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Book section

Manufacturing Dissent:
Visual Metaphors in Community Narratives

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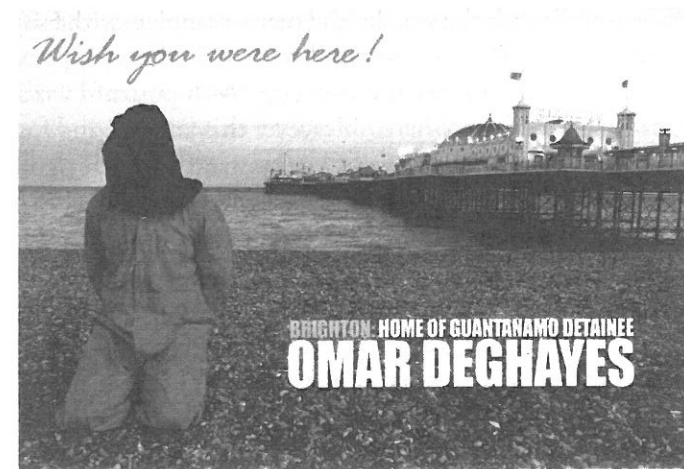
Wishing Omar was here

Protest organisations have traditionally relied on public demonstrations to show the strength of their commitment, draw attention to their cause and recruit fresh support. However, while mass demonstrations are an effective means of launching or consolidating campaigns, they are generally less suited to maintaining public interest in prolonged or slow-moving political issues. In an attempt to create durable and positive frames around

complex global issues, grassroots campaigners are increasingly turning to public relations techniques more commonly associated with corporate cultures. Traditional voices – from both the left and the right – have argued that such public relations based discourses disguise and distract from conventional, reason-based political discourse. However, more contemporary commentators (B. Doherty 2000; Graeber 2004) argue that far from diminishing the quality of political deliberation, these cultural practices stimulate vigorous, accessible and nuanced public debates.

In 2005 anti-war activists in Britain produced a picture postcard which plays upon Brighton's traditional seaside image. The familiar pebble beach fills the foreground while the sea, sky and pier – complete with fairground lights and rides – stretching away in the distance. The curly script expresses the familiarity and warmth usually associated with postcard writing and cheerily reads 'wish you were here!' However this familiar and formulaic scenario is made stark and strange by the postcards fourth element; an orange jump-suited figure kneeling, bound and hooded on the shingle. The blocked letters to the right of the figure read 'Brighton: Home of Guantanamo Detainee Omar Deghayes'. The colour orange gathers and foregrounds the phrase 'wish you were here', the jump-suited figure and the word 'Brighton' and suggests – without offering any explanation – that these three elements are in someway meaningfully interlinked.

The juxtaposition of contradictory elements deliberately unsettles our understanding of the seaside postcard as a genre. In doing so it throws up a number of unexpected questions which must be addressed and evaluated before they can be fully understood. 'Why would a Guantanamo detainee be on Brighton beach?' 'Why would we wish him to be in Brighton rather than in Guantanamo?' 'Where is here?' The text on the back of the postcard further develops this visual conundrum. It reads

Dear Margaret Beckett,

We ask you to make representations to the US government about the illegal detention of Omar Deghayes. If you need to know more about his case please visit www.save-omar.org.uk or come and talk to us in Brighton.

Yours sincerely

Thus while the image on the front of the postcard addresses the spectator, the message on back addresses the government (Margaret Beckett was foreign secretary at the time). As Billig points out 'national topography is routinely achieved through little banal words' (1995, p. 96). In this instance the words '*we* ask *you*', and 'talk to *us*' (author's italics) creates a liberal, civil rights based deixis of home and community. Moreover by requesting the government to engage in transnational talks with the US government it invites 'them' to reposition themselves and become part of a localised 'us'. In this way the postcard attempts to both highlight and disrupt the local, national and global identity formations which define and to a certain extent constitute the debates around the War on Terror.

The website address signposted on the back of the postcard leads to the Save Omar Campaign's home page which gives a comprehensive account of the circumstances surrounding the detention of Omar Deghayes. Here one learns that Omar Deghayes is a 37-year-old man who fled Libya in 1987 when his father was assassinated by the Gaddafi regime. The Deghayes family were granted exceptional leave to remain and settled down in Saltdean. Omar went to school in Brighton and studied law at university intending to become a human rights lawyer. In 2001 he went travelling in Malaysia, Pakistan and Afghanistan where he met and married his wife. Following the attack on the World Trade Centre Omar attempted to return to Britain with his wife and child. However, he was captured by bounty hunters in Pakistan who returned him to Afghanistan where he was held in Bagram airbase until his transferral to Guantanamo Bay in 2002.[1]

Whilst material produced by the Save Omar Campaign's website clearly asserts a belief in Omar's innocence it did not demand his unqualified release. Instead it emphasised the human rights abuses suffered by Omar Deghayes and called for his right to a free and fair trial under the rules of the Geneva Convention. In order to achieve this end, Save Omar campaigners engaged in many traditional grassroots activities such as

[1]   The information in this paragraph is taken from a fact sheet produced by the Save Omar Campaign.

collecting signatures, orchestrating demonstrations and lobbying key political figures. However, the campaign went beyond simply attempting to instigate change through establishment channels and embarked on a public relations initiative designed to strengthen its position by winning over public opinion. Consequently activists invested a considerable amount of time and energy in creating and promoting – through their increasingly close relationship with *Brighton and Hove Argus* – a series of innovative public events which visually encapsulate the plight of Omar Deghayes.

A few days after Tony Blair announced his intention to resign as leader of the Labour Party – but well before he actually did so – Gordon Brown came to speak at the Brighton Festival. Save Omar campaigners drew attention to Omar's case by raising the issue inside the Dome and by protesting noisily outside it. Both protests were covered sympathetically by the *Brighton and Hove Argus* in an article which discussed Brown's plans 'to win back the support of Brighton and Hove's disenchanted labour supporters' ('Gordon Brown visits Brighton', *Brighton and Hove Argus*, 14 March 2007). Following the 'stable and orderly transition' of power within the labour party, Gordon Brown signalled his break with the Blairite past by reversing the government's position on the detention of British Residents in Guantanamo Bay (Prisoner request another change from Blair era, http://news.bbc.co.uk). As a result detainees with British residency who had previously been denied consular support were offered some of the same rights and protections enjoyed by British citizens. Having been detained illegally and without charge for five years, Omar Deghayes was finally returned to Britain in 2007. Since then he – and the campaign – have successfully fought Spanish extradition charges against him and are now in the process of securing his right to remain in the United Kingdom.

The implications raised by this move into a more explicitly mediated public arena can be illuminated by turning to the work of Chantal Mouffe. In *On the Political*, Mouffe maintains that 'a well functioning democracy calls for a clash of legitimate democratic political positions' (2005, p. 30) between legitimate adversaries. However, while parliamentary debates may still be capable of accommodating differentiated positions on the

war against terror, the uncompromising 'with-us-or-against-us' rhetoric of US foreign policy makes maintaining a nuanced position within the public sphere difficult (http://archives.cnn.com/2001/US/11/06/gen.attack.on.terror/). Consequently mediated public debates surrounding the war on terror tend to foreground religious, political and cultural differences. For example public discourses on Muslim women's role in the western workplace centred around the notion of the veil as a 'barrier' or 'mark of separation' (http://politics.guardian.co.uk/homeaffairs/story/0,,2017271,00.html). These antagonistic divisions make it particularly difficult for groups like the Save Omar Campaign to overcome the 'friend/enemy distinction' (Mouffe 2005, p. 15) and articulate a coherent and cohesive public response to the detention of 'enemy combatants' in Guantanamo Bay.

This chapter will examine the way in which Save Omar campaigners have attempted to negotiate the frictions and fractures which characterise this uneasy terrain by unsettling the boundaries which surround current debate. It will argue that activists have employed public relations techniques in general and visual metaphors in particular to create a route through which alternative ways of thinking can move from the political margins to the mainstream. Moreover it will suggest that in their attempts to avoid the religious, political and cultural divisions which characterise the mainstream's coverage of the war on terror, activists have framed their appeal within the notion of a shared community. It will explore the way in which the visual metaphors enacted by the Save Omar Campaign tend to be situated within a specific and localised context and argue that by building Omar's prison number in pebbles by the pier or by imagining his face reflected on the Pavilion campaigners *successfully* sought 'local solutions to globally produced problems' (Bauman 2004, p. 6). Thus this chapter will conclude by suggesting that activists' explicit use of artifice has enabled them, in conjunction with the local paper, to bring 'human rights abuses and the disastrous nature of the war on terror to the doorsteps of Brighton residents' (Wells, *The New Statesman and Society*, 31 October 2005).

Before going on to analyse activists' use of visual metaphors in detail it is necessary to pause briefly and examine some of the theoretical debates

which underpin this discussion. In his seminal work 'The Public Sphere: An Encyclopaedia Article' Habermas famously defines the public sphere as a 'sphere which mediates between society and the state, in which the public organises itself as the bearer of public opinion.' A crucial element of this understanding lies in Habermas' belief that 'access to the public sphere is open in principle to all citizens'. Moreover, according to Habermas, those who participate in the public sphere 'set aside such characteristics as difference of birth and fortune and speak to one another as if they were social and economic peers' (Fraser 1998, p. 63). This emphasis on temporary equality is an attempt to guard against coercion and 'guarantee that they may assemble and unite freely, and express and publicise their opinions freely.'[2] In this way one can understand Habermas' classical interpretation of the public sphere as a universally accessible space in which individual differences are set aside in order to facilitate reasoned debate and achieve a consensus in public opinion.

The role of demonstrative events within the public sphere is an ambiguous one. As far as Habermas is concerned, the introduction of any sort of 'public body of organised private individuals' such as a protest organisation who go through the 'the process of making public' their arguments, inevitably contribute to the structural disintegration of the public sphere (1989, p. 55). Furthermore Habermas' traditional emphasis on 'conversation, reading and plain speech as worthy forms of discourse' combined with his open hostility towards the theatre, courtly forms, ceremony, the visual and to rhetoric more generally (J.D. Peters 1993, p. 562) clearly make creating a space for visual metaphors within the public sphere difficult. Indeed even politically sympathetic commentators such as George McKay have pointed out that protest culture in general and direct action movements in particular are invariably dominated by a 'culture of immediacy' (1998, p. 12) which prioritise spectacle and confrontation at the expense of more traditionally reflexive qualities such as 'reflection, history [and] theory' (1998, p. 13).

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2   All the Habermas quotes in this paragraph are taken from 'The Public Sphere: An Encyclopaedia Article' (1974).

However the same communicative processes can be approached from a slightly different and more positive perspective. According to this view the use of visual metaphors provides an opportunity, albeit limited, for ordinary people to take active control of their circumstances and produce their own outcomes. The space for this argument is created in Habermas' article 'Further Reflections on the Public sphere' which was published in 1992. In this article Habermas inches towards a position which acknowledges the role of demonstrative events and makes a rather grudging distinction between democratically unacceptable and almost respectable communicative processes. Unacceptable processes are those defined as being 'promoted by organisations intervening in a public sphere under the sway of the mass media to mobilise purchasing power, loyalty or conformist behaviour' (1992, p. 437). These communicative processes are contrasted with 'Self-regulated, horizontally interlinked, inclusive, and more or less discourse-resembling communicative processes' (1992, p. 437) which are somewhat reluctantly, tolerated.

This theoretical chink allows for what has been described as the 'sluice-gate' model of the public sphere to exist (Herbert 2005, p. 107). The sluice gate model allows for the movement of issues from the lifeworld to the systems world through the enactment of high profile action such as national boycotts or infringements of particular laws. This model is clearly far more tolerant of grassroots organisations that use demonstrative events in order to introduce marginal issues into the public realm. The potential inherent in this model can be illustrated by examining environmental organisations and the anti-globalisation movement's use of high profile direct actions. Direct actions are frequently a practical intervention designed to stop or at least delay 'undesirable' state activities, such as passing repressive laws, surrendering to global economies or destroying local habitats and communities, and have proved themselves to be an increasingly viable means of securing access to mainstream political arena.

Many contemporary pressure groups such as environmental and anti-globalisation organisations are rooted in a sub-cultural ethos which shares Habermas' distrust of spin and spectacle. Thus many activists emphasise the way in which direct actions go beyond mere surface and constitute

'an act of non-compliance, an act of authenticity to one's own beliefs' in themselves (Corrine and Bee cited in McKay 1998, p. 5). Brian Doherty adds a further layer of meaning to the term 'direct action' by coining the term 'demonstrative action'. He argues that demonstrative actions such as those employed by environmental or anti-globalisation organisations are dual in their purpose. On the one hand they 'mak[e] power visible by prolonging its exposure' and on the other they 'attempt[] to change government policy directly' by mobilising mass disapproval of the status quo (2000, p. 70). Thus he highlights the way in which politically motivated action can demonstrate the social consequences of particular policies to a wider public and instigate social and political change.

According to this view, direct actions combine 'social criticism' with 'cultural creativity in what is both a utopian gesture and a practical display of resistance' (McKay 1998, p. 27). However demonstrative actions, unlike direct actions, necessarily go beyond physically responding to the governmental policies of the day. They also involve the production of 'symbolic challenges' (Melucci 1989, p. 75) which attempt to embody alternative organisations' resistance to the status quo on a cultural level. These challenges are particularly pertinent in a political environment in which the authorities are reasserting geographical control of contested processes and spaces. Thus for example while peace activists in the 70s were able to camp outside Greenham, today's anti-war activists can not physically demonstrate their opposition to military bases such as Guantanamo or Bagram. Campaigners are therefore increasingly obliged to focus more heavily on the symbolic aspects of demonstrative actions in their attempts to further develop the parameters of contemporary public discourses.

It ought to be noted that the use of visual metaphors are not in themselves an entirely new phenomenon. Even in the late eighteenth century, when according to Habermas the public sphere was functioning at the peak of its perfection, special interest groups were employing demonstrative events in order to illustrate and publicise their cause. Thus the spoiling of British tea in Boston Harbour was a symbolic act which scandalised drawing rooms across England, 'captured the imagination of the rebels' and precipitated America's battle for independence (Downing 1995, p. 240). However, as J.D. Peters points out, basic economies of

scale prevent conversation from fulfilling its prescribed role within the contemporary public sphere. Consequently he argues that, in order to address the masses, some form of 'aesthetic representation' (1993, p. 565) must be allowed. This chapter argues that activists' sophisticated and contextualised use of visual metaphors contributes to a 'new language of resistance' (Graeber 2004, p. 208), which deliberately unsettles preconceived understandings of political situations and therefore contributes to the invigoration rather than erosion of the twenty-first century public sphere.

Unsettled Spaces

In order to move away from a view of demonstrative events and visual metaphors as somehow inherently hollow, and towards an understanding of political imagery as potentially beneficial, it is necessary to focus in more detail on the nature of the visual. In her collection of essays on the 'virtue of the image' (1996) Barbara Stafford points out there is a long and sophisticated line of thought which differentiates between 'imagery used as equivalents to discourse (or as illustration)' and imagery used as 'an untranslatable constructive form of cognition (as an expression)' (1996, p. 27). According to this second definition, images should be understood not as empty displays of visual rhetoric but as meaningful acts in themselves. In order to further explore the way in which activists' use of artificially constructed visual metaphors can produce real change in political circumstances and create new ways of thinking within the community this essay will focus in detail on one of the many visual metaphors enacted by the Save Omar campaign.

In the summer of 2006 Save Omar activists learned that Starbucks was selling coffee to American service personnel stationed in Guantanamo Bay. They emailed the company asking them to clarify their role in operations at the camp and received a reply stating that as an international company Starbucks was obliged to 'refrain from taking a position on the legality of

the detention centre at Guantanamo Bay' (personal email 26 May 2006). The company went on to deny having a Starbucks outlet on the island whilst simultaneously acknowledging that they did provide coffee to US service personal based at the camp. The exchanges between Starbucks' executive liaison officer and various anti-war activists were circulated widely along the protest networks of the World Wide Web (http:// www.business-humanrights.org/Links/Repository/587011; http://www. reports-and-materials.org/Further-exchange-between-Starbucks-Quilty-about-Guantanamo-May-2006.doc). In an attempt to inform a wider non-activist, non-internet based public of this contradictory position and capitalise on another campaigning opportunity, Save Omar campaigners orchestrated a demonstrative event which took place in two Brighton Starbucks outlets.

On 3 June 2006, 25 activists entered Starbucks on Western Road and North Road. Each group of activists included two members dressed in the iconic orange jumpsuits and black hoods that have come to signify civil rights abuses in Guantanamo Bay. These activists stood or crouched in silence while another member of the group read out a brief statement asking customers to reflect upon the circumstances surrounding Omar Deghayes illegal detention and Starbucks' role in operations at Guantanamo Bay while they drank their coffee. They also distributed leaflets which gave a fuller account of Starbucks' relationship with the US military and appealed directly to the 'people of Brighton' to differentiate themselves from the global brand by 'not ... "refrain[ing] from taking a position"' (personal email 26 May 2006). In this way Save Omar campaigners used a visual image of detainees in a coffee shop to make a connection between a global situation and a localised response.

The Save Omar Campaign's strategy follows in the methodological footprints of previous grass-roots campaigns against international companies such as Starbucks, Nike and Gap. These campaigns attempt to tag global brands with negative connotations in order to provoke political, social or cultural change. In his analysis of the North American Fair Trade coffee network, Lance Bennett argues that the organisation successfully attached its political message to the Starbucks' coffee drinking experience, thereby persuading 'one of the chief corporate purveyors of that

experience' (2003, p. 30) to fundamentally alter their business practices. Whilst Nike and Gap have been somewhat recalcitrant in accepting the criticisms of anti-globalisation protesters, Starbucks have positively embraced an ethical, humanitarian business ethos. In this way what was once a source of shame and embarrassment for Starbucks has become one of its most potent selling points. This shift is reflected in one of the company's leaflet and poster campaigns which proudly depicts a fair traded coffee producer beneath the trade-marked slogan 'coffee tastes best when you know that it's doing good'![3]

Despite this apparent confidence, Starbucks is inevitably still acutely aware of the impact which an orchestrated and sustained campaign can have upon its economic bottom line. The brand is still frequently associated with negative economic and cultural trends such as global homogenisation and corporate domination. Indeed, the week before the Save Omar Campaign's occupation of Starbucks, just such an article had appeared in *The Brighton and Hove Argus* ('Coffee chain bid scares traders', 26 May 2006). However, while campaigners were clearly attempting to mobilise a stakeholder boycott of Starbucks, this was not necessarily their sole concern. Indeed the occupation of Starbucks, like the postcard discussed at the start of this essay is explicitly dual in its address. The Save Omar campaigners were also attempting to access what the company's customer care specialist describes as 'the very personal connection customers have with Starbucks' (http://www.business-humanrights.org/ Links/Repository/587011) in order to provoke a re-evaluation of public opinion in relation to Guantanamo Bay in general and Omar Deghayes in particular.

In order to make this connection, Save Omar activists employed what Smith and Katz would describe as a spatial metaphor. In their article 'Grounding Metaphor: Towards a Spatialised Politics', Smith and Katz argue that

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3   This poster was seen in selected Brighton-based Starbucks in the summer of 2007 and has since become part of an extended promotional campaign.

Metaphors work by invoking one meaning system to explain or clarify another. The first [source domain] meaning system is apparently concrete, well understood, unproblematic, and evokes the familiar ... The second 'target domain' is elusive opaque, seemingly unfathomable, without meaning donated from the source domain. (Smith and Katz 1993, p. 69)

Smith and Katz maintain that 'it is precisely the apparent familiarity of space, the givenness of space, its fixity and inertness that makes a spatial grammar so fertile for appropriation' (Smith and Katz 1993, p. 69). The ways in which this dialectic between source and target domains can be opened out to create a plethora of resisting domains can be illustrated by examining the metaphorical implications raised by the Starbucks action in more detail.

According to Lance Bennett 'entering a Starbucks puts one in a quiet world with quality product, surrounded by quality people, soothed by demographically chosen music ... and tempted by kitchen coffee gadgets ...' (2003, p. 29). In this way one could argue that Starbucks offers the individual 'cultural materials to fashion an identity' (Barry et al. 2000, p. 122) in an environment designed to 'put people at ease for the purpose of spending time and money' (Purkis 1996, p. 215). The outlets chosen by Save Omar activists constitutes a particularly potent source domain because they are both situated in newly regenerated parts of Brighton which have come to symbolise the move away from the city's traditionally slightly seedy seafront appeal and towards a far more urban and aspirational cultural ethos. Thus, for example, the hundred metre stretch of road which brackets the North Road outlet is occupied by an award-winning environmentally friendly library, a Brazilian cocktail bar, a Japanese noodle bar and the quality food emporium Carluccio's. In this way the Starbucks on North Road exists within an architectural context designed to articulate to those both within and beyond the community that Brighton is a cool, cosmopolitan and cultured place to live.

George Ritzer maintains that '*Starbuck's major innovation has been in the realm of theatrics* [his italics]' and goes on to argue that customers take pleasure in witnessing the ongoing show taking place in their local Starbucks (2007, p. 9). However, this careful cultural construction is immediately and deliberately complicated by the activists' articulation of the metaphor's target domain, i.e. the bound and hooded faux detainee. Activists' entry into Starbucks immediately crystallises two contrasting forms of public discourse into a single 'ideologically loaded' image (Ruiz 2005, p. 201). Thus the normally unobjectionable activity of consuming coffee is juxtaposed with the appalling human rights abuses suffered by 'enemy combatants' in Guantanamo Bay. In this way protesters' actions create a situation in which not only 'the strange is rendered familiar, but the apparently familiar is made equally strange' (Smith and Katz 1993, p. 71). Like the postcard discussed previously this demonstrative action requires viewers to confront this clash of contradictory elements and cognitively evaluate a number of unexpected issues before being able to resolve the visual conundrum.

Smith and Katz maintain that critics have traditionally neutralised space rendering it politically and analytically neutral in order to provide a 'semblance of order in an otherwise floating world of ideas' (Smith and Katz 1993, p. 80). However more contemporary commentators (Fournier 2002; Cuppers 2005) have questioned this understanding arguing that small scale grass-roots movements are particularly adept at creating politically challenging conceptual spaces. Purkis argues that these protest spaces are particularly potent when they are located in private places – such as coffee shops – which are 'normally conceived of as safe from political agitation' (1996, p. 215). '"Colonizing" private space' (Purkis 1996, p. 215) in this way disrupt the status quo and creates a sense of 'estrangement' which makes perfectly 'normal' activities – such as drinking coffee – look suddenly 'strange, absurd, grotesque' (Fournier 2002, p. 194). In this way, protesters create an 'ambivalent position between strangeness and familiarity' (Cuppers 2005, p. 12) which jolts spectators out of their usual state of distraction and encourages them to re-evaluate the discourses which surround them.

According to Szersynski visual metaphors create a political semiotic field without 'a zero degree,' one in which there is 'no stable ground on which to stand, rather an ever-shifting surface of partial perspectives' (2003, p. 201). The unsettled nature of these spaces can temporarily 'unfix' the meanings usually ascribed to them, enabling 'each interested party'

to attempt 'to place their discourse onto it' (Purkis 2000, p. 216). These spaces are particularly valuable to resource protest groups as they enable them to call the dominant narrative into question. Moreover, their intrinsically photogenic nature means that such events are frequently reported in the mainstream press ensuring that they reach as wide an audience as possible. Thus despite Starbucks' company care specialists reassuring e-mails, the issue was raised and discussed further, both within the alternative and the mainstream community (http://www.indymedia.org.uk/en/2006/06/341924.html, 'Can the Coffee', *Brighton and Hove Argus*, 31 May 2006). In this way, spatial metaphors create a space in which source and target domains temporarily overlap forcing even reluctant participants to engage in an 'untranslatable constructive form of cognition' (Stafford 1996, p. 27).

A Shared Here

Demonstrative actions, such as the one described above, are part of protest organisations' long and honourable tradition in bearing witness (Seels and Paterson 2000). They are predicated in the belief that public awareness of wrong-doings will somehow force perpetrators to modify their own behaviour. This strategy's ideological roots lie in the work of philosophers such as Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill and their belief in the ethically purifying qualities of publicity. As George McKay points out large-scale non-governmental organisations such as Greenpeace have developed this strategy one step further by videoing themselves attempting to stop, or at least impede, ethically dubious actions and events such as the killing of minke whales in the North Atlantic Ocean. This forces 'everybody [to] bear witness – through news dispatches, voice reports, press releases, columns and of course photographs' (McKay 1998, p. 10). This is a theoretical position which has been successfully appropriated on a far smaller scale by resource-poor organisations.

J.D. Peters maintains that 'witnessing presupposes a discrepancy between the ignorance of one person and the knowledge of another' (Peters 2001, p. 710). This is a view which has informed much alternative news production and hinges on the notion that knowledge implies a certain degree of responsibility which will in turn lead to action. Thus Chris Atton cites Sam Beale, editor of *Squall*, as saying that his motivation lies in ensuring that MPs cannot 'say they don't know' about a particular issue or problem (2002, p. 92). Smith and Katz maintain that geographical encounters require a renegotiation of the social as well as the spatial. Thus individuals who have been 'confronted, challenged and even shamed' (McKay 1998, p. 29) by demonstrative actions are encouraged to redefine group identity boundaries. Chatterton goes further and maintains that the construction of explicitly 'uncommon ground' between actors and spectators creates connections, which can unsettle the essentialisms between 'activist and public, the committed and the caring' (2006, p. 272). Thus activists' use of demonstrative events and visual metaphors open up 'a moment of hope' which 'undermines dominant understandings of what is possible and opens up new conceptual spaces for imagining and practising possible futures' (Fournier 2002, p. 184).

This chapter has argued that in this instance Save Omar activists' colonisation of Starbucks adeptly fuses 'the real with the symbolic and transcends normal notions of time and space (Purkis 1996, p. 205). In this way the visual metaphor acts as a mechanism which both foregrounds and collapses the literal and metaphorical spaces between localised actions and their global implications. The metaphor's domains can be read in a number of possible ways. They can be read corporately in which case the metaphor's source domain – the purchasing of coffee in Brighton – stands in relation to its target domain – the purchasing of coffee in Guantanamo Bay. This reading forces Brighton's bohemian coffee drinking population into a position of ambivalent moral equivalence with the US Military. Alternatively, the metaphor can be read within the context of community. According to this view the coffee drinker stands in relation to Omar Deghayes – a man legally resident in Brighton but actually detained in Guantanamo Bay.

Both interpretations blur the boundaries between a multiplicity of almost overlapping narratives and remain deliberately unresolved, thus encouraging witnesses 'to visualize other understandings of the friend/enemy distinction' (Moufee 2005, p. 15).

As has been discussed previously, protest organisations such as the Save Omar Campaign are located within a particularly difficult media terrain. Moreover they, like most grassroots groups, are at a considerable disadvantage in that they must enter mainstream arenas without the economic resources and professional expertise enjoyed by their establishment opposition. However, it could be argued that the move away from 'costly investigative journalism' and towards more reactive forms of journalism that relies on 'routine source supply' (Curran 2000, p. 35) has had a surprisingly beneficial effect on alternative media strategies. For, as campaigning journalist George points out as in *An Activist's Guide to Exploiting the Media*, protest organisations which are prepared to engage with mainstream media providers have an advantage over their corporate/government counterparts in that they tend to be 'colourful, fun, outlandish and outrageous' and are therefore more able to capture the jaded eye of local journalists (http://www.urban75.com/Action/media.html).

Moreover, protest organisations such as the Save Omar Campaign are proving themselves to be particularly adept in their management of the local media. Thus, events such as the occupation of Starbucks are preceded by reliable and engaging press releases, photographers and journalists are met by knowledgeable and articulate activists and any resulting coverage is invariably followed up by contributions to the local letters page. This professionalism makes events organised by the Save Omar Campaign a dependable and attractive source of news for working journalists. *Argus* journalist Andy Dickinson describes Save Omar Campaigners as a reliable and innovative news source who are 'constantly managing to come up with a new thing' (2006, in interview). The Campaign has further capitalised on this dynamic by basing its call for support on the notion of community. This is a particularly attractive frame for local media as it enables journalists – particularly young and ambitious journalists – to tackle global concerns without abandoning local 'constituency issues' (Wells, *The New Statesman and Society*, 31 October 2005).

Of course this strategy of engagement is not without its risks. As Hollingsworth points out, organisations from the radical left constantly run the risk of being labelled 'the enemy within' and finding that the 'the usual rules for fair and balanced reporting' have been abandoned (1986, p. 289) in favour of easy headlines and increased circulation figures. Such a moment was encountered by the Save Omar Campaign when national journalist Abul Taher from *The Times* infiltrated their meetings and ran a hostile exposé (http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/uk/article675998.ece) which could easily have threatened the relationship between campaigners and local journalists. This sense of precariousness is exacerbated by divisions within the activist community between those who see engagement with the mainstream media as part and parcel of an activist's work and those who feel 'cheapened and compromised' by contact with the potentially underhand actions of corporate journalists (Monbiot, http://www.urban75.com/Action/media.html).

Essential to this juggling act is the notion of authenticity, as this is what gives activists political capital both within and beyond the movement. Crucially, according to traditionalist critiques, the manipulation of the masses by the media in general and the public relations industry in particular, takes place '*without* public awareness of its activities' (McChesney 1997, p. 15, author's italics). However activists' deliberate use of artifice enables them to foreground, rather than disguise, the persuasive nature of their appeal and thus side-step the 'sense of deceitfulness' which Corner identifies as being at the core of both propaganda and spin (Corner 2007, p. 673). In this way their symbolic (and therefore explicitly unreal) forms of protest allow them to distinguish themselves from the 'self-interested strategizing ... and vapid slogans that are customarily imputed to candidates for governmental office' (Feher 2007, p. 13). Thus the Save Omar Campaign's use of explicitly constructed images enables them to maintain an elevated degree of authenticity and thus avoid both external and internal accusations of spin.

It could be argued that the some of the anxiety provoked by campaigners' use of political imagery is rooted in an anxiety over what lies

disguised beneath the surface of signs and images. In his book *The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-Events in America*, Boorstin examines the relationship between spontaneous and fabricated events and comes to the conclusion that the artifice of sought-after publicity can achieve little of substance in the real world. He maintains that manufactured images (as opposed to raw ideals) are 'more interesting and attractive than spontaneous events' (1961, p. 37) and therefore seduce us away from the more mundane 'truth' of reality. Boorstin argues that 'aesthetic representations' are nothing more than a 'dramatic performance in which men in the news simply acted out more or less well their prepared scripts' (1961, p. 19). Moreover, like Habermas, Boorstin believes that the individual has been corrupted by 'the structural transformation of the public sphere' and 'the graphic revolution' respectively and becomes a passive and uncritical being.

Boorstin's emphasis on pseudo-events' 'interesting ambiguous relation to underlying reality' (1961, p. 21) forces him to acknowledge that a pseudo-event can become a type of self-fulfilling prophecy. As Lane Bruner points out political protest has frequently drawn on a carnivalesque tradition which involves a 'curious blending of the fictive and the real' (2005, p. 140). He goes on to argue – following Bakhtin – that rather than the 'fictional eliding the real' the fictionally temporarily takes 'precedence over the real' enabling new truths to become an actually existing force (2005, p. 141). This is a line of thinking which has also been developed by far more postmodern thinkers such as Baudrillard who asks 'since the simulator produces "true" symptoms, is he ill or not?' (1983, p. 7). Unlike Baudrillard, Boorstin makes very clear distinctions between reality and unreality. However even he accepts that 'the power to make a reportable event is [also] the power to make experience' (1961, p. 10).

It could also be argued that this rather postmodern sense of blur and ambiguity could be best exploited by turning to the work of Michel Foucault. Foucault rejects many of the modernist concepts that underpin the work of both Jürgen Habermas and Daniel Boorstin. He does not see power as dialectical or negative in essence, arguing that it can actually be a positive and enabling force. He also dismisses the classical model of consciousness and reality as vulnerable entities that can be seized and abused by those with power. Instead he claims that subjectivity and

reality are actively produced – rather than represented – by discourse and exist within the ever changing 'web of fragments' (Plant 1996, p. 116). This interpretation of media and power allows for the possibility of promotional forms of political resistance, albeit within the confines of the existing status quo.

Foucault would suggest that if signs and images are used as a means to establish a particular view of reality and their production/representation in the media causes them to become the dominant version of reality, then demonstrative events have succeeded in conflating their dual purpose. The theoretical possibilities opened up by Foucault's beliefs are made concrete in Wolfsfeld's observation that 'challengers who obtain significant amounts of media coverage usually enjoy a significant rise in political status. Those who are recognised by the news media as serious players become serious players' (1999, p. 67). In this way, the nebulous and contradictory relationship between 'reality' and 'unreality', 'substance' and 'image' enables protesters to actively promote their cause without the manufactured nature of public relations as a discourse undermining the validity of their actions.

Activist and journalist, George Monbiot claims that by feeding newspapers certain types of events, pressure groups like the Save Omar Campaign can exert a degree of control over the type of material which frames the representation of a political debate. This view is supported by academics such as Wolfsfeld, who reminds us that 'one of the first lessons in journalism is to construct news stories as a pyramid by leading off with the most important part before spreading out to give background and details' (1999, p. 51). There is little doubt that the most important part of most mainstream news stories is the event that is 'pre-cooked' (Boorstin 1961, p. 19) into news. However, while the pseudo-event may well be the point of an article, it can never be the whole story. Therefore it could be argued that the issues which inspired the event's creation will inevitably make an appearance, even if they are relegated to the broad base of the story's background detail.

The increasingly warm relationship between activists and the *Argus* culminated in the *Argus'* formal adoption of the campaign in September 2005. The paper's support of the Save Omar Campaign is not, sadly, an

example of commercial media's conversion to a more altruistic, community-minded way of being. As Miriam Wells, the *Argus*' most politically supportive journalist, points out local papers will only publish what they believe the local community will buy. The *Argus*' support of the Save Omar campaign was based on an understanding that the city's audience would, quite literally, buy into the campaign. However, the paper adoption of the campaign was more than simply economically profitable. It also garnered the paper considerable critical acclaim both in terms of snational coverage ('A local paper takes on the Pentagon', *New Statesman and Society*, 31 October 2005) and journalistic awards ('Campaign running for award' *The Brighton and Hove Argus*, 24 March 2006).

Activists' decision to deploy their 'prestigious right bearing bodies' (Gilroy 2006, p. 89) in key community spaces created an all important 'sense of there being an elsewhere' and of that 'elsewhere being in some way relevant' (Silverstone 2007, p. 10) to Brighton's collective sense of identity. Their sophisticated use of photogenic and ideologically potent visual images contributed to the wider dissemination of alternative understandings of Omar Deghayes as an 'enemy combatant' in particular and Guantanamo Bay in general. Moreover *The Brighton and Hove Argus*' decision to publicly support the campaign amplified this sense across the wider community and enabled the absent and silenced Omar Deghayes to escape categorisation as part of a globally feared terrorist 'them' and became part of a locally identified 'us' instead. As Francis Tonks, one of Brighton and Hove's Labour councillors, puts it in an internationally accessible YouTube address: '[Omar Deghayes is] one of our residents … a local guy … part of our community' (http://youtube.com). In this way the paper's adoption of Omar Deghayes inevitably boosted support for the campaign and enable it to move from being an issue to one being advocated by public figures in the heart of the community.

This chapter argues that demonstrative actions such as the visual metaphor discussed above probably do create an image that is more entertaining and less complex than the everyday grind of life as a political activist. However, this glamorisation of reality does not automatically undermine its value as a tool for democracy. Demonstrative events that also entertain and give pleasure are not automatically emptied of their political content.

Furthermore, the consumer satisfaction engendered by demonstrative events increases circulation figures, which in turn makes them more attractive to editors. This ensures that any promotional material finally published gains as wide an audience as possible. Therefore one could argue that pressure groups use demonstrative events as a Trojan horse in order to access an audience made susceptible by its own enjoyment.

Recent commentators such as Elizabeth van Zoonen (2004) argue that the almost elegiac nostalgia of seminal authors such as Postman, Bourdieu and Habermas inevitably hinders attempts to engage with the public sphere as an actual, rather than as an already lost, ideal. This view is developed further by Jon Simons who argues that the academic tendency to overlook the 'risky arena[s]' where visual and political cultures coincide is rooted in a 'lament' for the 'loss of effective cultural capital' (2003, p. 187) traditionally invested in the written word rather than the visual image. As Simons points out, this understanding of visual metaphors and their role within the public sphere requires a more generous interpretation of the role that the masses have to play in politics. Simons goes on to point out that Walter Benjamin offers just such an interpretation when he argues that the masses are not 'wretched, worn out creatures' (1928, pp. 240–1) but entirely capable of critical – if somewhat distracted – examination. In this way, the Save Omar activists' use of visual metaphors encapsulating the ideological content of their campaign unsettles many anticipated social and spatial expectations by creating an 'uncommon ground', which encourages the people of Brighton to think differently about the detention of Omar Deghayes.

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