

THE CIRCULATION OF REALITY TV AND INTERNET ACTIVISM:
REAL WORLD MEET THE ZAPATISTAS

By

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Over the past decade both Reality TV and Internet activism have proliferated across the mediascape. Often these two media forms are characterized as being in opposition to one another. This study, however, investigates the seemingly contradictory relationship between Reality television and Internet activism in order to work towards a demystification of their relationship and a (re)reading of their convergence in late capitalism. Through an examination of the very names “Reality TV” and “Internet activism” and a tracing of their “lines of flight,” this project shows how these rhetorics actually cross, transform, and become one another. Through a decentered and Deleuzian kind of analysis, this project argues that we can read Reality television and Internet activism as feeding into desires for relevancy and biopolitical control on their circulation and undulation through the space of late capital. It is not just a matter of “infection” of political culture by mass media; instead, it is an “interlinking” and a process or “unnatural alliances.”

Beginning with an examination of Mark Andrejevic's *Reality TV: The Work of Being Watched*, this thesis, while building on much of Andrejevic's central argument, questions his dismissal of Internet activism as politically unviable and attempts to open up the academic discourse of the relationship between Reality programming and Internet-based communication technologies beyond the realm of commercial surveillance. This opening allows for a provocative illumination of the multitude of ways in which Reality TV and Internet activism call viewers to action between screens, destabilize media boundaries, and recreate audience subject positions. While this project does not provide a "final answer" as to what counts as real political involvement, it does see these media forms as folding and unfolding in a process of becoming. They are neither simply liberatory nor regressive. Instead, they provide us with a map for imagining Frederic Jameson's notion of "new political art," a critical resistance that is both of and opposed to late capitalism.

CHAPTER 1
MAKING THE BAND-WIDTH: THE CONVERGENCE OF MEDIA

There ought to be some limits to freedom.

~George W. Bush in response to Zack Exley's campaign 2000 parody website, GWBush.com.

Sitting in my living room, reading a book, watching my husband play on the computer, and viewing *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* on television, I began to think about my position in relation to both sets of media texts that were flowing towards me. My living room is arranged so that my couch is directly facing the television; the computer, which is against the wall adjacent to the television, also faces perpendicular to the couch and TV. Thus, depending on how I decide to sit on the couch, I can face either screen. That night I could simultaneously see the blue, gray, and green shadows that were cautiously being molded into the shape of an imagined metropolis in SimCity4 and the pained face of slob and forgetful husband, Adam, as the "Fab Five" had his unibrow waxed. I only had to shift my eyes slightly to the left to see the morphing city and to the right to see the painful waxing. I was between two screens; however, this virtual building and televisual makeover were not the only flows of information in the room. The Internet was also "on," opening up the living room and SimCity streets into the highways of cyberspace. Of course, this conception of the interconnected relationship between the computer and the television is nothing new to media studies. With the advent of home media centers that merge computer and television screen into one apparatus, the notion of a convergence of television and computer is well established. I am less interested in examining the two apparatuses themselves, than I am in the movement of the Internet and

TV “towards a converging viewing experience” (Friedman 16). Specifically, I am intrigued by the rapid proliferation of Reality TV of the past decade or more and the near simultaneous rise of Internet activism.

Beginning with *Candid Camera* in the forties and later *An American Family* in the seventies, so-called "Reality TV" has often been a more minor part of televised discourse. The late eighties and early nineties brought the crime-oriented *America's Most Wanted* and *COPS* as well as the more family-friendly *America's Funniest Home Videos* to the forefront. However, since *Survivor* first defeated *Friends* in the Nielson ratings, Reality shows have become one of the most prevalent forms of new programming on the major networks today. Last year, Bill Carter proclaimed on the front page of *The New York Times*: "Reality shows alter the way TV does business" (Carter A1). Indeed, he pointed out that this fall the television networks would include an unprecedented ten new Reality shows in their lineups. The impact of Reality TV on network television has been of such magnitude that Gail Berman, the president of entertainment for Fox, has said that, "The 50 year-old economic model of this business is kind of history now" (Cater A1). Networks are shifting to a fifty-two week schedule and filling those time blocks with cheaply produced Reality shows that employ few, if any, actors and allow for maximum product-placement. The move towards Reality programming has left many writers and actors afraid for their job stability and creative license. As Leslie Moonves, the president of CBS, puts it, "the world as we knew it is over" (Carter A1).

This proliferation of Reality programming has led some theorists to worry about its impact on political activist culture as well as other media. In *Blurred Boundaries*, Bill Nichols warns that “the danger exists that actual [political] struggles will take their cue

from the rhythms of Reality TV” (60). His concern is that real life events and political issues will only hold the public’s interest along the prescribed arc of televised coverage. Political action, in line with the logic of Reality TV, will “mirror the very forms of absorption and distraction that should be among its primary targets” (Nichols 60). While I agree that contemporary political action does indeed seem to reflect some of the logics of Reality programming, this mirroring is not necessarily a “bastardization” of dissident action. Instead, political action, as exemplified by Internet activism in particular, both recognizes the problems of a “commodified reality” that Reality TV points toward and exhibits some of the same rhetorical strategies as this televised mode of discourse. This is not necessarily, as Nichols argues, a “problem” for Web activism, but rather a symptom of postmodernity. Political action is not outside the target; it is already a part of the commercial flow of late capitalist culture that also defines the rhetoric of Reality television.

Mark Andrejevic’s recent investigation of the relationship between the trend towards reality-based programming and the interactive, surveillance-based, Internet economy, *Reality TV: The Work of Being Watched*, explores this very phenomenon of convergence from which Nichols’ fear emerge. This relationship, which is built upon a surveillance economy—in the form of webcams and e-commerce on the Internet and the discourse of video diaries, and “real” confessional moments in Reality shows—encourages “self-discovery through self-promotion” (113). The relationship, he argues, is a pedagogical one that warns us against simply seeing participation and interactivity as inherently democratic. Indeed, the essential lesson of Reality TV to media critics, according to Andrejevic, should be that “a two-way, participatory medium is by no

means an inherently progressive one” (113). In other words, we should be wary of the promise of democratization that is offered up by the Internet in the age of Reality television. Through a thorough reading of *Big Brother*, *Survivor*, *Temptation Island*, *The Real World*, and *Road Rules*, Andrejevic examines the “work” of viewers and participants of Reality TV and equates this with the corollary positioning of Internet users as “individuals” through consumer surveillance. Reality television, according to this logic, is aligned with the merging of individuality, consumption, and surveillance that is at the heart of e-commerce. He explains:

The new economy relies on the assumption that individuality can be recovered from mass society through the process of individuation via customization—that consumers can express their uniqueness by participating in forms of customized production. Crucially, this participation comes about largely through the surveillance process—hence, the equation of pervasive monitoring with creativity and self-expression that is one of the hallmarks of the current generation of reality programming. (102)

Thus, Andrejevic posits that “reality becomes mass customized just as the online economy starts to become a reality” (114). In short, performing the work that it takes to get accepted on *The Real World*, sending in headshots, traveling hours to go to multiple interviews, and the eventual work/participation in the show itself in the name of “self-expression,” reflects the logic of an Internet site like Amazon.com, which tracks your choices and encourages you to “be the first to review this book!” or eBay, which asks you to join in a community of bidders. Individuality, through surveillance, becomes a tailor-made commodity to be consumed.

Andrejevic goes on to explain that there are two kinds of “readers” of Reality TV—the positivist and the “non-dupe” or savvy reader. The positivist is the believer in the “reality” of Reality TV as a kind of “study of human interaction” (124). On the other hand, he explains, building on Zizek and Lacan, that “non-dupes,” are “savvy subjects

[who] derive pleasure precisely from not being fooled by either the elite or social critics: they know just how bad things are and just how futile it is to imagine they could be otherwise” (178). It is this position, that of the savvy reader, which is perhaps most characteristic of the postmodern era of late capitalism. In other words, the “savvy” or “non-duped” reader is the cynical, ironic, postmodern figure who *knows* that s/he is a tool of globalism and likewise *knows* that there is nothing that can be done about it. The savvy readers see themselves as fully aware of the constructedness of Reality television. Nonetheless, what are they to do about it? Yes, that is not an actress playing a dumb bimbo on *Paradise Hotel*. She is the “real deal.” Yet, this “bimbo” is edited into bimbo. She even plays “real” bimbo. The savvy reader sees all of this; however, they also see no way out of this seeing. This supposed knowledge, as Zizek explains in “The Sublime Object of Ideology,” is not necessarily a simple unmasking of ideology. The “cynical reason” of the savvy reader, “with all its ironic detachment, leaves untouched the fundamental level of ideological fantasy, the level on which ideology structures the social reality itself” (Zizek 320). Thus, the satisfaction of knowing is not a radical position but rather a reinscription of the subject in ideology. Indeed, we need only look to the concept of the “fake” reality show, *The Jo Schmo Show*, or the B-celebrity smashing of *The Surreal World*, to see that Reality TV is fully aware of these ironic readers and sells back their cynicism. The fantasy, then, of Reality television “is the same as that of the interactive economy: that submission serves as a form of empowerment” (Andrejevic 192). The savvy response, in its acceptance of market forces and media manipulation, and the imagined power of such a position, is the very logic of e-commerce.

The two possible subject positions, positivist and savvy, the former desiring the “real” of Reality shows and the latter celebrating their own knowledge and doing nothingness in the face of that knowledge, each gestures towards the other as problematic. Each position “points to the inadequacy of the other’s conception of the real, thereby tracing the negative image of a real that cannot be contained by such conceptions” (Andrejevic 222). This leaves the audience at a kind of impasse. Reality television can not deliver either the promise of a pure social experiment in “reality” to the positivists or, because of its very claim to reality, the pure “real” of its entertainment value to the non-duped. The “reality” of Reality TV is ultimately unsatisfactory as a means of representing the real, and this is the very problem of the equation of interactivity with democracy through the Internet that Andrejevic seeks to illuminate. To the subject’s impasse Andrejevic answers that the recognition of the “inadequacy of commodified reality,” which is the, albeit unintended, end message of Reality TV, “is the precondition for the development of an elusive—but critically important—conception of what might count as real participation, or participation in reality” (223). Ironically enough, Reality TV, through its message of the poverty of a system that equates democracy with the market and free choice as the freedom of consumer choice, actually encourages us to question how we can be politically empowered in a capitalistic culture. The question is how can citizens find political empowerment and a “voice” in an age of multinational capitalism and spreading “free trade”?

Andrejevic never answers; he fails to give a solution to the conflict of this commodified, postmodern, ideological prison he constructs out of the relationship between Reality TV and the Internet. He argues that his book focuses primarily on

economic uses of the Net because “it is in the economic register that the promise of democratization is deployed as a strategy of rationalization, a fact symptomatic of the reduction of democracy to capitalism” (219). In fact, he does not consider the possibilities of Internet activism at all. While he does acknowledge that the Net may provide “certain organizational advantages” to political organizers and activists, he quickly counters that there are “some palpable disadvantages” as well (219). Citing technology critic, Kevin Robins, Andrejevic posits that “virtual communitarianism is a stultifying vision—an absolutely anti-social and anti-political vision” (219). It is here that I must part ways with Andrejevic. To simply discount political activism on the web exemplifies the very err of the non-duped that Andrejevic so astutely illuminates in his book. In his classic reading of the exercise of power, Foucault notes that power relations are a matter of “strategic positions” and that “they define innumerable points of confrontation, focuses of instability” through which power relations can be inverted, even if only temporarily (465). Power, then, even economic power, is not as all encompassing and politically stultifying as Andrejevic would have us believe.

There are pockets of resistance on the Internet that seem to have political potential and have gained “strategic positions” through which to affect real material, political, commercial, and social change. By seizing territory for democracy, these groups, such as MoveOn, Indymedia, YellowTimes, and others have gained a position that would otherwise be seized for commerce and the market. This does not mean, of course, that these “pockets” are free from the market or global influence; indeed, they are clearly only available because of the movement towards the global spread of capitalism. It is not my intention to suggest that these groups offer a kind of utopian solution to the problems of

mass consumption and the push towards free trade. These sites work within what has become, since the National Science Foundation closed direct connection to the research backbone and most US web traffic was privatized and routed through interconnected network providers, a commercial medium (Kristula). As individual sites on the Internet and, as I will discuss later in this project, even singular wireless screens that have stretched the boundaries of the “web,” they are part of the network and “flow” of commercial sites that also comprise the Net. They are, quite simply, part of the web that is Internet. These sites and wireless tools allow for greater political involvement (although whether or not this involvement is “significant” has yet to be determined); yet, they work within the structures of a system that, in some ways, does seem to exemplify the “reduction of democracy to capitalism.” Like Andrejevic, I believe that “demystifying the promise of new information and communication technologies means considering their emerging uses not in isolation but in relation to each other and to their historical context” (21). Thus, I think that it is most useful to see these sites of Internet activism not as mere blips of possibly positive answers to the “reality of participation,” but as part of a larger rhetoric that is echoed in the mass media in general and in Reality television in particular. In their very similitude, Net activism and Reality TV recognize a common desire of the multitude to have a voice in mass media and to take part in and help shape the discourse of media.

In *Future Active: Media Activism and the Internet*, Graham Meikle, quoting Kalle Lasn, the creator of *Adbusters*, the magazine of culture jamming, argues that we must recognize the strange postmodern contradictions of existence within capitalism:

I think that in this crazy postmodern age of ours, we’re all stuck in this ‘hall of mirrors’ [...] All of us move from being zombied out in front of the TV set one

moment, to suddenly trying to be empowered and really understanding what's going on, and trying to fight back against this advanced consumer capitalism that's somehow eating us up in all kinds of ways. I think that's just part of the postmodern condition, and that contradiction is inherent in our age, and in many of our psyches and personalities. I myself can't quite get away from it; I oscillate between the two states myself and don't quite understand it. (139)

While this notion that viewers are merely “zombied out” in front of the television, that we are simply passive consumers, is manifestly counter to my analysis of mass media audience positions, I do think that Lasn's anecdote gestures toward the contradiction that many academics, activists, artists, media theorists, and “average Joes” everywhere are aware of: we simultaneously want to enjoy the fruits of consumer capitalism and nevertheless (re)make, (re)work, and (re)imagine these productions. This is the predicament that motivates my exploration of the connections between Reality TV and Internet activism. These two global texts seem to uniquely allow for an exploration of the contradictory nature of our positions as both consumers and producers in late capitalism. Through a converging discourse of participation, education, and entertainment, Reality programming and Web activism acknowledge this desire to see what is “really” happening out there in the cultural landscape and to perhaps even have an effect upon or somehow change the oftentimes confusing, interconnected, multiplicities of the “hall of mirrors” that is the postmodern age of celebrity.

In a videotaped message to the 1997 meeting of the Media and Democracy Congress in New York City, Subcommandante Marcos, the leader of the Zapatista movement in the Chiapas region of southern Mexico, decried the “fourth world war [of] neoliberalism” and called for an alternative to a one-way hierarchical model of media. He said:

...the world of contemporary news is a world that exists for the VIP's-- the very important people. Their everyday lives are what is important: if they get married, if

they divorce, if they eat, what clothes they wear, or what if they clothes [*sic*] they take off-- these major movie stars and big politicians. But common people only appear for a moment-- when they kill someone, or when they die. For the communication giants and the neoliberal powers, the others, the excluded, only exist when they are dead, or when they are in jail or court. This can't go on. Sooner or later this virtual world clashes with the real world. And that is actually happening: this clash produces results of rebellion and war throughout the entire world, or what is left of the world to even have war.

We have a choice: we can have a cynical attitude in the face of the media, to say that nothing can be done about the dollar power that creates itself in images, words, digital communication, and computer systems that invades not just with an invasion of power, but with a way of seeing that world, of how they think the world should look. We could say, well, "that's the way it is" and do nothing. Or we can simply assume incredulity: we can say that any communication by the media monopolies is a total lie. We can ignore it and go about our lives.

But there is a third option that is neither conformity, nor skepticism, nor distrust: that is to construct a different way-- to show the world what is really happening-- to have a critical world view and to become interested in the truth of what happens to the people who inhabit every corner of this world. (Marcos)

Like Andrejevic, Marcos acknowledges the conceivable subject positions for readers of popular culture: conformist or cynic. However, unlike Andrejevic, Marcos offers a way out of this dilemma: we can invent and construct a "different" way. What Marcos is calling for is an "independent" media, a people's media. Instead of either giving up to the power of a non-representative media or abandoning communication through mass media, we can build our own. As an Indymedia local site's banner says, "Don't Hate the Media-Become the Media." Indeed, Subcommandante Marcos' call to creation and participation in the mediascape prefigures Hardt and Negri's explanation of counterpower in *Empire*. Hardt and Negri argue for a new materialist teleology that is in opposition to Marx's conception of proletarian struggle as the mole in subterranean tunnels. In reference to the "new quality of social movements" as illustrated by the Chiapas rebellion, Tiananmen Square, the LA riots, and the mid-90s strikes in Paris and Seoul, Hardt and Negri argue that "the figure of an international cycle of struggles based on the communication and

translation of the common desires of labor in revolt seems no longer to exist” (55-56). Instead, we have a new model born in the final years of the twentieth century. Although these movements “focused on their own local and immediate circumstances, they all nonetheless posed problems of supranational relevance” (56). These are biopolitical struggles—movements invested in the form of life and the creation of “new public spaces and new forms of community” that must still fulfill the primary political task of “recognizing a common enemy and inventing a common language of struggles” (56-57).

However, the divide between economic and political fights signified by Marx’s mole that emerges “in times of open class conflict” has been reimagined by Hardt and Negri as the undulating and encompassing snake of struggle that “slither[s] silently across these superficial, imperial landscapes” (58). The struggles, then, are both of and in opposition to global capitalism; they are a “counterpower that emerges from within Empire” (59). The postmodern “revolutionary” movement, then, is not a matter of strict opposition to Empire per se as much as it is from within Empire. It is the decentralized power that exists within, throughout and in opposition to multinational capitalism. As Hardt and Negri argue, “the deterritorializing power of the multitude is the productive force that sustains Empire and at the same time the force that calls for and makes necessary its destruction” (61). As Jay Sand, a volunteer at the original Seattle Indymedia center, says, “It’s not an isolationist movement [...] These people want a different type of globalization—one that doesn’t emanate from what’s best for corporate leaders” (Giuffo). This counterpower, then, is not in opposition to globalization but rather is globalism in a divergent form.

Subcommandante Marcos' comments above imagine not only this possibility of counterpower and the need to create within the global mediascape, but also a seemingly contradictory push towards the "real" of the matter and the "truth" through a new construction of our position in relation to mass media and communication technologies. For Marcos and the Zapatista movement, the construction of a different way to communicate is "to show the world what is *really* happening-- to have a critical world view and to become interested in the *truth* of what happens to the people who inhabit every corner of this world" (Marcos, italics added). Even in his recognition that we can not either ignore or resign ourselves to the power of corporate media and instead must create our own "mass media," he is still invested in the primacy of one-truth. There is a desire to illuminate the real of Chiapas for the conference attendees in New York and in turn to have them illuminate and spread the real through their investments in various medias. Of course, this rhetoric of reality and truth is ever-present in the expanding landscape of global mass media. These two seemingly disparate media texts in particular—Reality programming and Internet activist sites—are intimately invested in this discourse of reality and truth. From the promise that you will be able to see "when people stop being polite and start getting real" (*Real World*) to uncovering "the whole truth about the Iraq war" (MoveOn), both Reality programming and Web activism play upon the same desires that Subcommandante Marcos articulates: the struggle for real and meaningful participation, creation, and knowledge of the truth. The languages of both media influence, reflect, and inflect one another. They seem to tap into an overwhelming desire on the part of the multitude to somehow touch the real, "make a difference," and simply enter into the mediascape. Both sites, through similar rhetorical devices and

strategies, are contingent upon, reinforce, and yet challenge global, multinational capitalism. As strange bedfellows that both enter into and exploit a desire for participation, reality, and truth, Reality TV and Internet activism allow us to consider the implications and complications of attempting to answer Subcommandante Marcos' charge to envision a different way. In realizing the interconnectivity of the figures of Reality television and Net activism, we can perhaps begin to gesture towards the ways in which we can harness and rework the various rhetorics of mass media as powerful tools in a struggle towards both a clearer understanding of the complex world in which we live and the possibilities of real, individual, and democratic involvement in the creation of our own representations

CHAPTER 2 NAMING THE BEAST: WHO WANTS TO MARRY A WOLF-MAN?

In naming these two media forms and calling to explore their interconnectivity, I must first bring up the question that seems to most haunt studies of Reality TV and, more recently, Internet activism. What are they? What constitutes Reality television? When is Web activism happening? What is or is not counted in either of these media? When have we stretched the terms too far? Or does the generic terminology allow for a flow that quite literally causes a crossing of Internet activism into Reality TV and Reality TV into Internet activism? And if so, what are the implications of this strange hybrid? In examining these phenomena, this study also seeks to discern the limits of Reality television and Internet activism as terms.

The Reality genre has opened up from the early days of *Candid Camera* into a myriad of hybrids from dating games like *Joe Millionaire* and the first gay-themed dating show, *Boy Meets Boy*; to talent competitions like *American Idol* and *Food Fight*; to gross-out challenges like *Fear Factor* and *Dog Eat Dog*; to odd who-can-make-it-through-this-living-situation shows like *Survivor* and *Murder in Small Town X*; to watch-them-crash-and-burn celebrity centered programs, like *The Osbournes* and *Anna Nicole*. While this is only a small representation of the multitude of Reality programs that have flooded the major networks and cable, all of these programs, although ostensibly "Reality TV," are incredibly dissonant. Even within the subgenres of dating-themed Reality show or talent-competition-themed Reality show many narrative and generic differences exist.

In explaining this malleability of the term "Reality TV" or "Reality program," John Dovey writes that "the different kinds of programme described as 'reality TV' are unified by the attempt to package particular aspects of everyday life as entertainment" (Creeber 135). Thus, the connection between these dissimilar programs is in the fabric of the everyday: real people desiring love, wanting to succeed, needing that chance to do something unique. But does this definition adequately explain the emergence of the Reality show that centers on the celebrity's "real" life or the un-reality of the more scripted competition narrative? Are we recognizing the celebrity as real person or marveling at the surreality of their lifestyle? Are we eager to see them fail in "real" life? In fact, perhaps Dovey's definition leads to more questions than answers about the Reality format. If "particular aspects of everyday life" are reformulated as entertainment in Reality programming, then we are left wondering what "aspects" count. Indeed, although after the destruction of the World Trade Towers on September, 11, 2001, a series of articles posited that the sheer atrocity and *real* reality of the attacks would spell the end of the Reality TV boom, resulting in "the most abrupt end to a trend in TV history" (Feran), Reality programming has only grown and stretched the very boundaries of what the genre is. Yes, *Survivor* and *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire* have morphed into *Survivor All-Stars* and *Who Wants to Be a Multimillionaire*, but programs that seem to push the borders of Reality entertainment, that may or may not be "Reality shows," have also proliferated across the televisual landscape and into other medias.

Similarly, Internet activism is not something that can be easily defined. While it is a more recent media form than Reality TV, Net activism still seems to have grown and spread at the same rapid pace as Reality programming. From early individual web sites

that critiqued “real world” policy issues, to the 1990 e-mail wave of protests against Lotus MarketPlace’s “panopticon of information sources” (Gurak 26) and the 1999 “haunting” of GeoCities, to the Critical Art Ensemble’s encouragement of electronic civil disobedience, to the more modern movements of IMCs and MoveOn.org, Internet activism has spread and changed from simple, individual web protests to mass actions encompassing millions of global citizens interacting in different levels of “activism” from point-and-click petitions to direct street actions. Since the 1999 “Battle in Seattle,” the number of international street-level protests and direct actions and the rapidity with which they have been organized, has been directly related to the growing popularity of Internet-based politics. In an attempt to dissect the interaction of the Internet and politics, Graham Meikle, quoting David Rennick, notes: “the three major forms of Internet politics [are] politics within the Net, politics which impact the Net, and political uses of the Net” (3). It is the third form of Internet politics, “political uses of the Internet” that are, what Meikle defines as, “Internet activism” proper. This distinction of Internet activism refers to “political uses of the networked computers that attempt to effect social or cultural change in the *offline* world: a politics which can use the graphical and multimedia capabilities of the web as well as text-based applications such as e-mail” (Meikle 4). Again, as with Dovey’s definition of Reality TV, we are left with more questions as to what can be Internet activism than answers as to what it is. Does this mean that chain letters can act as potential Net activism? Is clicking a “Censure Bush” link really activism? Can the movement away from the personal computer and towards more mobile screen technologies that utilize the multimedia capabilities of the web and text and voice based application count in the sphere of Web activism? Interestingly enough, as with the

response in mass media to Reality TV after September 11, political action of the kind prompted by the networked connections that made the WTO protests in Seattle, the FTAA demonstrations in Quebec, and the G8 summit protest in Genoa possible was deemed “of diminished furor,” “inappropriate,” and even “unpatriotic” (NYC Indymedia). In a 2002 editorial concerning the upcoming World Economic Forum in New York City, Clyde Haberman argues that “some would say that New York needs [protests] about as much as it needs another airplane attack” (B1). Like Reality TV, at least the street-protests and direct actions associated with the communities forged through Internet activism were figured as a thing of the past—a moment of solidarity that could not be revived. However, the largest single day of international protest in world history occurred on February 15, 2003 in response to the United States’ immanent invasion of Iraq; and, this world-wide protest was facilitated by the communication networks forged by Internet activists. As I will discuss later in this study, the presence of Web activist groups has increased dramatically since 9-11. Undoubtedly, the movement has been of such velocity that it has not remained stationary on the web; instead, it has spread out from the web site onto the street, the television, and even the mobile phone.

Thus, we are left not with the dissolution of Reality TV and Internet activism after 9-11, but the proliferation of these forms. This rapid growth and change has made it perhaps even more difficult to name them in a way that seems to recognize the differences or the multiplicities held within. Indeed, the names “Reality TV” and “Internet activism,” rather than giving a distinct sense of being, seem to illuminate the between-ness of these forms. Of course, as I noted earlier, these forms seem to be named in a multitude of ways: from Net activism to Web activism to Reality TV and Reality

programs. These names all seem to recognize slight variances in form and apparatus. They help to open up the difference throughout. Reality television and Internet activism are form-less forms that we nonetheless desire to name and bring into being.

Perhaps we can begin to understand this phenomenon of naming through a brief examination of Deleuze and Guattari's musings on the Wolf-Man. In the "1914: One or Several Wolves" plateau of *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari examine Freud's Wolf-Man as attaining a singular multiplicity. They critique Freud's insistence on "Oedipus, nothing but Oedipus" (34) in the face of the Wolf-Man's pain. Actually, "on the very verge of discovering a rhizome, Freud always returns to mere roots" (27). He discovers the unconscious, the very figure of the acentered and nonhierarchical circulation of states, only to reinscribe it in the unitary themes of the father, the penis, Castration (27). Freud realizes the Wolf-Man as "Wolf-Man" proper name, but this "fragmented" identity is psychosis. The fragmentation is the illness. It is, as always, "a question of bringing back the unity or identity of the person or allegedly lost object. The wolves will have to be purged of their multiplicity" (28) In "From the History of an Infantile Neurosis," Freud explains that "I must therefore content myself with bringing forward fragmentary portions, which the reader can then put together into a living whole" (173). The Wolf-Man becomes reunification of fragments into psychoanalytic unity.

Deleuze and Guattari write:

The Wolf-Man knew that Freud would soon declare him cured, but that it was not at all the case and his treatment would continue for all eternity under Brunswick, Lacan, Leclaire. Finally, he knew that he was in the process of acquiring a veritable proper name, the Wolf-Man, a name more properly his than his own, since it attained the highest degree of singularity in the instantaneous apprehension of a generic multiplicity: wolves. He knew that this new and true proper name would be disfigured and misspelled, retranscribed as patronymic. (26)

The Wolf-Man is named as Wolf-Man. He is refigured, through the master-narratives of psychoanalysis, into sign of the classic analysand. He is star case-study. His between wolf and man or becoming-wolf is made being Wolf-Man. Although this naming reinscribes Wolf-Man into supposed unity, it also acts as a recognition of the multiplicity, the pack that is the Wolf. It is a kind of singular multiplicity, a becoming-wolf. As Deleuze and Guattari explain:

There are no individual statements, there never are. Every statement is the product of a machinic assemblage, in other words, of collective agents of enunciation (take “collective agents” to mean not peoples or societies but multiplicities). The proper name (*nom propre*) does not designate an individual: it is on the contrary when the individual opens up to the multiplicities pervading him or her, at the outcome of the most severe operation of depersonalization, the he or she acquires his or her true proper name. The proper name is the instantaneous apprehension of a multiplicity. The proper name is the subject of a pure infinitive comprehended as such in a field of intensity. (37)

The proper name, then, the “true” name, is the name that in depersonalization apprehends the becoming, the multiplicity. The name is the product of a collectivity; it is the folding of the individual and the social, the singularity and the multiplicity, being and becoming.

This theoretical detour into Deleuze and Guattari’s critique of psychoanalysis gives us an insight into the problematic of naming Reality TV and Internet activism

While Deleuze and Guattari are concerned with the naming of the individual, I think that we can apply this concept of “naming” in an effort to help us comprehend the seeming inadequacy of the names “Reality television” and “Internet activism.” The

names, as proper names for concepts—"Reality" and "activism"—that function through particular apparatuses—the television and the Internet—acknowledge the multiplicity of those forms. The moment of naming them is the moment that they open up to the multiplicities within. The "depersonalization" or, in this case, generic quality of the naming, allows for a linking of name "to the becomings, infinitives, and intensities of a multiplied and depersonalized individual" (38). The names "Reality TV" and "Internet activism" enable us to name the becomings that are yoked within. As Deleuze and Guattari note, "multiplicities are rhizomatic" (8); they do not have a self-contained unity. Rather the multiplicity, which is not "constituted by the interiority of a substance or subject," is "defined by the outside: by the abstract line, the line of flight or deterritorialization according to which they change in nature and connect with other multiplicities" (9). These connections engender transformations that are a becoming. This becoming is an event, "a verb with a consistency all its own" (239). It is "not a correspondence between relations. But neither is it resemblance, an imitation, or, at the limit, an identification" (237). It is a matter of "unnatural" alliances--a marriage of heterogeneous parts that is a new assemblage, an outcome of connections. It is, to put it very broadly, the connection of television the apparatus with reality the concept and Internet the apparatus with activism the concept. Yet, even naming this alliance brings us back to the original complication. What is the apparatus of the television or the Internet? What are the concepts of reality and activism? This is the becoming, the multiplicity of these popular cultural forms. However, whenever we decide this is or is not Reality TV or Internet activism, we change the multiplicity through the connections. We remake them through inclusions and exclusions; we make our own Reality TV and Internet

activism. If “no one can say where the line of flight will pass” (250), we can never be sure of how multiplicities will transform, cross, and become. Perhaps, then, in attempting to trace the lines of flight of Reality TV and Web activism we will discover their possible crossings and new becomings.

The incredible and unavoidable proliferation of Reality programming across the international televisual landscape and the network of Internet-based political activism, can perhaps be read together as both attempting, through convergent rhetorical models, to feed into particularly postmodern desires for relevancy and biopolitical control in a decentered and fragmented world. However, in their circulation and undulation throughout the space of late capitalism, both forms cross and transform one another, moving away and back towards one another, each somehow creating the other in the face of expanding global capitalism. It is not simply, to return to Nichols, an infection of activism by the discourse of Reality TV; instead, it is an interlinking and a process of “unnatural alliances” or ever-creation within capitalism. We are left with the *intermezzo*—the between of horizontal movements and nonlocalizable linkages. This is the movement between and the between-ness of Reality television and Internet activism. It is the poaching of territory and the opening and closing of spaces within and between these forms. It is the “transversal movement that sweeps one *and* the other away, a stream without beginning or end that undermines its banks and picks up speed in the middle” (Deleuze and Guattari, 25, italics in original). It is the singularities of the transversal movements and flows of this stream through the cracks and crevices of American neocapitalism, that I want to explore in the remainder of this project.

CHAPTER 3 “HOME FREE”: THE CALL TO THE SCREENS

Perhaps the most obvious way to begin this exploration of the movement of Reality TV and Net activism is through the way in which Reality programs and Internet activism hail us thru a call to action on the screen. This call to action that proceeds from the screen(s) to the screen(s) is most clearly illustrated by an extreme example of Internet activism: ELF (Earth Liberation Front). ELF is the rhizomatic ghost that haunts the web. As the number one domestic terrorist organization in the United States, ELF “claims no issue or area as [its] own, [they] just act” (Pickering 52). As opposed to an “opt-in” approach to activism or a “point-and-click” kind of postmodern ethic, ELF requires a commitment to a set of guidelines:

1. To cause as much economic damage as possible to a given entity that is profiting off the destruction of the natural environment and life for selfish greed and profit.
2. To educate the public on the atrocities committed against the environment and life.
3. To take all necessary precautions against harming life. (Meet the ELF)

These guidelines are then acted upon through “monkeywrenching,” such as spiking trees, and the destruction of property, often in the form of burning homes, office buildings, and SUVs. As of 2004, the North American ELF Press Office estimates that it has caused “over \$100 million in damages to entities who profit from the destruction of life and the planet” (Meet the ELF). However, you can not e-mail the ELF or contact an operative cell for there is no ELF per se. There is only direct action in the name of the ELF. An action is then “owned” by the ELF through messages left at the scene of economic

damage and encoded e-mails that are sent to the official ELF online Press Office. The “Press Office,” however, is also not the ELF. It is rather “an autonomous entity that serves to publicize news and action of the ELF, as reported through news media or by anonymous communications from the individuals involved in activities” (Media Information). This press office, the website of ELF, is the only “evidence” of ELF’s existence as ELF. Indeed, David Tubbs, the former head of the FBI’s counterterrorism unit claims, “They’re like ghosts. It was easier to infiltrate organized crime than it will be to get inside [this] group” (Westneat 28). It is disappearance through naming. The name, ELF, disguises the individuals and yet gives them a media presence. The ELF homepage asks: “Who are the people carrying out these activities? Because involved individuals are anonymous, they could be anyone from any community. Parents, teachers, church volunteers, your neighbor, or even your partner could be involved. The exploitation and destruction of the environment affects all of us - some people enough to take direct action in defense of the earth” (Meet the ELF). The homepage calls you to action; the site urges direct action in the name of the environment and under the name of ELF. As the site intones: “There is no way to contact the ELF in your area. It is up to each committed person to take responsibility for stopping the exploitation of the natural world. No longer can it be assumed that someone else is going to do it. If not you who, if not now when?” (Meet the ELF). This call asks you to move from the screen, to the SUV dealership with a can of paint or a jug of gasoline, and then to come back to the screen again. *You* must make ELF through naming the action as an ELF action.

This notion of action and its radical call to the screen as indicator of existence, invites us to explore the movement from one media to the next, from one screen to

another. What happens when the call to action is not simply an insistence on naming action but a call to shift from screen to screen? Often Reality programs encourage their viewers to “go online” and check out what’s new. A commercial for *Trading Spaces*’ recent “Home Free,” special win-and-we’ll-pay-off-your-mortgage competition, for example, encourages viewers to “get the skinny on the show” and “vote for you favorite team, and even get the chance to get your own *Home Free*” by going online. You can “meet the homeowners” on-line, “take a closer look at the rooms,” vote for you favorite team, track the tournament bracket, and even enter to win your “home free”—*Trading Spaces* will pay off your mortgage. The *Trading Spaces*’ page, in turn, is linked to the TLC homepage, which is linked to Discovery’s homepage. This page urges you to “Get on TV!”, which leads the web surfer to a seemingly endless network of possible Reality opportunities. You can have your house renovated, get a makeover, elect someone else for a makeover, and even have your finances repaired by experts. The call for the web surfer to “Get on TV!” offers, through an entrance over the Net, the actual possibility of moving onto the television.

This movement from the television to the net and back again to the television is mirrored by MoveOn. Created by the former owners of Berkley Systems (makers of the infamous “Flying Toasters” screensaver) in response to the impeachment of Bill Clinton, MoveOn echoes this urge to “Get on TV” and make your voice heard (“MoveOn.org Staff”). MoveOn is a kind of e-mail network whose goal is “to bring ordinary people back into politics” (“Frequently Asked Questions”). This objective, while reflecting the promise of Reality TV, is realized through a kind of buffet-style approach to left-leaning politics. Through ActionForum software, members (membership is free) are able to

“propose issue priorities and strategies” and other members can respond in turn. The top two rated concerns are then chosen as the “major strategic issues for the current congress” (“ActionForum”). Through an e-mail database of over two million individuals, MoveOn then contacts members about petitions, “urgent actions,” “flash campaigns,” and “global actions.” It is a model that does not follow the traditional one-issue or identity politics type of organization; instead, as Eli Pariser, the campaigns director of MoveOn explains, “You could say that MoveOn has a postmodern organizing model. It’s opt-in, it’s decentralized, you do it from your home” (Boyd). The guiding ethos of the group, if it can even be called that, is the ability to “move on” from issue to issue in a mode of oppositional politics. The site, through member input, moves from perceived problem to problem, opens a channel for members to “speak out” through e-mail, and then weaves this threading of replies together to form a blanket of opposition to whatever policy is at hand. Congress members, organizations, the President, or whoever is the target is then inundated with phone calls, e-mails, letters, and petitions en masse. One such action that proved to be successful and actually helped to bring MoveOn more mass media attention was the campaign in opposition to the FCC’s deregulation of media ownership rules. An “urgent action” message was e-mailed to members urging them to e-mail or call the FCC and their Congress people and to sign an online petition opposing the deregulation. While the FCC voted for deregulation, the Senate voted to stop this action (Tell Us the Truth). This result can not just be attributed to MoveOn by any means; it was the broad coalition of more traditional hierarchical membership organizations and the “blanketing” of officials with the combined virtual voices of hundreds of thousands of people that was able to effect this change.

Of course, this point-and-click kind of political action has been criticized for being too decentralized and not requiring “real” member commitment. It is not “true self-organizing” (Boyd). Members only take part in the actions they care about, respond to what they are interested in, and are literally “members” just for joining the e-mail list. There are no local chapters, no office, and only seven staff members who are responsible for directing the action campaigns. Perhaps of most interest to this study, then, is MoveOn’s most recent campaign, “Bush in 30 seconds,” which literalizes the urge to “Get on TV.” The link to the “Bush in 30 seconds” contest reads:

Sick of the propaganda being beamed at you from the current administration’s media mavens? Here’s a new way to fight back: Enter MoveOn.org Voter Fund’s political ad contest. You don’t have to be formally trained in the art of filmmaking, just ready, willing and able to create an ad that tells the truth about George Bush. (“Bush in 30 Seconds”)

What is particularly interesting about this contest is that it allows members the possible opportunity to create their own “truthful” mass media text. This vague quest to “tell the truth,” while echoing Marcos, certainly closes off particular points of view. The “truth” will not be that George Bush is a boon for democracy. Nonetheless, through the meeting of a database of almost two million voices into a collectivity, MoveOn has the power to provide the individual voice the ability to produce and speak in the mass media. As Laurie Ouellette notes in “Will the Revolution be Televised? Camcorders, Activism, and Alternative Television in the 1990s,” “what we have come to know as a commercial, one-way model of ‘television’ is not inherent to the medium itself but has been constructed by specific regulatory policies and economic practices” (167). Television is not, in and of itself, as a medium, “naturally” commercial in terms of a receiver/transmitter divide and MoveOn explicitly questions this divide in its search to buy air time and tell the “truth.”

The idea of winning through the creation of a commercial text made by an amateur is highly reminiscent of *America's Funniest Home Videos* and other Reality shows that asks contestants to send in their own "hilarious," and often staged, footage. MoveOn's "Bush in 30 seconds" strategy was similar to *America's Funniest Home Videos*' in that they both allowed viewers to not only be in the picture but to create it. In the case of *America's Funniest Home Videos*, live audience members would vote for which pre-selected clip should win. MoveOn's political ad winners, on the other hand, were narrowed down by popular on-line member vote and finally chosen by a large panel of judges mostly known for their attempts to use the mass media for left-leaning political purposes (such as Michael Moore, Katrina Vanden Heuvel, and Russell Simmons). The winners, "ordinary people" who "[didn't] have to be formally trained in the art of cinema," were to have been aired during the Super Bowl ("Bush in 30 Seconds"). However, CBS, the station that airs *Survivor*, *Big Brother*, *Star Search*, and *The Amazing Race*, refused to show the winning commercial, "Child's Play," on the grounds that they have "a longstanding, clear, and consistent policy of not allowing ads so that deep pockets cannot control one side of the debate, be it conservative or liberal" ("Political Football").

This unwillingness on the part of CBS to air the MoveOn sponsored and volunteer-created ad gives foregrounds the tension of the movements between apparatuses. MoveOn members worked to stop the FCC deregulation and the spread of Viacom, the parent company of CBS. At the same time, MoveOn pushed to air their political ad on CBS. In turn, CBS refused to air the ad. Instead, during and immediately following the game, commercials for and the premier of *Survivor All-Stars* aired. One

form of viewer participation was substituted for another form of viewer production. The Reality program with its “best of the ordinary,” the *Survivor* “all-stars,” was an appropriate televisual text for viewing during the Super Bowl, while “Child’s Play,” as a production of the “best of the ordinary” (recall that “you don’t have to be formally trained in the art of filmmaking”), was “advocacy advertising” and not fit for the Super Bowl. In turn, MoveOn sent out action alerts to members urging them to “Watch the ad that CBS refuses to air, and join our campaign. Just click the image below” (Pariser). What the TV refused to show, the Internet did. Thus, the campaign grew as a four-pronged approach, which encouraged members to:

1. **Spread the word.** Share the ad with your friends and family.
2. **Call in.** Tell CBC headquarters what you think.
3. **Post it.** Put a banner or button on your website.
4. **Get published.** Write a letter to the editor of your local paper. (Pariser)

The e-mail also provides Les Moonves, the President of CBS’s phone number and a link to a petition about the issue. This tension, the reluctance of the network to broadcast the activist-funded and created “ad,” did not close off protest. Rather, it opened up a firestorm of mass media attention and increased activism on the part of MoveOn. Viewers moved to the net and CNN during the Super Bowl half-time to watch the commercial that could not be aired on CBS (Pariser). Commentators on TV discussed the politics of resisting MoveOn’s attempt to “move on(to)” the TV screen, and twenty-eight members of the House of Representatives even wrote a letter to CBS exclaiming: “The choice not to run this paid advertisement appears to be part of a disturbing pattern on CBS’s part to bow to the wishes of the Republican National Committee. We remember well CBS’s remarkable decision this fall to self-censor at the direction of GOP pressure. The network shamefully cancelled a broadcast about former President Ronald Reagan

which Republican partisans considered insufficiently flattering” (Pariser). The ad has since aired several times on various CBS affiliates, CNN, and most notably, it ran as a quotation in several news commentaries to illustrate what we were missing. The activists’ push as well as the reflection of television on its own censorship, enabled the MoveOn ad to move on(to) network television and finally fulfill Reality TV’s endless challenges to “Get on TV.”

CHAPTER 4
WHILE YOU WERE ACTING OUT: THE INTERACTIVE, THE INTERCREATIVE

This movement between media thru a call to action *in media* also effects a destabilization of the traditional boundaries between journalist/activist and news/entertainment. It is the crossing of borderlines, the movement of Internet activist sites becoming information centers and mass news media becoming Reality program; it is the “extreme makeover” of media. One of the most potent examples of the attempt at a “media makeover” is through the meeting hub of the network of Independent Media Centers known as Indymedia. This “collective of independent media organizations and hundreds of journalists offering grassroots, non-corporate coverage” was created in 1999 in order to document the Seattle protests against the World Trade Organization (“Indymedia Documentation Project”). Although, like MoveOn, the site was born in response to a particular historical moment, Indymedia works on a very different principle than MoveOn. The site, Indymedia.org, is the “open publishing” model newswire that provides links to Independent Media Centers throughout the world. Like MoveOn, Indymedia does not have a central office; however, unlike the former, Indymedia actually acts as a supplementary sounding board for Independent Media Centers (IMCs) everywhere. The site is a central hub for activists to find links to more specific areas of political interest and meet with other activists in a virtual environment. While MoveOn has helped to organize specific protest days and anti-war vigils, Indymedia explicitly encourages a move back to the streets through a cooperation between the physical IMCs

and the virtual world of Indymedia.org. A center of information concerning the Free Trade protests and other international protest movements, the site “encourages people to become the media by posting their own articles, analysis, and information to the site” (“Indymedia Documentation Project”).

Thus, Indymedia creates a collectivity, both through its existence within and between the commercialized “highways” of cyberspace and the physical streets of the “real” world, and in its allowance for the individuality of activists through their ability to produce their own media texts. The singularity of Indymedia recognizes the multiplicity of individual participation. This collective, born of the “Battle in Seattle,” was created as a corrective to the silent mass media and the “clear imbalance of information” (*Showdown in Seattle*). Activists worked within the center to upload video of police brutality, marches, and interviews with protesters. As Eric Galatan of FreeSpeech TV has said of the IMC’s role in the Seattle protests, “I think we’re going to look back on this period as a launch pad for an entirely new way of making and distributing television” (62). It was, quite literally, a “Reality program” sent streaming over the web.

Like makeover “lifestyle infotainment” Reality programs, which are formed from "at least the following television genres: game shows, soap opera, reality-TV or 'fly-on-the-wall-documentary', confessional talk shows, daytime product-based talk shows, and gardening advice programmes" (Creeber 7), Indymedia imagines a “making over” of the media by the individual who participates in the larger collective project. The hybridity of the “lifestyle infotainment” subgenre of Reality programming, which Andrejevic tends to ignore in favor of “surveillance style” Reality shows, enables an even more nuanced approach to Reality television through its own divisibility and opens up a connection to

the particular activism of Indymedia. Unlike *The Real World* and *Temptation Island*, which are filled with young and often beautiful aspiring models and actors, lifestyle infotainment Reality programs often feature people who are not necessarily aspiring stars or beautiful. These kinds of "makeover shows collapse public and private space, and can destabilize the discrete identities of viewer and participants" (Moseley 314). Often the makeover is a "surprise" that the one being made-over is subject to. In *While You Were Out*, the unsuspecting individual comes home to find that their home, their private space, is filled with cameras, strangers, and a newly "made-over" room. Usually, the space being made over is distinctly figured as the private space of the unsuspecting individual. This space is to be tailored to their taste. The blandness of the private space is reworked into supposedly a more faithful representation of the individual through a public makeover. On the other hand, a show like *Extreme Makeover*, takes the intimate moment of plastic surgery and refigures it as public spectacle. In three months, during which time the "patient" being made over is in isolation from their family, the participant is nipped, tucked, whitened, and buffed up. They have the opportunity to take part in a "truly Cinderella-like experience: A real life fairy tale in which their wishes come true, not just to change their looks, but their lives and destinies" (*Extreme Makeover*). They will not only change physically, but there is the implication of a mental or spiritual change. They have the opportunity to influence their own "destiny" as never before.

Analogously, through an imagining of journalist as activist as opposed to the normative representation of journalist as objective viewer, Indymedia attempts to effect a kind of "media makeover" that encompasses the two conflicting notion of make-over: individualization of space and moral change. The mediascape is rewritten into what you

want it to be. At the same time, this refiguring of information source as “democratic media outlet for the creation of radical, accurate, and passionate tellings of truth” (“Indymedia Documentation Project”) has a moral awareness of change. The new journalist will not be objective but passionate and radical. Anyone with access to the Internet can publish, in many different languages, in the way that best represents them, on the main newswire or on local IMC sites. The guiding ethos of the site, then, is less about the ability to “move on,” than it is about the freedom to “move freely” between the virtual and the physical environments as both individual activist and member of a broader community. It affects a destabilization of the divide between journalist and activist, viewer and participant.

The import of this destabilization can perhaps be most clearly figured through Graham Meikle’s differentiation between “interactivity” and “intercreativity.” He writes in *Future Active*:

The idea of *intercreativity* is key in analyzing Net activist campaigns...[people] creating an alternative to the established media-an alternative that is an open [...] space. So, on the one hand, we have *interactivity* as an extension of the established media-not a new concept so much as a spin on an old one; a hot new words to use in ads. And, on the other hand, we have the *conversational, the unfinished, the intercreative*. (32)

Extreme Makeover, for example, in its promise of representing “real” people in the “extreme” situation of massive plastic surgery and physical change, explicitly plays on this notion of interactivity. The participant can jog and do their makeup (once they’ve learned the proper way), but they can not create per se. They are “finished” by the show; their destiny is “shaped” by the physical change. Indymedia, on the other hand, in an almost identical promise to show real people in real or extreme situations, such as police brutality at the Miami FTAA protest, invests itself in the intercreative. The Indymedia

journalist not only takes part in the protest but also “creates” a critical response to that situation as they add to the conversation surrounding the action. As Jay Sand notes, “With open publishing, your experience of the news is different... You really feel like you were there, even more so than on TV. On TV, you are seeing one image at a time. Real life is more confusing and this comes through on the IMC site” (Beckerman 4). Sand is noting an essential difference between television and the IMC’s ability to represent real life. Something about the IMC’s representation, the open-ness, the confusion, enables a more “real” reality than television can represent. In other words, television can not represent reality, but the IMC can give the essence, the feeling of reality that is unavailable to the televised discourse. However, the disjuncture in television and Internet activism’s abilities to somehow capture reality is not so clear cut. Conceivably, the “intercreative” does not fully address the problem or lack of activity in interactivity.

The implications of this division can be most clearly illustrated in the role that the camcorder plays in both Reality television and Net activism. The camcorder has become an essential part of the Indymedia movement, especially in terms of bolstering street protest. Rooted in the quest to document the WTO protests in Seattle and to record the individual’s perspective from the street through whatever means possible, Indymedia has a videographer e-mail listserv that allows independent newsmakers to share their footage. The European IMCs produce a monthly newsreel and FreeSpeech TV creates the “Indymedia newsREAL” once a month as well (“Indymedia Documentation Project”). Of course, one of the quintessential features of Reality programs such is the use of home video as a source of material.

As Ouellette, building on Stuart Hall's notion of the reproduction of oppositional views within mass media, notes:

[T]he idea that people can create their own media rather than relying on the monopolistic cultural industries [...] is reproduced within and around programs such as *America's Funniest Home Videos* and *I Witness Video*, although the oppositional potential of video is ultimately repackaged according to the logic of commercial television and dominant culture. (166)

This editorial control over the video, this repackaging of the materials into a more commercial logic, is, at least according to Meikle, the movement from the intercreative to the interactive. The videographer can submit their video to *America's Funniest* and take part in the program; however, their interaction is limited to the submission.

This notion is complicated by the more recent trend of Reality programs foregrounding the "repackaged" nature of the amateur video in Reality TV by actually removing the home video camera from the hands of the true amateur. In *Trading Spaces*, for example, the hostess, Paige, carries a digital camera and interviews, in seemingly offhanded or spontaneous ways, the cast members about their experiences thus far in the episode. The handi-cam moments are cleansed of any of the graininess of true home video; yet, as with a home camera, little red letters in the right corner announce "Paige-cam." We know that it is not "really" home video; it is a simulation of amateur video. Nonetheless, this representation of the obvious simulation of home video and spontaneity actually work to illuminate the commercialization of the amateur video in the world of Reality TV. We are forced to acknowledge that this is not "real" home video, but it insists upon the conventions of home video. It is the professional mimicking the amateur. It is the appropriation and simulation of the amateur by the professional. This appropriation holds within it the seeds of subversion; the amateur videographer is confronted with their

loss of power. The “interactive,” then, foregrounds its own lack of interactivity. It is bounded interaction.

This kind of simulation of the amateur in *Trading Spaces* also works as a sort of bridge that moves us closer to the hoped for moment of authentic reality that will be uncovered in the room reveal. Usually, the Paige camming helps to build up a conflict narrative or a sense of tension between either the homeowners/teams and the designers or the designers and the carpenters. The narrative thrust of each program, in part created through the use of the handi-cam, is towards the one essential moment of authentic, unmitigated, raw human emotion in the form of the “reveal.” In discussing *Changing Rooms*, the British precursor to *Trading Spaces*, Rachel Moseley argues that:

A profound desire for intensity and authenticity surely precisely explains the appeal of shows such as [...] *Changing Rooms*, premised as they are upon a central moment of apparently unmediated, unedited response, a guarantee of intensity, and authenticity...”(314)

The use of independent and amateur video for Indymedia and other progressive movements serves a similar function. In fact, amateur and small digital cameras (very much like Paige’s small camera) have proven essential “for documenting marches and events ignored by the mainstream media, for creating educational and community programming, for adding diversity to social discourse on issues, and for documenting police brutality and other oppressive encounters” (Ouellette 171). Since the most recent Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) protest in Miami, FL, Indymedia has posted a request that reads: “Miami Activist Defense needs your testimonies, photos, and particularly VIDEO footage in preparing for the mass defense and civil litigation” (FTAA, emphasis in the original). The emphasis on the need for video footage calls to mind Marcos’ insistence on the real. The video acts as a marker of authenticity and real

reality. The very name of the Indymedia video news program, “newsREAL,” highlights the desire and the political necessity to capture something more real and more authentic than mass media can provide. Certainly, the Miami City Council realized the power of this desire when they attempted to ban video and still cameras for the duration of the protest (Anderberg). They were ultimately unsuccessful in this ban because of the very protests and action campaigns organized by Internet activists in response to the proposed ordinance. This connection, this reterritorialization of the video camera by Reality TV and Net activism, points towards a desire to utilize a commercialized tool for independent purposes; yet, it also makes explicit the attempts by both mass media and government organizations to remove this productive power from the multitude. Interestingly enough, the Paige-cam” seems to recognize what Marcos and Indymedia perhaps do not: that video evidence is not necessarily truth or “reality.” As Sasha Torres, in an investigation of the “ideology of liveness” and the Rodney King video, quotes Judith Butler concerning the pedagogical value of the seemingly misguided verdict: “what the trial and its horrific conclusions teach us is that there is no simple recourse to the visible, to visual evidence, that it still and always calls to be read, that it is already a reading” (142). Video, or visual evidence, then, is not simply a valueless or more-truth-bearing representation. It is a reading, a series of truths that are up for grabs.

The significance of the use of the camera to capture “reality” in both Reality programming and Internet activism has been illuminated in a particularly contradictory way through the recent war in Iraq and the difference in coverage between the mainstream news media and websites like YellowTimes. Unlike the mass media shutout of protestor’s voices in Seattle, the mainstream news coverage of the Iraq war was billed

as the ultimate Reality show. As Peter Jennings notes, “the military wanted Americans to see war as it *really* is” (Anderson 6). Thus, the Pentagon arranged to have over six hundred journalists “embedded” with American and British military units. This embedding produced reporting that was, according to a recent report put out by the Project for Excellence in Journalism, “dramatic but not graphic” (“Embedded Reporters”). The author of the report goes on to explain that “the battle for Iraq is war as we’ve never seen it before. It is the first full-scale American military engagement in the age of the Internet, multiple cable channels and a mixed media culture that has stretched the definition of journalism” (“Embedded Reporters”). In “That’s Militainment!”, an article in *Extra!*, the magazine of the media watchdog FAIR, Robin Anderson looks at the “entertainment value” of this most recent war and the role that “embedding” played in the mass media coverage. “Militainment” signifies the contradictory nature of mainstream media’s coverage of the war—it is live, dramatic, and highly influenced by the reporter’s position within the unit. Indeed, in a pre-war briefing, Pentagon officials told journalists, “The idea is by making you a part of the unit, you’ll be a member of the team” (Anderson 6). While this “membership” in the “team” of the US and British military forces has resulted in unprecedented access to the battlefield, there has also been a strange disjuncture between the reality of the war and the “propriety” of certain images and points of view. As Tom Brokaw notes, “Television cannot ever adequately convey the sheer brute force of war, the noise and utter violence” (Anderson 8). Instead, as Anderson explains, we were allowed to see “the Iraq reality war [...] war as adrenaline rush, with no responsibility” (8). It became war from the perspective of the hometown soldier, the face of the military, and the reporter as near-soldier. With soldiers unable to

discuss their “real” feelings due to the Uniform Code of Military Justice and constraints on military personnel discussing their views of decisions made by officers or the President, and the inability of embedded reporters to access Iraqi citizens, the “reality” of the war was highly constructed (Ganey 30). As Peter Arnett of NBC gushed after seeing a battle up-close, “It’s an amazing sight, just like out of an action movie, but this is real” (Anderson 7). The fiction and the reality meet. In the desire to present a “real” moment of war, the result is something like *Trading Spaces* or *Survivor*, suffused with human emotion and excitement, but ultimately a signifier of the intangibility of reality.

This particular vision of the war was challenged by sites like YellowTimes, which displayed images and messages that were not within the official embedded sphere of “reality” for the Iraq war. YellowTimes claims on their homepage:

Today we live in an age of *yellow journalism*, where the mainstream media sensationalizes their content in order to increase circulation and increase profits. By putting television shows such as *Survivor* on the cover of their newspapers, or nicknaming a horrible conflict as a *showdown*, these guilty parties have given up on real journalism. During these *yellow times* in which we live, YellowTimes.org offers you an alternative. (YellowTimes, emphasis in the original)

Thus, YellowTimes positions itself in opposition to the Reality programming of the war. YellowTimes offers reality as opposed to Reality TV. In particular, during the war, YellowTimes presented alternative images of the “reality” of the Iraq war—pictures of Iraqi civilian casualties and American POWs. These images, according to YellowTimes, were the reality of the war, the truth that counteracted the narrow vision of the embedded reporters. As might be expected, the site was promptly taken off-line by its host, Vortech. According to an e-mail from the company, “As NO TV station in the US is allowing any dead US soldiers or POWs to be displayed...we will not either” (Anderson 8). The “alternative media” could not define the reality of the war; the Internet activist could not

determine the parameters of the discourse. The television and, in particular, the mainstream televisual news media, through the figure of the embedded journalist, was responsible for shaping the reality of the war. YellowTimes, in its attempt to reappropriate the authority of news-maker, in its deterritorialization of the mediascape, was simply shut down by its host. It was silenced because of its destabilization of media divides. Thus, the constraints of the two forms become clearer. Reality TV can never show reality, yet it opens up a critique or at least signifies the intangibility of reality. Internet activism, on the other hand, can perhaps show reality of a sort, but it too is still at the mercy of the commerciality of its apparatus

CHAPTER 5 THE FEAR FACTOR: THE VALUE OF MOBILE SCREENS

The call to action and simultaneous destabilization of media divides is taken in a new direction by the movement away from the stationary screen to the mobile or even disappearing screen. As Reality TV is a mobile and fragmentary series of texts that move from the televisual screen to the computer to the newsroom and even the battlefield, Web activism also shifts from the computer, to the streets, the television, and now the screen-in-motion. A mobile, wireless, networking has entrenched itself in world culture. Perhaps this wireless movement can be best illustrated through the ubiquity of the cellular phone. As of the summer of 2003, North America alone had 171 million mobile phone users, and the total number of global users is estimated at 1.32 billion (Cellular). SMS or “Short Messaging Service” (aka “texting”) has become a booming market for wireless corporations. In the UK, for example, over 20 billion text messages were sent by the end of 2003 compared to 16.8 billion for 2002 (Text It). And as of 2002, one in five people owned a mobile phone. The relative affordability of the technology has enabled a connectivity that was never before possible, especially in Third World areas where a landline or personal computer was prohibitively expensive. Indeed, Cellular technology has proven to be a boon for bridging the telecommunications divide between some Third World areas and First World nations. Landlines have proven prohibitively expensive to obtain and maintain throughout much of the world. For example, in Africa, “the main landlines are 18 per 1,000 people compared to the world average of 146 per

1,000. Developed countries average 567 per 1,000. For each phone line in Africa, there are 55 five people queuing to call.” (Mulumba). The affordability, accessibility, and techno-novelty of cellular communication have proven to be seductive for both Reality television programmers and activists alike.

Mobile technology is most often used in Reality programs as a part of the “game.” *Big Brother*, *American Idol*, and *Trading Spaces*: “Home Free” allow you to text message in your choice for the winner. Last season’s *American Idol*, for example, boasted 7.5 million American Idol-related text messages sent by AT&T wireless customers (Caouette). This season, AT&T Wireless, the official sponsor of *American Idol*, is expanding the ways in which people can join in the Reality program. Fans can now send text message the judges, host, and contestants, play interactive games, and access video content. As Andre Dahan, President of AT&T Wireless Mobile Multimedia Services recently gushed:

The country has embraced interactive text messaging with more fervor than anyone anticipated. Television viewers now expect to be part of the action - and there's no turning back. The wireless phone has earned a permanent place alongside the television remote. Text messaging has proven to be the key that opens the door to increased viewer participation in reality television, and this is just the beginning of what we have planned for integrating text messaging into other non-conventional arenas. (Caouette)

The viewer becomes voter through the mobile phone. The e-mail application is morphed into text-messaging which allows the audience member to actually “take part in the action” of *American Idol* as never before. Last season’s voting finale, for example, actually fueled a controversy concerning call-in voting: “Many people received busy signals during the final three hours of voting on Tuesday, causing some to suspect that, in shades of the 2000 Bush vs. Gore presidential contest, the lost votes might have produced

a different result” (Graham). The interactivity through landline connections and cellular call-ins blocked some viewers from interacting in the program. Their voice could not be heard. Text-messaging voters did not experience this problem. They were able to register their vote without fear of a busy signal. Nonetheless, this notion of “voting” or “taking part” through SMS is still limited by the very commercial medium of television and mobile technology. It is Meikle’s notion of the interactive. As Brian Eno explains, “Interactive makes you imagine people sitting with their hands on controls, some kind of gamelike thing [...] Interactivity means never having to get off the couch” (28). The wireless phone can literally sit on the coffee table, in its “permanent place alongside the television remote.” Also, like the remote control, the text messaging interaction with *American Idol* is highly limited by marketing concerns. Since AT&T Wireless is the show’s sponsor, it is also the only carrier through which SMS votes will be accepted. The sponsorship creates barriers for who can and cannot vote through SMS, for those who will and will not experience a busy signal.

Nonetheless, unlike the television remote, the mobile phone can leave the coffee table and interact outside the televisual sphere. The wireless screen technology brings the interconnectivity of possible networks into the forefront. In *Smart Mobs*, Howard Rheingold, quoting Paul de Armond in “Black Flag Over Seattle,” writes in reference to the WTO protests in Seattle:

In addition to the organizers’ all-points network, protest communications were leavened with individual protesters using cell phones, direct transmissions from roving independent media feeding directly onto the Internet, personal computers with wireless modems broadcasting live video, and a variety of other networked communications. Floating above the tear gas was a pulsing infosphere of enormous bandwidth, reaching around the planet via the Internet. (161)

The plethora of networked apparatuses formed a complex and engulfing weave of communication possibilities. Of course, the Internet and networking are not merely tied to the personal computer or the website. Our conception of “Internet activism” can perhaps be expanded to consider other networking devices and methods and a new form of political intervention: the “smart mob.” Rheingold defines smart mobs as consisting of:

...people who are able to act in concert even if they don't know each other. The people who make up smart mobs cooperate in ways never before possible because they can carry devices that possess both communication and computing capabilities. Their mobile devices connect them with other information devices in the environment as well as with other people's telephones. (xii)

This mobility allows connections to more stationary devices, individuals, collectivities, commercial and independent medias. The smart mob reworks this mobility to political means through the network. I actually saw this notion of the “smart mob” at work at the AFL-CIO protest of the FTAA meeting in Miami in 2003. As I tried to find my way to the bandstand where the protesters were to meet, I found myself blocked off by police barricades at every turn. I could see throngs of protestors beyond the police lines, but I could not make my way to them. Every time I took a side street, thinking that I would be able to gain access to the permitted protest, I was told by an officer “You can't go this way. Go one turn down.” Of course, I would go “one turn down,” and I would be told to “go one more.” The movement between nodes of disinformation created a circulation of desiring-to-be-protesting protestors. I would walk towards the next pocket, and then other protestors would brush past me saying, “you can't go that way, it's blocked off too. My friend says that we need to go down this block.” I began to look towards the protestors with cell phones in their hands. The unseen conduits of communication were competing

through the air with the helicopters that swooped overhead. We were being led by cell phones. Through cellular communication, friends attempted to map out the direction they had taken to circumnavigate the police barricades. The web of police barricades was “jumped” by the network of cellular communications.

In particular, this enabling of activist mobility through the wireless apparatus also empowers the everyday citizen to effect “voting” and the real world political implications of everyday life. Certainly, the “voting-text” or “Generation Txt” movement has spread throughout much of the world. In January, 2001, over one million residents of Manila, Philippines gathered to demonstrate against President Estrada. In part, they were brought together through text messaging. As Howard Rheingold, the author of *Smart Mobs* notes, “in a country where 40 percent of the population lives on one dollar a day, the fact that text-messages are one-tenth the price of a voice call is significant”; this affordability of SMS encourages Filipinos to send over 70 million text messages every day by 2001 (158). This culture of text messaging made the SMS system particularly amenable to use as an organizing tool. Within in 4 days of the first text message, “Go 2EDSA, Wear blk,” the Estrada government fell. More recently, in Iran, where weak cellular phone networks make voice-to-voice connections almost impossible, SMS has been an incredibly popular method of communication and has moved into the realm of voting as well. During last February’s parliamentary elections, an SMS war was waged between dissidents trying to keep the turnout low in response to the conservative clergy’s disqualification of reformist candidates, and the “Coalition for Iran,” an alliance of political reformists encouraging people to go to the polls. Messages like, “The ballot box will be the coffin of democracy, we will not participate in the funeral of democracy. Send

this message to 5 other people" and "Friday we stay home. It will be a referendum to say 'no'" circulated throughout the wireless network (Pouladi). Voicing in the wireless realm, through the silent SMS, signified exchange of one participation for another. To the reformists, it is real-world voting that will kill democracy. Real-world voting is merely interactive. By extension, it is only through cyber-world text messaging that one can have a voice that cries out "no." On the other hand, the coalitionists encouraged people to "Go and vote massively on Friday" (Pouladi). The rallying cry here is to make your voice heard in the "real-world" realm of politics. The SMS voice cries out "yes" to the possibilities for change through interaction in the political system. These two conflicting dissident SMS voices, however, are not simply free-flowing. As one journalist, who wished to remain anonymous, noted, "You have to pay attention with calls for a boycott because all the messages go through Iranian telecommunications, which can monitor them" (Pouladi). This mobile technology, while allowing for a certain level of voice, is also bounded by the realms of sponsorship and government intervention. Who can or can not vote in *American Idol* via text-messaging is bounded by market concerns, likewise the specter of state monitoring of SMS arises.

Mobile technology, however, is not limited to the small screen of the cellular phone. In a futuristic turn, Reality programs such as *Fear Factor* and *Murder in Small Town X* and research groups like WearComp have created cyborg-style technologies that both expand and integrate the role of the human in the flow of information machines. The screen disappears in favor of the apparatus that translates a "seeing" into televisual and Web discourse. Oddly enough, this translation of "seeing," is often figured in terms of fear. In *Fear Factor* and with Wear Comp's ENGwear, the human is "suited" in

information technologies. The *Fear Factor* contestant will occasionally wear a helmet fitted with a camera, so that the television viewers can better experience the “reality” of the contestant’s fall from the cab of a speeding semi covered in flags they must collect for points. When they slip and fall off the edge of the building they are scaling to win the prize, we can see the experience almost from their point of view; the camera shows their face. We have a close-up of the terror. In the short-lived *Murder in Small Town X*, real contestants attempted to solve a fake murder mystery. Each week two contestants would be forced to pick between two clues to find out “whodunit.” The two participants would then go alone to seek out who had the right clue; the one with the wrong clue was “killed” by the murderer they were seeking out. Interestingly enough, a camera crew did not follow the two contestants; instead, the participants, like in *Fear Factor*, wore head mounted cameras. We, as viewers, had the opportunity to witness the moment of fear when the murder attacked the unsuspecting loser. In both of these cases, in *Fear Factor* and *Murder in Small Town X*, the viewer is able to be inside the action, almost be the participant in simulated and yet seemingly extreme danger. This footage is then edited and recast as “live” danger. We can hear their erratic breathing and mumblings. We take part in the experience of fear and can even know almost what it must be like to see death coming.

In the “Cyborg Manifesto,” Donna Haraway explains that “the tradition of reproduction of the self from the reflections of the other—the relation between organism and machine has been a border war. The stakes in the border war have been the territories of production, reproduction, and imagination.” (150). She goes on to elucidate that the “cyborg myth is about transgressed boundaries, potent fusions, and dangerous

possibilities which progressive people might explore as one part of needed political work” (154). The fear that is highlighted in these Reality programs through the cyborg-technology seems to call forth the very fear of boundary-crossing and the political possibilities therein that Haraway examines. The technology enables a look at the very fear of the death of human that the individually mounted-camera calls forth. Is the individual to be subsumed into the network? What control does the individual have over their representation? What can this cyborg body do? As Deleuze and Guattari note: “we know nothing about a body until we know what it can do, in other words, what its affects are, how they can or cannot enter into composition with other affects, with the affects of another body, either to destroy the body or to be destroyed by it, either to exchange actions and passions with it or to join with it in composing a more powerful body” (257). What can a body do? What is this cyborg body? These questions are at the heart of many science fiction narratives and horror stories. Will the machine dissolve or infect the human? This inability to know what the body can do, specifically in terms of the cyborg body, returns us to the Wolf-Man and the notion of becoming-animal. The very name “Wolf-Man” recalls the fear of being wolf and man as well as the realization of becoming wolf. It is both an opening and a closing, a moment of liberation and reinscription. Thus, crossing boundaries between self and other, human and machine, like the concept of becoming-animal, is political; however, this politics does not necessarily equate to liberation or empowerment. This integration and expansion of the human can be both a reification of hierarchical power structures and a revolutionary possibility.

Howard Rheingold presents a version of this cyborg narrative that is more in line with Internet activism and quest for political power. WearComp’s ENGwear provides a

similar point of view camera angle to the head gear of *Fear Factor* and *Murder in Small Town X*; however, the recorded moments are not compiled and edited. They are shot real time onto streaming Web. Called “an experiment in wearable news-gathering systems” (Rheingold 168), ENGwear is a wearable computer outfitted with “EyeTaps,” which broadcasts whatever the wearer is looking at in real time. In the spring of 2000, Steve Mann, the creator of ENGwear, and his students at the University of Toronto, went to test the ENGwear at a demonstration called by the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty. The protest became violent. Nonetheless, the ENGwear was able to record the event “without conscious effort” on the part of the students (Rheingold 168). What they looked at was streamed on-line. They were able to bare witness simply by looking. With the EyeTap:

...the eye itself [functions] as both a display and a camera. EyeTap is at once the eye piece that displays computer information to the user and a device which allows the computer to process and possibly alter what the user sees. That which the user looks at is processed by the EyeTap. This allows the EyeTap to, under computer control, augment, diminish, or otherwise alter a user's visual perception of their environment, which creates a Computer Mediated Reality [...] When no computer mediation is used, EyeTap video can be displayed to the user in such a way that the user perceives what he/she would otherwise have in the absence of the device. (EyeTap)

The user can either use the wearable computer to manipulate their vision of reality or they can see “normally.” This mediated vision, this cyborg narrative, holds within it the possibilities of interactivity, intercreativity, and smart mob connections. The user, unlike the participants of the reality shows, can manipulate and change their own vision. They can create a “computer mediated reality.” They can edit vision itself; hence, they can edit our vision of events as well. The individual wearer is able to edit her or his own Reality program for us to view. The possibilities of, as Rheingold quotes Mann, “engaging in a process of cultural reclamation, where the individual is put back into the loop of

information production and dispensation” (169) are illuminated through the EyeTap. The EyeTap and ENGwear are still in the process of invention, part of the myth of the cyborg; however, they are also an anticipation of what political tactics may be available to Internet activists in the future.

CHAPTER 6
“IS THAT YOUR FINAL ANSWER?”: THINKING THROUGH THE FRAGMENTS

This project does not seek to give, to use the language of Reality TV, a “final answer” as to what counts as real political involvement and change through Reality TV and Net activism. Instead, I want to gesture towards a mapping of these forms and their “lines of flight,” a seeing of these media not as binary oppositions in the mediascape but as folding and unfolding processes of becoming. It is not necessarily a matter of Reality TV/bad and Internet activism/good. While the overt commerciality of Reality programming and the named “activism” of Web activism may lead us to privilege one form over another, and perhaps this privileging is not entirely incorrect, I am wary of claiming MoveOn or Indymedia as essentially “liberating” or “revolutionary” and *Trading Spaces* or *Survivor* as simply “regressive” or “containing.” Indeed, MoveOn has often been called the “Starbucks” of the progressive movement. As Eli Pariser said in an interview with Andrew Boyd of *The Nation*, “If Nike hadn’t already taken it, our motto would be ‘Just Do It’” (Boyd). MoveOn is often faulted for being too amenable to consumer culture and especially for their support of Democratic Party candidates. Indymedia, on the other hand, because of its “open publishing” policy is often inundated with virulent and anti-Semitic rhetoric. The destabilization between journalist and activist, in this case, is not only subverted but perverted into the position of the hate-monger. However, if, as Andrejevic concludes, Reality television shows us “the inadequacy of commodified reality” (223), and we begin to see this insistence on the

search for the “reality” and the “truth,” in the discourse of an expanded and even more fragmentary notion of these forms and their interconnectivity, perhaps we can begin to see them in a new way, to return to Marcos—“a different way.” The naming of these forms as Reality TV and Internet activism both veils and reveals the possibilities within them. They are more rightly becoming-Reality, becoming-TV, becoming-Internet, becoming-activism. The politics of becoming, according to Deleuze and Guattari, “express minoritarian groups, or groups that are oppressed, prohibited, in revolt, or always on the fringe of recognized institutions, groups all the more secret for being extrinsic, in other words, anomic [...] it is accompanied, at its origin as in its undertaking, by a rupture with the central institutions that have established themselves or seek to become established” (247). This becoming of Reality TV and Internet activism, this strange marriage within each form and the crossing of one into the other at various moments in the line of flight, can perhaps give us a way of expressing a liberatory politics of the multitude in the creation of their own representations.

Like Hardt and Negri’s concept of counterpower that emerges from within as well as in opposition to Empire, in *Postmodernism* Frederic Jameson calls for “a new political art” that allows us to imagine our collective and individual subjectivity in the postmodern sphere of multinational capitalism. Jameson writes that the new political art:

...(if it is possible at all) will have to hold to the truth of postmodernism, that is to say, to its fundamental object—the world space of multinational capital—at the same time at which it achieves a breakthrough to some as yet unimaginable new mode of representing this last, in which we may again begin to grasp our positioning as individual and collective subjects and regain a capacity to act and struggle which is at present neutralized by our spatial as well as our social confusion. The political form of postmodernism, if there ever is any, will have as its vocation the invention and projection of a global cognitive mapping, on a social as well as a spatial scale. (54)

The emergence of a kind of postmodern “political art,” then, must both function within the space of late capitalism and enable the individual to act through and begin to conceptualize their position within the network of a larger, global, community. The question becomes, can this “new political art” ever really exist? While I do not necessarily argue that Jameson’s vision of a “new political art” is realized through the reflection of Reality TV and Internet activism, I do think that we can begin to *imagine* the possibilities for that art in the becoming of these two modes. As recognizing the inadequacy of reality and as intimately invested in the products and productions of late capitalist culture, perhaps we can imagine these Reality TVs and Internet activisms as opening up the possibility of clasp[ing] onto our individual and collective identities, our own becoming. With the continuous repetition and proliferation of Reality programming throughout the world, the sharing of this discourse, and the connection of much of the world through the highways of the Internet, perhaps we can “make do” and find common grounds of resistance with the texts that are before us.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Born in Hattiesburg, MS, Katherine Ann Casey-Sawicki spent much of her childhood traveling throughout the Southern United States. As an adolescent she moved to Maine, where she spent the remainder of her young adulthood. She attended the University of Southern Maine, where she graduated cum laude with a Bachelor of Arts in English literature with a minor in Russian language. In 2002, she then accepted a partial fellowship and assistantship position at the University of Florida. Ms. Casey-Sawicki will graduate in May 2004 with a Master of Arts in English, and then continue to the PhD as an Alumni Fellow at the University of Florida. Her academic interests include New Media Studies, Marxist theory, and fantasy narratives.