well.

Toronto Sun writer Bob MacDonald captured this logic perfectly in "Violence Marches On," a dizzying editorial written just after an OCAP-initiated action aimed at shutting down the Toronto financial district on October 16, 2001. The demonstration, which was called in opposition to the provincial government's war on poor people, proceeded despite widespread uncertainty about the prospects for militant action in the aftermath of September 11. For MacDonald, there was no doubt that dissent was a cover for terror. "The way it works," he pointed out with more than a hint of xenophobia, "is that the demonstrators first simply urge peace and disarmament.

But subsequent 'spontaneous' rallies and demonstrations are joined by more violent elements—perhaps even some Muslim groups" (October 17, 2001). Since violent Muslims might lurk amidst those simply calling for peace, all must be contained.

In the media, where the *legal* consequences of representational conflation were less immediate, activists' semiotic struggles had a somewhat different character. Reporters and editors did not concern themselves primarily with entering *the activist* into discourses aimed at the regulation of criminals (although, as MacDonald's comments suggest, it was not beyond some commentators to demand that such criminalization take place). Instead, the dominant ideological practice of media actors (both corporate and "alternative") was to make sense of anti-globalization activists by conceptually rendering them as versions of the incomprehensible other. In this way, these media stories also helped to produce and reinforce a regulatory conception of the law-abiding citizen. This figure has played an important role in the elaboration of the society of control.

As Sherene Razack and others have pointed out, starting in the seventeenth century, the nascent bourgeois states began to produce their idealized schematic counterparts: "the new citizen subject was a figure who, through self-control and self-discipline, achieved mastery over his own body. The self-regulating bourgeois subject had to be spatially separated from the degeneracy, abnormality, and excess that would weaken both him and the bourgeois state" (2002: 11). In the present context (a context in which this image of citizenship continues to dominate), it's not surprising that the excessive practices of anti-globalization dissidents put them in danger of being conceptually expelled from the category "citizen."

Media during this period regularly marshaled representational practices ordinarily bound to the histories of scientific rationality and racism. The fact that most anti-globalization activists in Canada and the US were white and bound to social spaces traditionally supported by scientific rationality (such as the university and the suburb) did not prevent media from proceeding in this manner. After all, it was only *the activist* (as abstracted concept) who was under fire in these fights. Perhaps it didn't matter what the activist got up to when she was not being apprehended (whether by police or in news stories) as *the activist*. Wasn't the hope that—like her parents before her (those courageous kids who marched in the sixties)—she would eventually return to the fold?

In order to generate content for their ideological concept, media accounts during this period focused intently upon the *objects* associated with *the activist*. These depictions tended to be overwhelmingly silencing affairs. However, when read symptomatically, there is a great deal that activists can learn from these accounts. In the end, *the activist* described in the media reveals a great deal about both the media and the norms of the society that this media serves and shapes. Cast as an incomprehensible other in need of rationalization and containment, the media's *activist* gives shape to the anxieties of the bourgeois world. And, since activism's objects only acquire commonsense meanings through the power of an orchestrated gaze (and since the media's inventory of activist objects accumulates over time), it's possible to trace a genealogy of bourgeois anxieties by reading activist objects to determine how and when they became meaningful. As new preoccupations overtake older ones; and as older preoccupations manage—in whatever fashion—to be resolved, representations of *the activist* evolve. Finally, when media and state accounts of *the activist* are read together, it becomes possible to trace a loose correspondence between the genealogy of bourgeois anxieties and the evolution of strategies devised to regulate activist excesses.

By tracing how activism's objects become the basis for a stable—if mythic and abstract—identity, and by understanding how these objects become meaningful through the discourses of scientific objectivity and racism, activists could learn how to more effectively challenge the constraints of *activist* identity itself. Developing an understanding of how the representations mobilized in regulatory courses of action are produced is a minimum requirement to developing the capacity to disrupt them. Frequently, however, activists have accepted much of the discursive logic and inherent constraints of media and state accounts. Instead of questioning the legitimacy of a gaze that casts us as violently exterior and binds us to a world of objects, many dissidents have sought to establish their status as "reasonable" beings within the representational sphere.

In the context of expedited criminalization, activist efforts to appear reasonable temporarily yielded some dissidents some breathing room. However, as a strategy, such commitments seem destined to succumb to a law of diminishing returns and "winner loses" failure. Given that media and state representations of *the activist* have been prompted by a global confrontation of divergent interests, the terrain of "the reasonable" will no doubt continue to erode. In the end, what is reasonable to a ruling regime is that which conforms to its interests.

Now fully colonized by managerial and representational techniques of the society of control, the space of "politics" (if it ever was) can no longer be a viable staging ground for consequential disagreement. Under these conditions, dissidents intent on laying purchase to the "reasonable" are left with two options: cease activism (or, at very least, its effective and disruptive practices) or risk criminalization. As US activist Starhawk argued in the wake of massive police repression in Genoa during demonstrations against the G8 in August of 2001, "if this level of repression goes unchallenged, no one is safe, not the most legal NGO, not the most reformist organization with the mildest demands. If we don't act now, when a political space remains open to us, we may lose the space to act at all."¹³

In struggles over representations, state and media are, in an ordinary and non-conspiratorial way, motivated by their own institutional interests. We are therefore obliged to ask: what is in the best interests of dissidents? Since this is a strategic question, it's difficult to provide definitive answers. At the very least, however, we would do well to break with the ideological and conceptual practices of the regimes we oppose.¹⁴ Activists could, for instance, develop accounts of activist objects focused less on their implications for identity and more on what these objects *enable*. By recasting objects with an eye toward production rather than representation, activists could begin to devise a genuinely political response.

Since both state and media have seized upon activist identity as a point for the application of regulatory power, it's questionable if activists can gain anything by advancing opposing accounts of *the activist* as noble, heroic, or a good citizen. Nevertheless, this continues to be an overwhelming activist response to vilification. By and large, these efforts have tended to abide by the logic of inversion and conceptual negation—"I know you are but what am I?" Worse than ineffective, activist efforts to determine the content of *activist* have tended inadvertently to reiterate the restrictive epistemic frame of the media and state.

By restricting themselves to answering every charge, dissidents effectively limit themselves to refuting official pronouncements. What our greatest accomplishments make clear, however, is that the course of neo-liberal globalization will be disrupted not with refutations but with a response. As Andrea Nye has pointed out, confrontations with authority that seek to refute its

pronouncements happen on the terms set by authority itself. Consequently, even when they are "successful," these confrontations tend to reaffirm the authority of authority. "But if a refutation can always be refuted, a response cuts deeper" (1990: 176). It's therefore significant that, at a critical moment, discussions within the movement (discussions often shaped by the insights of the "bad" protestors) began to reveal attempts to not only refute but also respond to the conceptual practices of ruling regimes.

This threshold was not reached all at once. Depictions of activists became remarkably frequent in popular culture during the first years of the twenty-first century. Even corporations like The Gap found ways of capitalizing on the new renegade mystique. The summer of 2000 witnessed both CTV and CBC television running clips of confrontations between demonstrators and riot cops—squeezed between images of natural disasters and military conflicts—in promotional spots for their news services. More significant than the obvious sensationalism of this Marxploitation, however, was the way these images helped to shape our conception of *the activist* herself. Although the trailers never identified their cast of characters, it was clear that the viewer was supposed to *recognize* who was involved. The rioters were activists. The riot was activism.

Movement participants will object: some might point out that most activism is boring and takes place around tables in dreary rooms at marathon meetings where the most dangerous thing to be confronted is their comrade's coffee breath. Moreover, most people who go to demonstrations never end up clashing with police and those who do tend to represent a very narrow—young, white, middle class and probably male—demographic. Seth Tobocman's account of the struggle to preserve the Lower East Side squats confirms this hunch. According to Tobocman, although media photos usually captured tensions between young white men and police, what these photos neglected to note was that "children, parents and grandparents of all races" were active in the struggle (1999: 318). Nevertheless, these recognizable images come to stand in for actual activists. And, once transposed, *the activist* is news.

If these depictions are pushed to their logical conclusion, we must surmise that activism requires *the activist*—a practitioner bearing an identity. In three seconds of decontextualized footage, television thus turns the world on its head. Although activism denotes an orientation that (by definition) emphasizes productive engagement within the social field, it comes to require *the activist* (an *a priori* conceptual formulation) in order to be made intelligible. No wonder activists have often taken to contesting media depictions.

Inadvertently accepting the logic of media accounts, some have opted to struggle not over the representational transposition of the world but over the content with which *activist* gets filled. This approach is understandable; however, it's a preoccupation that entails a narrowing of the political field. In order to develop a response that's not simply a refutation, it's first necessary to trace the process by which *the activist* is representationally produced.

Since identification is a social process, *the activist* (and the associated forms of political regulation) is always in formation. The attributes of the category have been most subject to revision in moments when the character of activism itself has changed. Nevertheless, the period between 1999 and 2001 witnessed the emergence of a series of semi-stable visual codes or "facts" that gave the activist a degree of conceptual stability and coherence. The emergence of these codes allowed the process of *recognizing the activist* to become an ideological practice. According to George Smith, the coordination of "facts" within any discursive regime is subject to the "social organization of the production of coded at-account" (1990: 72). In a context where an additive accumulation of coded at-tributes is taken to imply the presence of a particular subject, the organization of "the facts" enables the ideological moment of recognition. Within a textually mediated relation of ruling, recognition initiates a course of action aimed at organizing and regulating lived actuality. This general account of the process of recognition-in-scription has serious practical implications for activists.

For instance, while anti-globalization activists may have held a variety of beliefs about what they were doing, their characterization by CSIS as a "security threat" prompted courses of action that extended far beyond the framework of these self-perceptions. In this case, the course of action brought about by "recognizing" the "security threat" included reporting "the threat" to the government so that they could make appropriate institutional decisions. From there, the government could pass new legislation aimed at dealing with the problem. This legislation is made coherent through "the facts" produced and compiled by CSIS.

Under the "Reporting Responsibilities" section of their 2000 Public Report, we learn that "the primary mandate of CSIS is to collect and analyze information, and to report to and advise the government of threats to the security of Canada... [A]nalytists use their knowledge of regional, national and global trends to assess the quality of information gathered, and to organize it into

useful security intelligence products." In this way, the organization of "the facts" helps to *produce* and *organize* the reality it merely claims to describe. But "a fact's organization of actuality is not simply the expectation of an order already perceived," Smith argues. Rather,

A fact is constructed in a definite institutional context, and its organization reflects that context. An inner coherence is established between the actuality thus represented and the statements that can be made about it, such that the actuality, produced as "what actually happened/what is," can be seen to require its own descriptive categories and conceptual procedures. (1990: 78)

Institutionally committed to factual accounts called "news," media have been as actively involved in the conceptual production of *the activist* as has the state. Reading these accounts symptomatically allows us to discern the logic and conceptual organization of their production. Unfortunately, despite yielding knowledge that could counter the regulatory strategies aimed at our domestication, analyzing the production of factual accounts has not yet become the primary means by which activists make sense of (or challenge) media representations. In fact, for the most part, dissidents continue to consider their own activities in representational rather than productive terms.

"HellNo, We Won't Show!" screamed the anti-protest headline in *The Excalibur*, York University's student paper. Accompanying the June 7, 2000 editorial was a cartoon entitled "The Modern Protester" (Figure 1). Standing in the middle of an otherwise empty frame (lacking even a horizon line), *Excalibur's Modern Protestor* looked like a biology specimen. Indeed, the diagram was labeled, arrows pointing here and there to important aspects of the object under consideration. With great care, the artist highlighted kneepads ("protection from asphalt when brute force is applied"), a gas mask ("protection from tear gas and pepper spray"), a helmet ("protection from nightstick blows to the head"), and a bulletproof vest ("protection from crossfire and stray bullets").

What are we to make of this schematic organization of "the facts" of *The Modern Protestor*? Blatant to the point of absurdity, it is nevertheless worth noting that this schematic mode of representation derives from the gaze perceived by scientific objectivity. Through a process of visual schematization, *The Modern Protestor* in this organization of "the facts" becomes an object to

OCAP-led demonstration at Queen's Park on June 15, 2000, Brown argued that demonstrators "would not arrive at the protest in balaclavas, gas masks and goggles, dressed for war rather than discussion" if their intentions had been honorable (June 21, 2000). Called to demand redress for a litany of injustices endured by poor people,¹⁶ the demonstration involved nearly 2000 participants and ended in a massive altercation with police. In both legal and media accounts, the event quickly became a "riot."

Representing the demonstration as a riot was important to Crown attorneys who used the designation to make their case. Since police charged most of those arrested—more than fifty in total—with counts of "participating in a riot," any uncertainty about whether or not the label could be properly applied would have been extremely harmful. But even though many of the charges were eventually thrown out of court precisely on the grounds that it was not clear that the label "riot" applied, it did not take long for June 15 to become a riot in the social imaginary. Reiterating the logic that insists protesters ought to occupy the moral high ground, Brown concluded his letter to *The Star* by indicating that, despite having been brutally beaten by police on that day, demonstrators "should have shouted 'Shame, shame' at themselves."

Accompanying Brown's letter, *The Star* ran a photo of a tattooed white professor wearing a gas mask and bandana. Over the next couple of years, images such as this one featured prominently in media accounts of activists. And while the meaning of objects like *the gas mask* remained a contested matter,¹⁷ these objects nevertheless become recognized signifiers of a new generation of resistance. But photojournalists were not the only ones drawn to these signifiers. In the lead up to the protests against the Summit of the Americas in Quebec City, activists released promotional materials bearing the image of an iconic gas mask along with text that read "Quebec City: The Most Fun You've Had Since Seattle."

Semiotic street fights of this kind suggest that it's been relatively easy for activists to challenge (or at least ridicule) the regulatory claims of media and state bodies. However, it has remained far more difficult for us to recognize our own imbrication in the representational sphere. Here, in the realm of conceptual action where engagement at the level of the signifier makes the possibility of engaging at the level of the signified fall from view, activists have often ended up silently adopting the conceptual relevancies of their opponents. Given the extent to which police and politicians have managed to force a correspondence between *activist* and *terrorist*—if not yet in the courts then at least in the social imaginary—this collusion is especially troubling.

As anti-globalization protests escalated in frequency and—on occasion—in intensity, state and police agencies began to reorganize the "facts" of activism. Facilitated by a series of semiotic contortions, the new state facticity attempted to recast *The Modern Protestor* as a terrorist class. Police commissioner John Timoney, who oversaw the police operation at protests against the 2000 Republican National Convention in Philadelphia, played a central role in this transposition. Describing the movement in the summer of 2000, Timoney recounted how "there's a cadre, if you will, of criminal conspirators who are about the business of planning conspiracies to go in and cause mayhem and property damage and violence in major cities in America" (Ferguson 2000: 50). Especially since September 11, it's clear how closely this account antcipates and reiterates the conceptual content of *terrorist*. However, while it was amplified by the "war on terror," this conflation has much deeper roots.

According to Mackinnon, although "progressives recoil at the thought that they could be seen as a threat on par with the Yankee militias," they nevertheless find themselves designated by a common nomenclature. "The word 'terrorist,'" Mackinnon reminds us, "has been readily applied to animal-rights activists who release mink from fur farms, eco-saboteurs who damage logging equipment, and certainly to anyone who wears a balaclava." This list is striking because of the ease with which the actions described in the first two instances devolve seamlessly into an account of an *object*—the balaclava—in the last. Here, the object itself invokes terror. As far as Mackinnon is concerned, the conflation between *progressives* and *terrorists* is patently ridiculous. "For a taste of how absurdly far-fetched perceptions of leftist activism can be," he proposes, "consider a column by journalist and self-declared espionage expert Paul Jackson in the May 2 issue of the *Calgary Sun*."¹⁸

"How is it that these supposedly motley crews—looking like the disorganized flozram and jetsam of the world's radical left—can be so well organized?" asks Jackson. Jackson has his theory. He sees "three immediate possibilities" behind the Left's capacity to select targets, book accommodations and organize such effective dissent: Moammar Gadhafi of Libya, Saddam Hussein of Iraq, and Osama bin Laden of Afghanistan. (Mackinnon 2000: 29)

Although the anti-globalization movement in Canada and the US was comprised overwhelmingly of white activists, this did not prevent media

commentators from drawing on racist anxieties to undermine its efforts. This was possible in part because, as Joy James has pointed out, the image of the international security threat—a designation applied to anti-globalization protestors and terrorists alike—has been Middle Eastern (1997: 107). Insinuations that America's Middle Eastern "enemies" were behind anti-globalization protests are, of course, spurious. However, this has not prevented various anti-movement actors from trying to benefit from the conflation.

For instance, in October of 2001, executive director of B'nai B'rith Canada Frank Dimant held a press conference condemning the radical Concordia Student Union for its student handbook entitled *Uprising*. Released just prior to September 11 and including content that fused anti-globalization sentiments with active support for the liberation of Palestine, the handbook was denounced by Dimant in terms that actively conflated radicals with terrorists. "Is this a blueprint for Osama bin Laden's youth program in North America," he asked rhetorically. If it wasn't already clear, the absurdity of Dimant's question becomes explicit when one considers *Uprising's* unapologetically queer and feminist content.

But beyond the racism implicit in state and media discussions of "international security threats," there are two features of Jackson and Mackinnon's words—and the interaction between them—that deserve comment. The first is that it was possible for Jackson to have made his claim in the first place. The second is that, in countering this absurdity, Mackinnon elected to advance an *alternate representation*. The problem is "resolved" by changing the content assigned to the signifier. Although protestors sometimes look scary, they are not *really* a threat—at least not one on par with Middle Eastern terrorists. Whether or not it was deliberate, Mackinnon ends up binding the activist to state-fostered conceptions of the good concerned citizen, the reasonable rights-bearing subject of liberalism.

Given Mackinnon's evident sympathies with the activist cause, perhaps this is reasonable. A cursory glance at a CSIS report issued in 2000, for instance, presents a vision of anti-globalization activism that indeed looks threatening. It's a vision that any strategically sensible movement advocate would seek to refute. Mackinnon's comments might therefore be best read as recognition of the consequences of being labeled a "security threat." Perhaps he decided—in a moment of shrewd calculation—that such a classification was more hear than the movement could afford.

Indeed, being an international security threat is a precarious undertaking. CSIS's list of turn-of-the-century threats to the "global security environment" is truly astounding. Along with the rise of international terrorist networks, CSIS expressed concern that some members of "Canada's ethnic communities" felt implicated in and connected to "violent foreign conflicts." Additionally, they expressed concern over the related matters of proliferating "weapons of mass destruction" and the threat of retaliation against Canada for its role in "resolving foreign conflicts." Rounding off their list of global threats, CSIS enumerated various regional conflicts including the struggle between Palestinians and Israelis, ongoing "tensions" in Yugoslavia, skirmishes between India and Pakistan over Kashmir, and the ongoing "troubles" in Northern Ireland.

At the bottom of this impressive list of security threats, CSIS includes the rise of the anti-globalization movement. Last, but definitely not least, the document devotes four whole paragraphs to the threat posed by activists. Considering the single paragraph summaries allotted to each of the other important international conflicts cited in the document, the extensive account of the summit hoppers seems especially notable. According to CSIS, the anti-globalization movement was composed of activists "representing a broad spectrum of groups, lobbyists and overlapping networks, including a limited number of violent extremists."

[These groups] share a mutual antipathy for multinational corporate power. Large corporations with international undertakings stand accused of social injustice and unfair labour practices, as well as a lack of concern for the environment, mismanagement of natural resources and ecological damage... Underlying the anti-globalization theme is criticism of the capitalist philosophy, a stance promoted again by left-of-centre activists and militant anarchists... Circumstances have also promoted the involvement of fringe extremists who espouse violence, largely represented by *Black Bloc* anarchists and factions of militant animal rights and environmental activists. (CSIS 2000b)

It's worth considering how, if it were not for a fundamental conflict of interests, CSIS's description of "activist traits" might be mistaken for a list of admirable qualities to which every citizen should aspire. Listen, for instance, to this benign description of our "threatening" practices:

[Using the Internet,] individuals and groups are able to identify and publicize

targets, solicit and encourage support, establish dates, recruit, raise funds, share experiences, accept responsibilities, arrange logistics, and promote goals... (2000b)

Although they might easily be mistaken for provisions in the mandate of the local Rotary Club, these were the practices that turned anti-globalization activists into threats to international security. It's not surprising, then, that CSIS identified its inability to "legally" eavesdrop on online discussions as a principle barrier to its capacity to respond in a timely fashion to the shifting security environment. Moreover, since the violent extremists in the movement (a movement that—after all—was nothing more coherent than a series of "overlapping networks") could be anywhere, the movement as a whole needed to be increasingly scrutinized.

After September 11, these themes were extensively discussed in the House of Commons. During debates about Bill C-36 (Canada's widely criticized replica of the USA PATRIOT Act), Liberal MP John Bryden defended the legislation despite legitimate fears that it would infringe upon civil liberties and the right to dissent. In his estimation, the Bill needed to be broad enough to encapsulate anti-globalization protests. "What choice do we have," he asked.

These are not peaceful protests we are dealing with. We are dealing with violent protests and it becomes increasingly dangerous to have any kind of international conference... [A]s long as protestors are allowed to wear masks, as long as they use violence and as long as there is a chance that terrorists may be infiltrating such protestors wearing masks, I do not know what choice we have but to give the RCMP reasonable powers to bring peace to protestors. (Hansard, Nov 29, 2001)

Forget, if you can, that the only group ever commonly acknowledged to have infiltrated a group of protestors wearing masks were police who, during the G8 Summit in Genoa, donned Black Bloc gear and proceeded as *agents provocateurs*. Since *terrorist* and *activist* correspond to discrete courses of action within the law and the social imaginary, the semiotic exchange of *terrorist* for *activist* has become a justification for increased repression. And while activists, social movement theorists, and media and state agencies have all expressed disagreements about the meaning of *the activist*, it's clear that—since September 11—the meaning of terror has been severely truncated.

The question, of course, is not whether the state and media actually believe

that contemporary activists harbor terrorist capacities. Whether they are using mere hyperbole to engender desirable social responses or are shaking in their boots, it's evident that what's being sought is not clarity but justification. At the same time, the associative strategy that makes sense of *the activist* through the more established signifier *terrorist* also denotes a reorganization of the "facts." In this way, *the activist* becomes a residual category, a symptom of the bourgeois world. A genealogy of representations of *the activist* thus allows us to see how anti-globalization struggles also transformed those they opposed.

Media depictions of anti-globalization activists in the period after Seattle prominently displayed the gear featured in the *Excelsior* cartoon. But while they became everyday referents, it's important to consider how, even three months prior to Seattle, these objects would not (indeed, could not) have been the defining features of activist representation. Before Seattle, depictions of the genealogical precursors to *The Modern Protector* relied on a different series of signifiers. Just beneath the debates about the offensive or defensive character of *The Modern Protector's* equipment lies a whole genealogy, a series of points plotted along the axis of recognition. And while they do not necessarily evoke legal considerations in the same way, they are nevertheless important dimensions of the identity under consideration. Who was this activist before she became a criminal, a terrorist, a threat to international security?

Looking at representations rendered prior to Seattle, it's possible to see just how quickly the ordering of the facts of activism can shift. But even depictions rendered during the period under consideration reveal how the contested signifiers are piled onto a series of sedimented and taken-for-granted visual cues that are no longer called into question. Even in *The Excelsior* cartoon, just beneath the level of active signification, a whole genealogy unfolds. What do we learn about *The Modern Protector* by investigating the parts of the drawing that aren't labeled? Reading the visual cues that, in the estimation of the artist, did not need comment, it's possible to unearth some of the now commonsensical assumptions that give content to the category *activist*.

Excelsior's Modern Protector is highly androgynous, although would most likely be read as male. And white. Of the clothing that has not been labeled, there are heavy black shoes or boots and extremely baggy pants held up with a utility belt. His coat has large pockets and hangs loosely around modest and slightly slouched shoulders. Poking through the straps of his gas mask

catalogue of objects. Amongst *the activist's* "accessories" are bicycles, bongo drums, organic soy milk, and spray paint. For clothing, the two models—one male, one female, both apparently white, standing around in their underwear in a state of comfortable androgyny—are provided with heavy boots, large heavy army pants with multiple pockets and t-shirts bearing political slogans and the names of organizations. "Food Not Bombs" reads one, "Fuck Suharto" exclaims the other. Aesthetically, these clothes bear a remarkable similarity to those worn by *Excaltibur's Modern Protestor*. Other accessories available to these cut and paste creations: a portable radio and a tape by Propagandhi (identified as "good news" punk music), a keeper,¹⁹ and—perhaps most significant—two halos graced with the text "keen awareness of white male privilege."

Drawn nearly a year earlier, "Concordia's special breed" is undeniably a genealogical precursor to *The Modern Protestor*. By the time *Excaltibur* got around to it, the aesthetic highlighted in *The Link* cartoon could be assumed.

But where did *The Link's* signifiers come from? A closer investigation reveals an intriguing genealogical inheritance. Although the artist did not comment upon it, Concordia's "special breed" appears to draw deeply from the river of Christianity before following it downstream to the nineteenth century estuary of romantic liberalism. Along with Propagandhi's "good news," the analogy drawn between saintliness and awareness of white male privilege confirms the artist's recourse to the Christian archive. Following a convention that identifies resistance as the radical negation of that which it opposes, *The Link* treats awareness as a return—or elevation—to innocence. Here, while the reference was not likely deliberate, the depiction ends up reiterating prominent themes from the romantic tradition.

For instance, Henry David Thoreau thought that withdrawal of consent—pure negation—was tantamount to an assertion of glorious individual will. In *Civil Disobedience*, Thoreau assigns the task of renouncing the government to a group he calls *men*. But *men* who resist, in Thoreau's account, are ontologically distinct from those too closely bound to the state—that is, all other men who, despite being conceptual equivalents, are incapable of resistance. Soldiers, constables, jailers, and lawyers: Thoreau casts them all under suspicion. "The mass of men serve the state," he writes, "not as men mainly, but as machines, with their bodies."

They are the standing army, and the militia, jailers, constables, posse comitatus, etc. In most cases there is no free exercise whatever of the judgement or of the moral sense; but they put themselves on a level with wood and earth

and stones; and wooden men can perhaps be manufactured that will serve the purpose as well. Such command no more respect than men of straw or a lump of dirt. They have the same sort of worth only as horses and dogs. Yet such as these are even commonly esteemed good citizens. . . . A very few—as heroes, patriots, martyrs, reformers in the great sense, and men—serve the state with their consciences also, and so necessarily resist it for the most part, and they are commonly treated as enemies by it. (1960: 237)

So, while resistance requires *men*, Thoreau is convinced that "the mass of men serve the state." Because of this, resistance becomes an elevated calling, a kind of devotional act carried out by those who are able to make moral distinctions and thus to serve God/the state. In the process of defining themselves in opposition to the dominant order and becoming "martyrs," subjects who resist through the withdrawal of consent advance for themselves a heroic, messianic ontology; it is a state made possible by the belief that they are not that which they resist. Even though, as ontological equivalents, all *men* are capable of resistance, only a precious few actually resist. Through the act of conscience, Thoreau's resistant *men* elevate themselves above all others: and these others fall to earth, cast aside like "a lump of dirt." Concordia's "special breed," halo firmly on head, confirms this legacy.

According to Dyer, ontological conceptions that enable us to draw distinctions between equivalent forms have been pivotal to the emergence and historical elaboration of whiteness. Starting with the Christian notion of *spirit* (that thing which is *in* but not *of* the body) and secularized as the transcendent within continental philosophy, white ontology has been indelibly marked by anxiety-producing becoming. To use Thoreau's example, the inevitable question posed by whiteness is thus: are we men, or are we *men*? For this reason, whiteness encounters its nervous condition at precisely the point where its devotees realize that, if the process of becoming ceases, they might disappear for good. And so they keep moving.

Restless, the white subject's productivity arises from the fact that it's ontologically impossible for him to sit still. And is this not the case for activists as well? Anxious productivity, activism's nervous condition: it's hard not to perceive the bastard inversion of transcendental white ontology permeating activist culture. And it's on this basis that we can make sense of the frequent—though frequently unconscious—Christological citations in activist texts. How else are we to understand the aesthetic decisions that framed the image of John Clarke shot on the day of the Queen's Park riot and published in



Figure 4: John Clarke
June 15, 2000. Photo by David Malby



Figure 5: Duccio di Buoninsegna,
"The Way to Calvary" (1308–11)

Novu Magazine? In a remarkable instance of citation without quotation marks, the image perfectly reiterates—and thus becomes infused with the affective weight of—the devotional posture and situational iconography of Italian pro-to-Renaissance artist Duccio di Buoninsegna's "Way to Calvary" (1308–11).



While there may be a connection between white activists and a discrete world of objects which, when taken collectively, might be recognizable as a coherent aesthetic or identity, this connection can't simply be understood through the logic of signification. To break with the conceptual practices of media and state, activists need to devise another approach to the question of representation and another strategy for apprehending our objects. The importance of reading objects in their historical-relational dynamism becomes evident in moments of danger. To get a sense of this process, it's useful to turn once again to the past in the hope of uncovering another—more productive—genealogical current running through contemporary activist practice. Specifically, it's useful to consider Joan of Arc's decision to wear male clothing.

"Essentially seen as a transvestite by scholars and artists who came after her and took her as a subject," says Andrea Dworkin, "Joan's defiance, her rebellion, is trivialized as a sexual kink, more style than substance, at most an interesting wrinkle in a psychosexual tragedy of a girl who wanted to be a boy and came to a bad end." In Dworkin's estimation, "romantics, especially the

filmmakers, seem to see the male clothing as an esthetic choice, the beauty of her androgyny highlighted by the graceful boylike look." But this preoccupation with the signifier ends up concealing what is most important:

The clothes made her life of high adventure and martial brilliance possible; she needed them, a sword, a horse, a banner, a king, a cause, all of which she got with an intransigence that is the mark of genius. The male clothing—the *signifier and the enabler*, signifying rebellion, enabling action—became the emblem of a distinct integrity for those who hated her. (1987: 100, italics mine)

With perhaps less heroic impulses, similar patterns could be faintly traced in the clothing and object choices of anti-globalization activists. Activist feet were often bound in heavy boots; pants and shirts *did* get borrowed from the wardrobe of blue-collar work. On some, hardware began to appear. Pockets for knives, screwdrivers, and especially big black markers grew like tumors on people's pants. Every surface became a space from which to pronounce political messages.

Perhaps the most commented-upon piece of this new activist "uniform" was the hooded sweatshirt. Indigenous to both punk rock and hip hop (but popularized by the latter), the hoodie was often described as the perfect synthesis of functionality and a militant aesthetic. In a compare-and-contrast essay on police and protestor gear—provocatively entitled "Who's the Thug?"—*Novu Magazine* writer Nabil Elsaadi championed the hoodie in a manner consistent with Dworkin's analysis of Joan of Arc. For Elsaadi, activist hoodies were "tear gas protection and fashionable too" (Elsaadi 2001: 19). Forgetting for the moment that a hoodie affords little protection from tear gas, we are left with an object perceived as both signifier and enabler.

In the context of the anti-globalization movement, which (on occasion) sidestepped legality in order to be effective, the emphasis on the enabling is especially significant. Without foreclosing discussion about the potential significance of the glamour of resistance, it seems clear that—in order to be effective—activists need to reconnect with the realm beyond (or beneath) the signifier.

Can activists begin to conceive of our objects in such a way that they highlight social relations and the means by which they can be transformed? Given the extent to which activist representation has been put to the service of regulation, this would be a welcome possibility. It's useful here to draw upon the insights of an unlikely couple—the "militant anarchists" feared by CSIS

and that old curmudgeon, Karl Marx. According to Bertell Ollman, Marx's principal contribution to understanding historical processes was his ability to perceive *objects as relations* (1971: 27). An object, Marx proposed, contained traces of everything that went into its realization. And, since objects were fleeting fixities (temporary traces of ongoing human activity), their present shape could not be taken to be their timeless substance or truth.

Perceived in this manner, objects become a symptom of the social relations that heralded their emergence. Individual objects, when apprehended relationally, therefore become important points of entry into an understanding of the whole to which they are bound. According to Ollman, Marx devised his understanding of this relational dynamic through a critical reading of German idealist philosophy and (in particular) the work of Hegel, who threw the very notion of identity into question. "In establishing the identity of each thing in its relation to the whole, as a mode of expression of the Absolute," Ollman writes, "Hegel altered the notion of identity used by Kant and of truth itself."

Mathematical equality ($1=1$) is replaced as the model for comprehending identity by what might be called 'relational equality,' where the entity in question is considered identical with the whole that it relationally expresses. (1971: 33)

Although Marx rebelled against Hegel's idealism, he never disavowed his account of the relational dynamism of the world. Following Marx, Ollman suggests that the connections between things are best understood not as logical relations but as *ontological* ones (1971: 34). Whereas idealist thought plots relationships of abstract causality (a process clearly at work in MP Bryden's assertion that mask-wearing protestors provide cover for terrorists), the process of apprehending activist objects through their ontological relationality allows us to consider them as expressions of the contradictions at work within the social whole. Here, objects disclose their use-value and their enabling potential, and can be approached productively. The signifier gives way to the signified.



In and of itself, philosophical hairsplitting of this kind is unlikely to be of any use. Still less will it be appealing to many who were counted amongst the movement's "violent extremists." Nevertheless, it's interesting to note the regularity with which challenges to the limits of idealist thought and conceptual

"action" appear in their statements. Speaking, for instance, of the importance of wearing masks at demonstrations, an activist writing on infoshop.org advanced the following proposition:

Wearing masks is such an effective tactic that more and more police departments are implementing anti-mask laws. The practice of "masking up" is controversial within activist circles. Some activists criticize mask-wearing because it contradicts the image of activism being open and accessible, in other words, "we have nothing to hide." There are several reasons for wearing masks at an action: 1) to protect ourselves from illegal police surveillance; 2) to promote anonymity among the ranks, which helps protect against the rise of charismatic leaders; 3) to provide cover for activists engaged in illegal actions during the demo, and 4) to promote solidarity within the bloc. (infoshop.org, 2001)

By speaking about what the mask *enables* and not what it *means*, by not seeking to simply refute possible negative readings (for instance, the suggestion that the mask contradicts the idea that activists have nothing to hide), the Black Bloc statement effectively reformulates the relationship between activists and objects. Rather than asserting an abstract right to wear masks, these activists proceeded instead by taking legal regulation as one variable among others within a mobile terrain of struggle. In short, the Black Bloc orientation to masks suggests the concrete means by which representation is supplanted by production. And, since what the Black Bloc wants to produce (as can be adduced from the passage above) is clearly at odds with the wishes of the state, it marks a preliminary moment in the elaboration of a genuinely political opposition. From the managerial realm of surveillance and the bio-political possession of the body comes the mask. By wearing it, the activist enabled her passage through violence from ontology to politics.

When considered as an aspect of the overall anti-globalization project, the question of masks remained a relatively small matter. Corporate globalization was not halted; activists in balaclavas did not manage to turn the world upside down. What remains significant about the mask, however, is what it suggests about the prerequisites for political being. If contemporary activists hope to build upon the initial successes of this period, it will be important for us to continue developing an understanding of social relations that breaks with the conceptual mystifications of representation. In Chapter 2, I will explore how direct action has and can be used as a weapon in this war.