

**What About the Laughter? the Music? the Zest?
Emotions and the Study of Social Movements**

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"A weird euphoria...there is a collective upswell of emotion that seems to occur at demonstrations, or at least at the good ones. I think it would be dangerous if I were to feel it more often: a mix of inspiration, sentimentality, camaraderie, self-righteousness, righteous anger, abject fear, and...a deep, abiding compassion for everything and everyone."

-Jason Grote, playwright and political activist¹

"It was like a fever. Everyone wanted to [join the 1960 campus civil rights protests in the South]."

-Michael Walzer, political scientist²

"Humor and a wink as a response to evil, it's charming."

-Member, Billionaires for Bush³

Introduction

Elation, exhilaration, rage, fear, pride, indignation, jubilation—can this lexicon of passion in collective action lodge comfortably in scholarly analysis? What is the value of singling out emotion⁴ in the analysis of social movements? It is not simply to affirm "Hey! Emotions exist! Emotions are important!",⁵ but rather to take emotion as a point of entry for understanding political life. Such a move resituates sentiment in the anthropology of politics; questions approaches to politics that emphasize the "rationality" of calculating, individual actors; and stimulates new questions in the anthropology of

¹ From Grote's account of a Reverend Billy protest at New York's Times Square Disney Store in late 1998, in which he grins into a video camera and says "Arrest Mickey!" as he himself is arrested and led away with hands bound (Grote 2002:359).

² Quoted in Polletta (1998:137).

³ Unless noted to be otherwise, all quotes from members of Billionaires for Bush are from the author's audio-taped interviews or from audio-taped planning meetings, street actions, and informal conversations in 2004 and 2005. On methods, see note 20 below. Portions of this paper draw on Haugerud (2004, 2005).

⁴ See Lindholm (2005:31) on the etymology of the term, whose usage in English he notes dates only from the eighteenth century. I use emotion here in a broad sense that might include the related categories 'feelings' and 'affect,' as outlined by Besnier (1990:421): "Psychological and folk models in the West distinguish among *feelings*, a broad category of person-centered psychophysiological sensations, *emotion*, a subset of particularly 'visible' and 'identifiable' feelings, and *affect*, the subjective states that observers ascribe to a person on the basis of the person's conduct." As Besnier (1990:421) notes, "[m]ost anthropologists view this categorization with at least some suspicion, in that it subsumes a Western ideology of self and person," and therefore it may be wise to adopt a "broad (but malleable) definition of 'affect'."

⁵ Calhoun's (2001:47) caveat.

emotion by extending it beyond micro-level analysis of social interactions and cultural constructions of personhood into more historical and collective domains.⁶

Partly in reaction to earlier depictions of social movement participants as irrational, immature, deluded, fanatic, deviant, or alienated, dominant North American approaches in the 1960s and 1970s "virtually abandoned the effort to look inside the heads of protestors" and instead simply assumed the rationality of their viewpoints and examined resource mobilization and structural determinants of social movements (Goodwin and Jasper 2003:131; see also Calhoun 2001; Edelman 2001; Tarrow 2004).⁷ Collective action came to be seen as "strategic, interest-based, calculated in terms of efficient means to an end" (Calhoun 2001:48). This framework emphasized the "free rider problem" (individuals "rationally" avoided the risk of participation in collective action and benefited from the actions of others who did participate)—a view that emerged from a conception of individual rationality that denied not only "irrational" emotional motivations but also various ties that bind individuals to one another (Edelman 2001:287-291).

Since the mid-1980s, instrumental metaphors of rational economic calculation and purposive formal organizations have been "challenged from a cultural perspective," which recognizes that protestors' motivations are not confined to pursuit of "material advantages for individuals or groups" (Jasper 2003:153). Resource mobilization theorists, Edelman (2001:290) notes, eventually acknowledged that their framework insufficiently addressed "'enthusiasm, spontaneity, and conversion experiences' or the 'feelings of solidarity and communal sharing'⁸ that rewarded movement participants.

⁶ The latter point is a social science gap suggested in various ways by Polletta and Amenta (2001:315), Lindholm (2005:34), and Orlove (personal communication). On the anthropology of sentiment in a colonial political context, see Stoler (2005).

⁷ As Edelman (2001:289) observes, the resources examined in this approach were "material, cognitive, technical, and organizational" [and were]...deployed in order to expand, reward participants, and gain a stake in the political system." In this paradigm, Edelman (2001:289-290) notes, collective action is mainly construed as "interest group politics played out by socially connected groups rather than by the most disaffected;" resource availability and preference structures become the central analytical foci; and "success" is understood mainly as "the achievement of policy objectives rather than in relation to broader processes of cultural transformation."

⁸ Edelman (2001:290) here quotes Zald (1992:330-331).

Yet even after social movement analysis took a cultural turn in the mid-1980s,⁹ most cultural researchers continued to avoid the issue of emotions, focusing instead on activists' "cognitive beliefs and moral principles," rather than their "feelings about the world, themselves, and each other" (Jasper 2003:153; Goodwin and Jasper 2003:132). Many analysts of social movements, Jasper (2003:153) suggests, treated "key cultural concepts [such as] identity [or] injustice frames... as though their highly charged emotional dimensions hardly mattered"—apparently fearing that "emotional" protesters would be deemed irrational. Understanding why this boundary persists is beyond the scope of this essay but would require exploring its foundations in long-standing dualisms such as mind/body, rational/irrational, motive/action, and individual/social—a "heritage that has produced the very idea of emotions—and the distinction of these from reason" (Calhoun 2001:48-9).¹⁰ Integrating emotions into sociological analysis of social movements now is difficult Calhoun (2001:48) notes, "partly because they were not merely neutrally absent from it but expelled in an intellectual rebellion that helped give the field its definition." The challenge now, Calhoun (2001:51) writes, is to devise "frameworks for bringing intrapsychic and cultural dimensions of meaning and action into clear relationship with social organization," which requires overcoming "two of sociology's long-standing resistances: to cultural and psychological analysis."

Anthropologists in turn have given far less attention than have sociologists and political scientists to theorizing social movements (Edelman 2001:285), but have contributed much to conceptualizing emotion (Besnier 1990, Casey and Edgerton 2005, Lindholm 2005, Lutz and White 1986, Lutz and Abu-Lughod 1990, Lutz 2005, Stoler 2005, White 2005).¹¹ Building on such scholarship, as well as on

⁹ Goodwin and Jasper (2003:5-6) discuss several conceptual "turns" in social movement theories: an economic turn in the 1960s, a political turn around the same time, and a cultural turn in the late 1980s. Most recently, they note, the transnational and emotional dimensions of protest are being recognized or rediscovered.

¹⁰ Calhoun (2001:52) notes that emotions have been under-studied partly because they "usually appear on the embarrassing side" of familiar dichotomies such as affect versus reason, emotion versus instrumentality, body versus mind, or feeling versus thought—though the positive valuation commonly placed on the second element of each of these pairs has sometimes been historically reversed (e.g., since the 1960s for some), in pairings such as authentic/inauthentic, natural/artificial, and expressive/repressive.

¹¹ Lindholm (2005:31) suggests, however, that anthropological interest in emotion is surprisingly recent for a discipline whose "practice is based on feelings of empathy"—a disinterest he links in part to anxiety about the "validity of participant observation as a methodology," and to quests for disciplinary legitimacy rooted in assumptions about "the [gendered] association of emotion with irrationality and sentimentality."

sociology and political science, what might a focus on the affective dimensions of social movements include and accomplish?

To explore this question, I draw on ethnographic research with a satirical political group whose glamour, style, wit and innovative tactics made them a media hit in 2004. Their theme, however, is one of the least welcome issues in American politics and in dominant neoliberal economic discourse—namely economic justice or inequality. The group's signature tactic is ironic word play as they spoof the affective (and sartorial) styles of the ultra-rich. This grassroots network, known during the 2004 U.S. presidential campaign as Billionaires for Bush, quickly grew in that year to 100 chapters in the United States (as well as a handful offshore).¹² News media dubbed them the “rock stars of the protest circuit,” and *Washington Post* associate editor Robert Kaiser observed that “Billionaires for Bush, no matter what your politics, must be one of the most likable protest groups ever formed.”¹³ The cultural content of such likability, and its sources, limitations, and historical and situational contingency invite scrutiny.

The Billionaires particularly suit analysis of under-explored questions about the affective dimensions of social movements. These include the historical effects on social movements of “broader emotion cultures” as well as possible links between the emotional content of movements and “structural factors such as transformations in the state, capital, or other institutions” (Polletta and Amenta 2001:309-315). Irony--the Billionaires' principal tactic--often flourishes as a form of “political expression in circumstances where direct dissent is hard to formulate, risky, or unwise” (Fernandez and Huber 2001:5). Thus the Billionaires' approach has affinities with the spirit of medieval carnival, the Shakespearean fool, weapons of the weak (Scott 1985), 1960s guerrilla theatre of the Yippies, Bread and Puppet Theatre, and contemporary globalization activism (Boyd 1999, Graeber 2003, Klein 2002, the “Yes Men” 2004). Today an ironic voice—such as the satirical humor of Jon Stewart's “Daily Show”—appears to be one of the few genres of political critique to which the public will readily listen. (The other principal form is the

¹² A full listing of the group's U.S. chapters is available on their website: www.billionairesforbush.com. Offshore chapters in 2004 included Paris, Brussels, Cologne, Seoul, and Sydney. Photos of various Billionaire events are available on their website at <http://www.billionairesforbush.com/photos.php> and on Dave Gochfeld's website: <http://www.dagimage.com/bfb.html>

¹³ Robert Kaiser, “Convention Diary New York City, August 30-September 2.” <<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/politics/interactives/diary/repub...>> Accessed September 6, 2004.

shouting matches found on some cable television news shows.) Media complicity with (often hostile or trivializing) official representations of protest (McLeod and Hertog 1999, Gitlin 2003, Goodwin and Jasper 2003:257-260)¹⁴, as well as increasing state repression and surveillance of activists,¹⁵ help to redefine the kinds of emotional displays considered "safe" or likely to win sympathetic media coverage and public attention. Acutely aware of such constraints, an experienced activist in his thirties (and member of Billionaires for Bush), who participated in the huge August 29, 2004 anti-Bush protest in New York (the day before the start of the Republican National Convention in that city), commented to me:

"we're in a kind of trapped situation where if you protest politely and peacefully and utterly within the bounds of all the police restrictions, you run the risk of being ignored or having an only minimal impact; and if you are transgressive in any way, you run the risk of being branded a hooligan, miscreant, anarchist, or terrorist...I think the authorities are aware of this double-bind...it feels increasingly like a kind of lose-lose situation."

His remarks suggest the utility of exploring how the category "protester" is constituted and contested over time (menace to society, irrelevant curiosity, agent of change),¹⁶ and how activists' tactics both reflect and shape such categories. The Billionaires for Bush, for example, are remarkably explicit about the emotional demeanor they wish to project, and they carefully craft their style in opposition to "traditional" protestors, in order to attract favorable media and public attention. In doing so, they walk a fine line between complicity and critique.

Here I explore that delicate balance by addressing the following questions. What are the focal emotions of Billionaires for Bush and why does their affective style appear to suit—and indeed to draw force from—the current discursive moment or broader emotion culture? How does the emotional content of this group affect its recruitment and retention of members? How does the emotional arc of the final seven months of the 2004 U.S. presidential campaign and its aftermath shape that of the Billionaires'

¹⁴ For critiques of corporate news media threats to democracy more generally, see also McChesney (1999) and publications by Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting (FAIR): www.fair.org, among many other sources.

¹⁵ See "New York Police Covertly Join In at Protest Rallies," Jim Dwyer, *New York Times*, December 22, 2005, p. A1.

¹⁶ The larger historical topic is beyond the scope of this paper, but see, for example, Della Porta (1999) on changing cultural frames of protester identity in Italy and Germany from the 1960s to the 1980s, including competing frames of law-and-order and civil rights coalitions, and what forms of protest are normalized or stigmatized.

organization? Such issues signal the profound importance of emotions in giving historically variable purpose, form, and consequence to social movements.

I begin with ethnographic and methodological challenges in the study of emotion and social movements. I then introduce the Billionaire brand of irony and humor and explore its associated politics of emotion.

Some Ethnographic and Methodological Considerations

Research on activism or social movements poses ethnographic challenges such as possible over-identification with the groups studied, accepting their claims at face value, or representing them as more cohesive than they actually are (Edelman 2001:310). Scholars tend to focus on groups that match their own political and moral preferences (Goodwin and Jasper 2003; see also Edelman 2001:302). Yet anthropologists and historians, Edelman (2001:309) notes, “may have privileged access to the lived experience of activists and nonactivists, as well as a window onto the ‘submerged’ organizing, informal networks, protest activities, ideological differences, public claim-making, fear and repression, and internal tensions, which are almost everywhere features of social movements.” Such research requires critical self-reflection, attention to researcher positionality, willingness to criticize the causes and movements under study, and scrutiny of both the politics and the epistemology of knowledge production. In addition, analysis of the wider social and political fields in which social movements emerge and dissipate is crucial to understanding the internal dynamics of such mobilizations and the varied responses of targeted constituencies (see Gledhill 2000, Burdick 1998).

Research on emotions in social movements raises particular methodological (and epistemological) concerns. From a positivist perspective, activists' reports of emotional memories may be unreliable since emotions are fleeting and changeable, and since some emotions carry negative social valuations and invite psychic repression, public sanctions, or deliberate concealment or "management" (Polletta and Amenta 2001:313). To address these problems, Polletta and Amenta (2001:313) suggest relying on participant-observation or on "primary materials that provide little opportunity for face-saving,

after-the-fact emotional reconstruction—such as diaries, contemporaneous testimony, transcripts of meetings, and other statements and actions recorded at about the time they happened."

In addition, however, we can recognize the value of talk about emotion on its own terms, rather than from the perspective of a referential theory of language (Abu-Lughod 1990; Abu-Lughod and Lutz 1990). Thus it is worth studying how individuals and institutions deploy narratives about or conceptions of emotion, how these figure in contests over power and in particular social projects, how "social forces...elicit and shape emotions" (White 2005:241), and how emotions are "embedded in socially constructed categories" (Lutz and White 1986:407). Such approaches focus on how emotions are defined "in the context of social action" (Besnier 1990:438); how they are connected to power, social structure, and sociability (Lutz and White 1986:407, Abu-Lughod and Lutz 1990:13-14); how emotions are "produced and organized—played out--in interpersonal relations" (Calhoun 2001:53); or how they are "the creation of particular sorts of polities and social relations...a product of social practices" rather than "emerg(ing) from an inner, presocial world" (Yanagisako 2002:10). Some read such positions as insisting on the "total authority of culture over feeling," (Lindholm 2005:37),¹⁷ though constructionist approaches vary in their view of the relationship between somatic or neurobiological changes and emotions (see Jasper 2005:154-157). Anthropologists sometimes take emotion as "a form of cognitive assessment that arouses the body as well as the mind" (Lindholm 2005:40). Lindholm (2005:43) proposes the notion of a basic set of physiologically-based emotions that are "not infinitely malleable...nor completely relational" though they are "blended, transformed, expanded, or contracted by culture."¹⁸ My own approach is to rely on a combination of participant-observation (with attention to

¹⁷ See Lindholm's (2005:34-36) discussion of cognitive-interpretive and essentialist-biological positions on emotion, and various attempts to mediate between them after "neurobiological research on the brain...showed that endorphins and other neurochemicals had significant and quite specific effects on mood."

¹⁸ Lindholm's (2005:42) own position is that the "psychological substrate out of which mixtures [of emotions] come is universal, though the specific colorations and intensities will differ across cultures and individuals." He links this position to the "consensus among neurobiologists and psychologists that such a substrate exists and must include at least the four basic emotions of fear, anger, sadness, and happiness and their permutations."

contemporaneous emotional talk and talk about emotions at planning meetings, street actions or protests, and social gatherings), interviews, and media and archival analysis.¹⁹

Meet the Billionaires

"By stating one thing but suggesting something more or less its opposite, ironists point to an alternative reading of a situation, while evading the challenge of direct dissent and protecting themselves from censorious response."
--James W. Fernandez and Mary Taylor Huber²⁰

Members of Billionaires for Bush dress in tuxedos, top hats, evening gowns, and tiaras as they spotlight how President Bush's tax cuts and other policies have favored large corporations or the very wealthy at the expense of everyday Americans.²¹ Champagne glasses, cigarette holders and huge cigars—as well as bright banners and placards—are their props. Members adopt satirical names such as Phil T. Rich, Tex Shelter, Iona Bigga Yacht, Lucinda Regulations (as in loosen the regulations), Noah Countability, Ivan Aston-Martin, Owen Dwight Howse, and Alan Greenspend. Their placards declare “Leave No Billionaire Behind,” “Corporations Are People Too,” “Small Government, Big Wars,” “Widen the Income Gap,” “Hands Off Halliburton!” and “Taxes Are Not for Everyone.” As a counterpoint to the Republican slogan “Four More Years!” the Billionaires for Bush shout “Four More Wars!”—thereby deliberately creating confusion when they infiltrate Republican political events (at one of which—in Pennsylvania-- the Billionaires joined a group of Bush supporters waiting by the roadside for Bush's motorcade to pass, and at first joined the Republicans in chanting "Four More Years" then shifted to

¹⁹ Since April 2004, I have attended internal planning meetings of the Billionaires for Bush Manhattan chapter (the largest in their organization), street actions, and social and fund-raising events. I have also spent time with their Seattle and Washington, DC chapters and I have interviewed chapter heads in other states. At their public performances and street actions (where I identify myself as a researcher and visibly carry a tape recorder), I interview (usually on audio-tape) members, spectators, journalists, and videographers. At a few public Billionaire performances and street actions, three doctoral students from Rutgers University (Arpita Chakrabarti, Noelle Mole, and Wendy Weisman) accompanied me and skillfully assisted in interviewing group members and spectators (and audio-taped their interviews). Given the fast-paced action and movement of people at such events, it was an advantage to have assistance with interviews and observations.

²⁰ Fernandez and Huber (2001:5).

²¹ According to the nonpartisan U.S. Congressional Budget Office, and as reported in the *New York Times*, “fully one-third of President Bush's tax cuts in the last three years have gone to people with the top 1 percent of income, who have earned an average of \$1.2 million annually.” *New York Times*, “Report Finds Tax Cuts Heavily Favor the Wealthy,” 13 August 2004.

"Four More Wars" and reported gleefully that the Bush supporters followed their lead and also chanted "Four More Wars" for a few minutes before detecting the joke).²² The Billionaires have a polished website (www.billionairesforbush.com) and have produced music CDs, a book, T-shirts, an infomercial, and a mockumentary (among other products). Their Manhattan chapter has a theatrical singing group called the Follies.

In everyday life, these Billionaires are artists, actors, writers, corporate professionals, academics, unemployed recent college graduates, and seasoned as well as novice activists. They have ties to a variety of other activist organizations and networks ranging from liberal or mainstream NGOs to more culturally and politically radical direct action groups. Some have known one another for years through political and subcultural networks (e.g, Lower East Side environmental and economic justice activists, theatre and art worlds, or previous political candidate campaigns). Billionaires for Bush members tend to be white (and a few Asian), college educated, and middle or upper middle class²³—yet interested in the challenges of building cross-class and cross-race coalitions. For example, the New York chapter has participated in street demonstrations by Starbucks and Verizon employees struggling to unionize and improve working conditions. Billionaires are not only cyber-networked activists who recruit and mobilize members via the Internet and adopt "smart mob" technologies (thereby excluding the non-wired),²⁴ but they rely as well on crucial forms of social connectivity (meetings, social events, street actions). Such political networks, as Polletta and Amenta (2001:306) note, provide "not only information but sympathy, trust, and emotional identification."

Examples of their street actions include the Million Billionaire March during Republican and Democratic National Conventions, a ballroom-dancing flash mob²⁵ in New York's Grand Central Station,

²² A story told amidst appreciative laughter at a July 2004 Manhattan chapter meeting, along with showing a videotape of Billionaire interactions with journalists and Bush supporters along the Pennsylvania roadsides where Bush's motorcade passed.

²³ At the same time, some members are financially struggling artists and writers who report they have faced growing hardship during the Bush administration, and some fear losing their New York apartments.

²⁴ For example, see Rheingold's (2002) analysis of "smart mobs." Tilly (2004:152) reminds us that it is important to consider who is excluded from these connections: "Despite the engaging image of smart mobs, that play of inclusion and exclusion is likely to continue through the twenty-first century."

²⁵ A flash mob, according to the Word Spy website, is "a large group of people who gather in a usually predetermined location, perform some brief action, and then quickly disperse." Such actions are coordinated by

thanking people outside post offices as they mail their tax returns on April 15th or auctioning off Social Security on President Bush's inauguration day. Calling out “Reappoint Bush!” and “Four More Wars!”, the Billionaires joined the 500,000 anti-Bush protesters from countless activist groups who marched through the streets of New York in August 2004²⁶ to call attention to issues ranging from environmental politics to human rights, war in Iraq, corporate power, sweatshops, health care, tax policies, the World Trade Organization, and news media that fail to serve the public interest. They also staged Limousine Tours through swing states, where the 2004 election outcome was too close to predict. The Billionaires dubbed the U.S. Labor Day holiday “Cheap Labor Day” and displayed banners proclaiming “No Minimum Wage! No Minimum Age!” and “Subcontinents do it cheaper!”

Bold pranks were also part of their repertoire. These required secrecy and skillful organization, as when Billionaires posing as business school students infiltrated the official event in 1999 where Steve Forbes announced his presidential candidacy, then once inside switched their signs and unfurled a banner that read: "Billionaires for Forbes: Because Inequality Isn't Growing Fast Enough"—a prank covered by print media and television, to the delight of the Billionaires. In 2004, their media coverage spiked after a spectacular February street action in Manhattan, where a Karl Rove impersonator (an actor hired by the Billionaires) fooled journalists, security agents, and even other Billionaires as he pulled up at a Republican fund-raiser in a black town car and began shaking hands with protestors.²⁷ Billionaires delight in showing the video and telling the story of the "Karl Rove action," where, as one member remarked, they "scrambled reality for a brief shining moment." A few months after the Rove event, a *New York Times* article about novel protest tactics referred to the Billionaires for Bush as "one of the

electronic text messaging, and "to protect the planned serendipity of each event, participants aren't told exactly what the mob is supposed to do until just before the event happens." <http://www.wordspy.com/words/flashmob.asp> (accessed 17 September 2004)

²⁶ Photos by Dave Gochfeld of this event are available at <http://www.dagimage.com/BFB-UFPJ/>.

²⁷ By September 2004, the Billionaires' public relations team had tracked some 225 major print and broadcast media mentions. "Major media hits" are those with readership or outreach to over 250,000 people, including national daily newspapers, television and radio broadcasts, magazines, and local newspapers. While working to reach "mainstream" national corporate media, the Billionaires also received substantial coverage by alternative print and broadcast media and videographers.

better known of the theatrical protest groups."²⁸ Such external representations of the group are quickly absorbed into its self-images.

I first learned of this group in April 2004, when I read a witty feature article about them in the *New York Times Magazine*.²⁹ That month I began ethnographic research on Billionaires for Bush, and although I initially thought it would be a short-term project, at this writing it has been underway for about 18 months.

A Brief Billionaire History

"It was dizzying...it was so easy to just get caught up in it and focus on it and not do anything else...it was fantastic, I was so happy to be part of it. I still think the organization is great but it's different now."
-Member, Billionaires for Bush (July 2005)

The 1990s saw resurgent social movement interest in economic issues and struggles against inequality, and a relative decline in the number of organizations devoted to identity politics or ethnic issues (Edelman 2001:286, Klein 2002, Smith 2004, Tilly 2004:118). The Billionaires' activist networks, satirical style, and intellectual foci intersect with those of some anti-corporate globalization activists analyzed by scholars such as Graeber (2001, 2005) and Klein (2002).

A brief history of their organization might read as follows. The group that was known in 2004 as Billionaires for Bush has had several names. Immediate precursors of the 2004 group emerged in the United States in 1999 as an offshoot of the Boston economic justice organization United for a Fair Economy (UFE),³⁰ which coordinates the New England Fair Trade Network and presents popular education workshops on the global economy, among other activities. UFE's former "minister of culture," Andrew Boyd, helped to found the IMF Loan Sharks (protesters who wore gray business suits and shark

²⁸ Randal C. Archibold, "Hey Hey, Ho Ho, Those Old Protest Tactics Have to Go'." *New York Times*, June 1, 2004, pp. 45, 47.

²⁹ Jack Hitt, 2004, "The Birth of the Meta-Protest Rally?" *New York Times Magazine*, p. 20, March 28, 2004.

³⁰ As its website states, "United for a Fair Economy is a national, independent, nonpartisan, 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization." It "raises awareness that concentrated wealth and power undermine the economy, corrupt democracy, deepen the racial divide, and tear communities apart. We support and help build social movements for greater equality." <http://www.faireconomy.org> [accessed September 2, 2005] See also the UFE publication (Boyd 1999), *The Activist Cookbook: Creative Actions for a Fair Economy*, which offers a collection of examples of (usually humorous) direct action approaches to economic justice activism.

noses and fins on their heads)³¹ and then the satirical Billionaires for Forbes in 1999, Billionaires for Bush (or Gore) in 2000, and Billionaires for Bush in 2004. The 1999 and 2000 Billionaire groups marched with globalization activists in the 1999 anti-WTO protests in Seattle and in the large April 2000 demonstration during the World Bank/International Monetary Fund meeting in Washington, D.C. Building on the experience of its much smaller 1999 and 2000 precursors, the 2004 network Billionaires for Bush³² attracted wide media attention and grew rapidly from a few chapters to 100 nationally (and a few abroad).

Co-founder Boyd (2002a:158) described the 2000 Billionaires for Bush (or Gore) structure as a hub-node model,³³ with United for a Fair Economy as the "organizational hub of an ad hoc network of Do-It-Yourself movement grouplets." In 2004, when United for a Fair Economy was not directly involved with the group, the New York chapter of Billionaires for Bush functioned as the hub for a similar—though much larger-- network. The 2004 organization experienced occasional tensions between hierarchical/meritocratic and egalitarian/consensual modes of decision-making and organizing, some of which centered on processes internal to the New York chapter and others on the appropriate extent of the New York chapter's authority over chapters elsewhere.³⁴ A Manhattan chapter member said "in an effort to organize, it's become a little too hierarchical for its own good, and the danger is that we don't want to become that which we deplore." Leaders of the large New York chapter talked about "making all the great stuff we're doing...replicable out there [in other chapters]...we need to support people." There are stylistic and other differences among chapters; the Seattle Billionaires, for example, are more casually dressed than New York Billionaires.

³¹ See a photo of the Loan Sharks in Boyd (2002a:152).

³² The Billionaires for Bush were registered during the 2004 U.S. presidential campaign as an independent 527 PAC (after Section 527 of the U.S. Internal Revenue Code), which meant they could take partisan stances and retain nonprofit status as long as they did not coordinate with the parties or candidates they support. They describe themselves on their website (in irony mode) as "a grassroots political action committee advocating for the rights and interests of people of absolutely fabulous wealth." <<http://www.billionairesforbush.com>>

³³ Terminology borrowed from the Rand Corporation's classification of types of activist networks, as outlined in a study commissioned by the U.S. Army, in order to assess how to fight them (Ronfeldt et al 1998:11-14).

³⁴ A member of the Executive Committee (usually 15-20 people, with fluctuating composition in 2004) commented that the Billionaires' organization is "hierarchical" and "tries to be as transparent as a meritocracy can be." He also said that "the totally consensual model" he's seen in some organizations (which usually entails very long meetings) "drives me nuts." Others found the organization's leadership structure too hierarchical, centralized, corporate and paternalistic (an opinion expressed openly in a mid-2005 strategic planning retreat).

From their start in 1999, these satirical Billionaires focused on democracy versus corporate power and growing economic inequality. They urged campaign finance reform (to counter threats to democracy posed by the expanding role of corporate and private money in politics), criticized excessive deregulation and privatization, and called attention to setbacks for the poor and middle class, and other issues they believed neither Democratic nor Republican parties were addressing effectively. As a member remarked, theirs is “not the smash-the-system politics of the Yippies in the 1960s,” but rather “a politics of make America fairer, redistribute the wealth...make the American middle class viable, and vote George Bush out of office.” This is an agenda for a more democratic, humane and egalitarian capitalism. While the group's name in 2000 targeted both Republican and Democratic presidential contenders (Bush and Gore), in late 2003, they became Billionaires for Bush, not because they were ardent supporters of John Kerry (indeed many were not) but because they thought it so important that George Bush be defeated.³⁵ His defeat, they reasoned, would open political space for addressing the larger challenges noted above, which cross-cut the boundaries of the two main political parties. In that sense the Billionaires have always been more nonpartisan than their 2004 name implies.

The post-election year has seen an occasional spectacular Billionaire event, such as their January 2005 counter-inaugural ball in Washington, DC the weekend of the presidential inauguration, which the *Washington Post* covered with a prominent article and two photos in its "Style" section.³⁶ By the fall of 2005, attendance at Manhattan chapter meetings (which surpassed 50 during the height of the 2004 presidential campaign)³⁷ had shrunk to 8-10 members—a "skeleton crew," as one put it. But a member describes it as a group that is "still alive" and "able to bloom again," and whose fellowship and social bonds remain quite strong when larger

³⁵ Not all members agreed with the decision to target only the Republican presidential candidate. But in 2004, as Varon (2005) notes, many "liberals, leftists, and radicals withheld building robust social movements on the causes that mattered to them, whether the environment or even opposition to war. Instead, all energy fed a single overarching goal: beating Bush"—"as if it were a transcendent calling to save the nation's honor and soul."

³⁶ "The Anti's Antidote for the Bush Blues: Counter-Inaugural Ballgoers Don't See Red." David Montgomery and Jose Antonio Vargas, *Washington Post*, January 21, 2005, p. C2. (This article and its two color photos of Billionaires for Bush fill the top half of the newspaper page.)

³⁷ There is a fluctuating membership; in addition to some long-term members are many who participate intermittently or who participate for a while and then disappear. And nearly all of the several dozen Manhattan chapter planning meetings I have attended included at least some first-time attendees.

numbers come together at a party, demonstration, or strategic planning retreat. Many Manhattan chapter members believe the group has suffered since the departure of the national organization's charismatic leader, Andrew Boyd (who remains an occasional advisor). In addition, as one put it, "it's just not as exciting now, without a [presidential] race going on" and "people are discouraged from having lost the race." In the first days and weeks after the election, "discouraged" would have been an understated description of the raw, intense emotions of Bush opponents nationally. How the Billionaires managed those powerful feelings is discussed later in this paper.

Music

Music, an emotionally powerful—and often overlooked—force in social movements, can help "generat[e] a moving feeling of solidarity" (Jasper 2003:161) and it did so especially in the U.S. civil rights movement (Eyerman and Jamison 1998). For example, Eyerman and Jamison (1998:2-4) suggest that the song "We Shall Overcome"

"more than any other expresses the project of the sixties.... That song, which began as a spiritual, was picked up by the labor movement, and through contact between labor and movement activists and civil rights activists... was transformed into the anthem of the civil rights movement and since then has found 'new' uses in many other movements around the world.... [It] became part of a global culture of dissent."

It remains unusual, however, for analysts of the music of that era to place contemporaneous civil rights, antiwar, and student movements at the center of their analyses (Eyerman and Jamison 1998:2).

Lyrics can become "a form of shared knowledge that helps one feel like an insider" (Jasper 2005:161)—as it does in the case of Billionaire songs. The group's music has ironic lyrics written by Los Angeles Billionaire Clifford J. Tasner, and is set to a wide range of familiar tunes: "Billionaires for Bush" and "Billionaires for Bush's War" (both to the tune of "The Caissons Go Rolling Along"), "Georgie Made the Size of My Wallet Grow" (to the tune of "Joshua Fit the Battle of Jericho"), "Toys for the World" (sweatshop theme, to the tune of "Joy to the World"); "Maquiladora" (to the tune of "Macarena"). There was a strain of 1960s satirical music (e.g., Tom Lehrer, Phil Ochs) that some Billionaires for Bush

songs resemble.³⁸ Occasions for Billionaires to sing range from Christmas caroling while strolling down New York's Fifth Avenue, to street actions like those mentioned earlier, or appearances by the Follies at Billionaire balls or fund-raisers for political candidates, among others. I first heard the Follies as they made a merry choral entrance into a Manhattan chapter meeting (they had come from a rehearsal), singing (to the tune of "The Caissons Go Rolling Along") the group's theme song:

We're so rich that it's zany,
Billionaires for Bush and Cheney.
We can give you the stars and the moon.
When we pay campaign debts
It's a way to hedge our bets
That the winner will dance to our tune.

Sing hey hey hey
Buy a candidate today
And he'll become your buddy
through and through.
Sing ho ho ho
If he's desperate for your dough,
He will do what you tell him to do!

We've got life by the tush,
We're the Billionaires for Bush,
We're determined to keep it that way....

That impromptu performance was greeted with loud applause and cheers, and revived flagging energies at the meeting.

Members tell a story of a tense moment during 2004 Republican National Convention street demonstrations in New York, when some Billionaires in costume were nearly caught up in mass arrests but believe they managed to disarm the police and avoid arrest by making a quick decision to cheerfully sing "Georgie Made the Size of My Wallet Grow." Once again, their light-heartedness, politeness, formal dress, and practiced performance helped to protect them.

The Limits of Irony

"The art of being in-between, of being ironic or camp...is based on an essential cliquiness, a club of people who get the aesthetic puns," Klein (2001:83) observes. Given the well-known capacity of irony

³⁸ I thank Marc Edelman for calling my attention to this point.

"to create or strengthen an in-group of those in the know" (Fernandez and Huber 2001:18), a possible limitation of the Billionaires' form of ironic humor is that rather than opening the eyes of many to political alternatives, it functions primarily as a "symbolic refuge"³⁹ whose primary or immediate effect might be to energize or cheer up the Billionaires' own political base—that is, to help build solidarity among a liberal-left political elite who regularly consume media such as the *New York Times*, *New Yorker*, National Public Radio, Air America, and Pacifica Radio.⁴⁰ Of course such solidarity itself can be a step toward broader political networks, strategies, and consequences.

Whether members of the public comprehend the Billionaires' ironic humor depends on their ability to see its intertextual links⁴¹ --for example, the linguistic intertextuality of "leave no billionaire behind" and the Bush administration's education policy slogan "No Child Left Behind," or the textual link between "four more wars" and "four more years," or that between the fictive name Alan Greenspend and Federal Reserve chairman Alan Greenspan, or that between the Billionaire name Lucinda Regulations and the politically conservative drive toward economic de-regulation, or that between the Billionaire name Thurston Howell IV and the "Gilligan's Island" television character Thurston Howell III (named by Forbes Magazine as one of its top fifteen fictional billionaires).⁴² What renders the word play of Billionaire names and catchphrases or slogans interpretable—when they are that—is the commonality of linguistic reference points, especially among people who frequently consume particular media forms. The actual processes of transportability of such speech forms across variable contexts and the "conditions that enable their decontextualization and recontextualization" are relatively recent research foci (Spitulnik 1997:162). Richly suggestive for the Billionaire case is Spitulnik's (1997) analysis of the social circulation of media phrases and discourse styles in Zambian popular culture, which is accomplished through the recycling and "creative reworking" of widely accessible Zambian radio discourse outside of the immediate contexts of radio listening or direct media consumption. The engineering of such linguistic

³⁹ Scott's (1976:240) term.

⁴⁰ "Let's Buy Pacifica" (to the tune of "God Bless America") is a Billionaire song on their CD, "Never Mind the Rabble: Here Come the Billionaires."

⁴¹ I thank Debra Spitulnik for suggesting this line of analysis.

⁴² See <http://www.forbes.com/lists/2005/fictional/09.html>.

recycling and creative reworking is the Billionaires' core intellectual enterprise. It is the focus of brainstorming sessions in their planning meetings, discussion and debate via e-mail, and informal discussion in other contexts. How do these efforts play out on the street?

When they are in-character, the Billionaires always say the opposite of what they mean (as illustrated by the slogans mentioned above), and that can be confusing to spectators—at least at first. Some observers delight in catching on to the ruse, while others never fathom it. Billionaire street performances play on uncertainties and unsettle ideas about political categories.⁴³ On George Bush's birthday in July 2004, the Billionaires staged a street action outside the large post office opposite New York's Pennsylvania Station. They invited passers-by to sign a giant birthday card for George Bush and displayed a birthday cake and (a prescient move) a large cardboard cutout of the state of Ohio wrapped in red ribbon and a bow. The Billionaires called out: "He's the best president money can buy!" and "What do you give the man who has everything? The election!" and "We are giving the state of Ohio to the president along with all the other swing states!"

A passer-by at this presidential birthday event may at first think the giant birthday card for the president is a kind gesture; then consider the context (final months of a presidential election campaign); look more closely at the staging, the slogans, and over-the-top impersonations of the ultra-rich; and finally rethink the intentions behind the birthday display. Audience members are active co-producers as well as consumers of meanings in Billionaire performances, which sometimes include lively interchanges with spectators. (Billionaire street performances are usually a mix of scripted, semi-scripted, and improvised components.) In such street theatre, performers try to sustain spectators' psychological collaboration throughout the performance, a process that includes, as Beeman (1993:386) observes in a different context, a crucial but fragile and constantly shifting phatic connection that "keeps all parties engaged with each other."

What interpretations and opinions circulate among spectators when Billionaires for Bush stage public appearances? A woman encountering the Billionaires for the first time at their April 15th 2004 tax

⁴³ Marc Edelman (personal communication) points to historical parallels such as Jerry Rubin dressing up as Uncle Sam in the U.S. Congress.

day street action outside New York City's central post office asked: "Is it a joke? I can't figure out if it's a joke." A male passer-by at the same event wondered: "But are they for or against Bush?" A man in his thirties muttered as he passed by the birthday event, "they lost their mind!" As passers-by linger and watch, they usually realize that the "campy, spoofy" (as one observer put it) Billionaire impersonations are meant to be ironic. If a Bush supporter shouts something positive about the president, the Billionaires cheerily shout "Huzzah!"—after which a heckler is likely to walk away quickly. [The exclamation "huzzah!" encodes triumph and cheeriness (sometimes mingled with condescension) and, as an oft-repeated Billionaire shout, it contributes to in-group solidarity as well.] When a hostile passer-by in Seattle shouted "so you blame Bush for everything?" the Billionaires stayed in character and replied "no, we think he's the best president money can buy!" Sometimes Bush opponents who miss the irony of the Billionaires' messages become furious and shout comments such as "that's disgusting!" And Bush supporters who mistake the Billionaires for Republicans and take their slogans literally may either react with embarrassment ("we appreciate your support but can you tone it down?"⁴⁴) or become angry and say the Billionaires are hurting the Republicans' image when they call out "Leave No Corporation Behind!" or "Four More Wars!" Thus an irate Republican letter writer to a New York radio station that had broadcast a Billionaire segment misread irony as complicity: "You are making the Republican Party look like a bunch of out of touch elites!"

Such comments point to the "volatile mixes of privilege and power in culture [that] often invite irony" and its expressions of "skepticism toward authority" (Fernandez and Huber 2001:vii, 1). Irony, Fernandez and Huber (2001: 1-2) remark, is a "valuable resource for inciting the moral and political imagination against whatever is given, assumed, or imposed" and it "flourishes in certain historical conditions, [which]... are now especially intense and widespread." In adapting to this historical moment, the Billionaires' success in depicting as playful or absurd contemporary economic realities depends on embedding their irony in carefully crafted affective and stylistic cues—which sometimes misfire.

⁴⁴ Washington, DC, CACI demonstration, [CK date].

Rare critical observations came, for example, from an African-American woman who worked for Verizon and an African-American man, both bystanders at a union rally during their lunch break on a cool day in December 2004, a few blocks from Times Square. Neither of them had heard of the Billionaires before. The woman (who later told me she was not a Bush supporter) commented that she had to work for a living whereas the Billionaires obviously could take time off during the middle of the day to dress up and perform at such an event. The man said “they are people who have nothing better to do with their lives and don’t actually work...the millionaire and his wife...I’m working and they have time to get into costumes and do this kinda stuff on a work day.” I later discussed these reactions with a couple of the Billionaires, so that they could consider how to avoid such alienating effects (which may be most likely to occur in situations where the Billionaires attempt to cross class and race categories).

Billionaire Emotion and Semiotics

"[Journalists'] point of reference was protestors wearing scarves around their mouths, throwing rocks or bottles or just spitting or being, you know, confrontational. And here we are with our ball gowns and long gloves and pearls and we're just so polite. But at the same time we're saying: 'What are you guys doing to the economy? What are you doing to the people who live here?'"
--Member, Billionaires for Bush

The Billionaires posit stark differences in emotional demeanor between their group and "angry liberal" protesters they deem more "traditional." Their talk about the emotions of "other" protesters of course is also talk about power relations and contemporary cultural constructs of marginality and danger (whether the risk of protesters being arrested or the hyping of supposed threats—projected by officials and corporate news media--of protester violence). One member noted that "there is a subtext of state suppression through all of this," and some talked explicitly about the Billionaire approach as a way to, as one long-time activist put it, "be an effective protestor and not get arrested" (though others disagreed with this stance).⁴⁵ A male Billionaire who had been arrested in political convention protests some years

⁴⁵ In mid-2005, a male in his thirties who was very active in the organization said to me: "we've become very afraid of the police or challenging our environment...it's been a very safe place to be an activist in Billionaires for Bush. I

earlier said that in 2004, "I comforted my father greatly by telling him, 'oh I'll be wearing my top hat during the [Republican] convention; don't worry, you won't have to bail me out again'...the cops don't tend to beat up a clown and there's a certain safety in being a clown." Avoiding arrest, however, was not the dominant original rationale for the group's approach when it was devised in 1999. Rather the Billionaire style was conceived as a strategy to penetrate corporate news media filters (see Boyd 2002a, c and the group's website.)

Delivering their message with humor and charm, elegantly dressed Billionaires for Bush perform in stylized opposition to popular cultural stereotypes of scruffy "angry liberal" protesters or 1960s holdovers. (At the same time, they view themselves as morale boosters and media magnets for traditional protesters.) Manhattan Billionaire leaders in 2004 encouraged all their national chapters to avoid hand-made signs and to use the professional and standardized visuals that can be downloaded from their website (www.billionairesforbush.com).⁴⁶ Website postings of Billionaire fashion tips, purchasable accessories (jewelry, dollar-print ties, tiaras), political message content (with policy background), and photos of Billionaire street actions circulate images of ideal Billionaire appearance and practices. Such normative signals conveyed electronically are reinforced and mediated through personal contacts between New York chapter leaders and chapter heads and members in other parts of the country. The organization's New York leaders sometimes exercise a disciplining function, usually with a light touch, as they monitor activities of other chapters. (One chapter leader in another state said "we definitely pale in comparison" to the New York chapter. A member in a Western state said a national coordinator from New York had called him just before a protest that was likely to attract national press coverage to stress the importance of staying in Billionaire character, staying on message, and staying in the designated protest zone so as not to get arrested.)

really want to push that envelope." As they planned street actions during the Republican National Convention, Billionaires disagreed about how much to risk arrest; some felt, for example, that the ballroom dancing flashmob in Grand Central Station during the Republican National Convention was too cautious about not stepping over the line with respect to the legality of playing music inside the station.

⁴⁶ Their 2000 precursor group, Billionaires for Bush (or Gore), by contrast, was less polished. As a member of both the 2000 and 2004 groups put it as she talked with me while looking at web photos of the 2000 group, "we were just kind of trying to find our identity at the time and we figured 'well if I wear this boa I can get away with wearing my rock-and-roll T-shirt'." The earlier group, she noted, had signs that "are not the fancy signs that we have now, you know with the nice graphics; they're kind of hand-written and crude looking but you know it worked."

Through their dress and style, the Billionaires for Bush appropriate stereotypical symbols of corporate America and the contemporary Right (projecting images of wealth, clean-cut respectability, and professionalism) in order to advance an agenda now associated with the Left (reducing the disproportionate political influence of the ultra-rich and large corporations). When the Billionaires and more traditional protesters share a public space, they sometimes engage in mock heckling of one another; “angry liberal” protesters bearing hand-made signs, and clad in casual clothes become “straight men” in glitzy Billionaire street theatre. Emma Chastain (2004), writing in *The New Republic Online*, light-heartedly counterposes the Billionaires’ effervescence, bonhomie and “sunny good humor” on the one hand, and the “unseemly anger and earnestness of left-wing protesters,” “liberal fury rut,” “bitterness,” “scruffy lefty protesters” and a political “Left [that] takes itself too seriously” on the other.⁴⁷

Spectators’ remarks capture these semiotic oppositions. The Billionaires’ flashy visuals (tuxedos, evening gowns, professional banners and placards) and light-hearted, satirical style attract attention from passers-by who say they might ignore more “traditional” protesters or would resent loud, angry speech. Thus a man remarked as he watched the July 2004 Billionaire street action in New York to “celebrate” George Bush’s birthday: “It could be just another table with a bunch of hippies at it, and you’d just walk by and say, ‘yeah whatever—hippies.’... But this is totally entertaining.” A male spectator at the New York Billionaires’ 2004 tax day street action commented, “I think they’re really funny. I think that protests and that kinda stuff can be kinda boring.” Another observer of the same event said, “I think it gets people to like turn their head and question reality which is like great you know.”

A well-dressed Republican couple, a man and woman in their early forties who planned to vote against Bush, observed the Billionaires for Bush at their July 2004 New York street action on George Bush’s birthday and commented: “I think the key to protest now is not to alienate people, cuz you scare the cross-overs like we are, we’re Republican, life-long Republicans, but we’re voting for Kerry. But we don’t want to go back to the sixties, where they’re so radical and they’re so obnoxious, if you will, that

⁴⁷ Emma Chastain, "Right Attitude," *New Republic Online*, 30 August 2004. <http://tnr.com/docprint.mhtml?i=express&s=chastain083004> (accessed 3 September 2004).

you scare away the cross-over people....You know I think this type of thing is good because it appeals to people like us....And the more protesters are like the rest of us the more influence you'll have."⁴⁸

These spectators' comments suggest that in early twenty-first century America, when the category "protester" sheds its angry liberal and 1960s associations, its popular appeal expands—especially if protesters project images of celebrity, glamour and wealth. By bending the protest genre in that way, the Billionaires for Bush both strategically adapt to and reflect the historical and discursive moment. On the one hand, Billionaires for Bush, when not in public performance mode, are angry liberals⁴⁹ and, as a male Billionaire remarked, film depictions of the 1960s as a "magical fun time" actually attract many youth to activism. On the other hand, this same member noted, "we don't look anti-establishment; we're speaking truth to power but in a more palatable way than angry actors shaking a fist in the street." Indeed the group's establishment image itself draws some individuals to join; a white female Billionaire in her twenties says, "part of what attracted me to the group is that you do get frustrated with standard fare protesters, you know the stereotypical way they look...traditional left-wing protest thing...it's important in a place where billions and billions are spent every year advertising, making sure that you're on the cutting edge of the image you want your message to get across."

In short, the Billionaires' appeal, for both the public and some members, rests on skillful deployment of semiotic contrasts reproduced in the media (and in official discourses and practices) and reiterated through performance: Billionaire charm versus liberal anger—or protesters who are elegant rather than scruffy, hip rather than traditional, polite rather than offensive, and harmless rather than dangerous. As they cultivated an ostensibly new role of good protester and challenged older stereotypes, they were of course confined by the logic of the semiotic binaries, but stretched it in ways intended to promote change.

How did the Billionaires themselves experience impersonating the ultra-wealthy? How did they learn to do so, and how did the group manage focal emotions?

⁴⁸ I thank Noelle Mole, who was present with me at that event, for this interview (on audiotape).

⁴⁹ They self-identify as such; thus the two dress codes specified on their website are "angry liberal attire" (e.g., jeans, T-shirts, sandals or tennis shoes) for their planning meetings versus "full Bling" for events where they dress as billionaires.

Performing Wealth, Mocking the Rich

[One of the] "great ironies of spoofing the super-rich [is that if you adopt their affect or mannerisms] you at some point send a negative set of signals that is part of the problem with the culture of elites...so it's a tricky pantomime and if you pull off the illusion too well you become what you're spoofing."

-Member, Billionaires for Bush

Although upward economic mobility has declined in recent decades, many Americans expect to be rich one day.⁵⁰ As the female Billionaire member known as Ivy League Legacy commented (during a New York radio appearance—in which she did not depart from irony mode):⁵¹ "We do know that...the majority of Americans think they are pre-rich...which of course is a delusion that is very useful to us.... It means that they'll vote for tax cuts for the super rich because they think 'well, one day I'll be in that tax bracket.'" Billionaires explain that it would be alienating if their aim were simply to make fun of rich people ("talking about your diamonds"). Instead, their intention, as a member put it, is "to expose George Bush's policies which benefit the super-rich... [since] obviously we have many allies who happen to have a lot of money and they're not the people we're rallying against so I think that was something we had to work on a little." Can the Billionaires impersonate the ultra-rich in a way that helps to puncture the illusion that plutocrats identify with the masses or "share their moral anger, lead their crusades, and even echo their average-guyness" (Varon 2005)?

That complex semiotic task starts with learning how to perform wealth and inhabit one's Billionaire persona with ease (cf. Bourdieu 1984). The group's Manhattan chapter meetings sometimes included workshops on performance techniques, how to make desirable impressions on audiences, and how to deal with hecklers (don't take the bait and don't step out of character) or with overly enthusiastic spectators who join in shouting their slogans with them (thereby distracting from the Billionaires and the carefully crafted media image they wish to create). Performing as a Billionaire is "not a free-for-all," one

⁵⁰ CK ref.

⁵¹ December 12, 2005 on WBAI, a Pacifica Radio station.

noted, but rather requires learning and following informal and formal norms (some of which are detailed on their website).

A July 2004 Manhattan chapter meeting I attended included practice impersonating billionaires, with members walking around the room chatting with one another in-character. Those running this session talked about mannerisms, voice, carriage, posture, costumes, and the importance of not being so condescending that they anger people, or so aloof that people on the street ignore them. As they began this exercise, here is how a Billionaire who is an actress in real life coached them to get into character (cf. Bourdieu 1977:94-95 on *habitus*):⁵²

"Picture for yourself your billionaire, your billionaire self, and...figure out how that billionaire self stands, how they fit in your body...what's different about the way they hold this body from the way you hold it....Some of the things to play with are...a sort of generic idea of high class with a very straight spine and excellent posture, sort of an old fashioned sense of the word....Now as you are coming into your own billionaire shape, I want you to just experiment with small moves, don't move your feet too much yet, just...see if you're looking around, what happens, how you hold your head, how you might hold your hands. You might start thinking at this point if there are certain props that seem to come naturally to your billionaire, like...a little handbag, or a top hat, or a cane....Very gradually, taking care of each other, start to walk around the room...and just experiment with how your billionaire walks. [some laughter from members as they walk around the room] Try not to interact just yet; really self-focus, which shouldn't be hard for all of us." [a remark that prompts hearty laughter from others]

Individual Billionaire members project fictive characters with different personalities—Merchant F. Arms claims to represent the "dark side of impossible wealth," while Thurston Howell IV describes his character as follows: "I do sort of feel a little bit like Thurston Howell III ["Gilligan's Island" character];⁵³ I'm the fourth; and he's just...a little silly but generally you know not a bad fellow...a little bit goofy but kind of friendly although he's more of a curmudgeon than friendly." Iva Fortune talks about her character as "looking for a husband, inebriated, decadent, martini-swilling...someone who's never earned any of her wealth...usually off sailing." Some Billionaires perform their characters more loudly

⁵² Billionaires' for Bush Manhattan chapter meeting, July 13, 2004 (author's audio-tape).

⁵³ Thurston Howell III is described in 2002 on the Forbes.com list of the top 15 fictional billionaires as "eccentric Harvard grad [who] fled U.S. on eve of indictment on accounting fraud charges. Rumored to be living on private island in Pacific with wife Lovey and skeletal staff of trusted associates. Known for his bare-knuckled boardroom style, despite socialite manners...." http://www.forbes.com/2002/09/13/400fictional_print.html (accessed January 2, 2006).

and more aggressively than others, and some are friendlier or more comfortable than others in stepping out of character and engaging with spectators during their street actions rather than just performing aloofly for them. Stepping in and out of character can be a challenge, a male Billionaire commented; sometimes people on the street "want to talk to you one-on-one and just switching from the slogans to an actual nuanced discussion and staying in character is like a juggling act." Group leaders encourage Billionaires to use the messaging documents on the website to familiarize themselves with specific economic issues, policies, and legislation, and to become comfortable enough with their fictive characters' biographies and emotional impulses to be able to link them to political message content.⁵⁴

What does it feel like for a middle-class American to perform wealth or impersonate the ultra-rich? One Billionaire said, "what I do is I channel...the people I knew at the tennis club" on Cape Cod, where she spent summers as a child. Another (a New Yorker in his early forties) commented: "this whole thing of impersonating billionaires, the upper class... the corporate class, there's some very strange things that get mobilized in your average leftist...there's obvious class hatred that gets mobilized and there's less obvious class envy—it's more subterranean. We all like to bash the rich but you know everyone...would love to have so much money that they don't have to care, right? Even if they give it all to the Black Panthers." I asked him if it might be harder for a lower middle-class person to project or enact the character of a super-rich person. He replied that the ironic, satirical approach of Billionaires for Bush "comes out of more of an educated middle class...hipster, down-town" sensibility. (As suggested above, it also may come from some first-hand familiarity—as in the tennis club on Cape Cod.) And he suggested that it's also much harder for a person who has more direct experience of economic pain, of suffering from "the system" to play the Billionaire role. She or he might intellectually agree with the economic justice issues the Billionaires for Bush promote; indeed Billionaires for Bush have performed before enthusiastically appreciative union audiences, he said. But those who had more direct experience

⁵⁴ One chapter leader on the West Coast said she feels like the teacher who's trying to get students to do their homework—"come on, read the documents on the web site!" She notes that many members are either thespians or experienced political activists, but that "you rarely get one that's sort of both...and that's the ideal Billionaire." Another perceived a fine line between the Billionaires as a "vanity project" (emphasizing the fun of performing) versus a political movement, and said "it's hard to keep people from getting wrapped up in the charm of the joke and to remember to use it as a tool to effect change."

of economic pain, this member suggested, might find it less comfortable to inhabit the roles of the fictive super-rich characters. Well educated professionals or even unemployed recent college graduates who grew up in fairly comfortable circumstances, he suggested, have a sort of “emotional distance” from the painful side of the economic system and rely on abstract understanding of it.

One Manhattan chapter member (also a man in his early forties) was struck by the psychological effects of his role:

"Dressing up, playing the role of someone else, especially someone that's really different from your own persona, it has a psychological function that I hadn't really realized. I think when I'm out as [interviewee's name deleted], or all of us are out as the people we normally are, we're repressing so much of ourselves because it doesn't necessarily fit that image. I don't wear tights, I don't dance, I don't, you know, laugh out loud—all these things that part of you wants to do but most of you doesn't, so you get to dress up and play this [Billionaire] role where you can be loud or obnoxious or a hoity-toity or conservative or whatever; it somehow serves the whole psyche by exorcising--or it's not just a catharsis but bringing them out and letting them air themselves--aspects of your personality that somehow make you feel more whole, make you feel more calm, and I think that's part of why it's so much fun. I really had underestimated that until I started being a Billionaire."

Thus members may view participating in this group as a path to emotional self-knowledge, as well as an opportunity to develop emotional gestures or affective styles attuned to public audiences and political goals. Here are several more examples of talk about emotions from Billionaire members:

A Seattle man in his late forties said he joined the Billionaires because "there is not nearly enough fun in political activism" and he enjoys the Billionaires because it's more politically effective when "people are laughing as they're learning...it's easier to listen to somebody when they're making you laugh, when they're having a good time; you feel less weighted down by what might otherwise be heavy information; it's an easier way to reach past people's potential defenses and I think it gives people more hope too."

A New York man in his early forties comments: "No one can be sincere about politics anymore." His female companion replies, "When you do it hurts, I say from experience....when you are sincere about politics and you put everything into it, it is so dangerous that it hurts when your man loses!" Her companion responds, "which happens most of the time...so we protect ourselves with irony." He says the Billionaires' organization "is very strategic and meaningful and it's focused and it's not just mouthing off and it's not just like doing weird libidinal things in the street and stuff like that but actually thought out politics...this is a way to...almost operate within the system without seeming to operate within it."

A New Yorker in his thirties remarks that "the...surprising thing is the unbelievable kick you get out of this, and it's really amazing what happens when you put on a uniform, you put on a character, you know your operation is sufficiently professionalized such that you have a nicely printed banner and there's a certain attention to detail and sort of elegant

presentation...everybody responds to something well done and...when we present ourselves nicely it's an impressive, sort of lovingly articulated display."

Might participation in Billionaires for Bush be interpreted in functional terms as helping individuals to improve the fit between their emotional life and wider social and political contexts (cf. Lutz and White 1986:412)? Or as an expression of what Lutz and White (1986:413) term "unresolved, culturally patterned emotional conflicts"—in the Billionaires' case, both critique and desire (criticizing the ultra-rich while also wishing--consciously or not--to be ultra-rich)?

Billionaire performances entail emotional work--the production or creation of emotional meaning (rather than simply expressing pre-existing emotions), and the enactment of social identities and power relations. Since Billionaire performers and their audiences co-produce meanings or co-construct emotions, the latter are not necessarily stable and Billionaire failure to produce their "desired social emotional reality"⁵⁵ is a possibility—particularly since Billionaire themes are associated with what White (2005:248) terms "sentiments of moral conflict"—in this case those associated with the appropriate distribution of wealth, and with notions of the deserving and undeserving rich and poor in America. In an American cultural context that equates emotional spontaneity with authenticity (Lindholm 2005:44), the emotions Billionaires express in their public performances could be considered in folk psychology as "inauthentic" because they are parodic, contrived, and calculated to create a particular effect—thereby possibly suppressing or transforming more "authentic" emotions such as their own envy, resentment, sadness, or anger.

Emotion Management, Focal Emotions

We have seen a number of examples of "emotion management," the aims of which are summarized well by Jasper (2003:153):

"Political activists try hard to induce emotions that they think are good for their movement or cause and to prevent emotions or moods that they think are bad. At their planning meetings and at protest events themselves, activists often work hard at generating such emotions as outrage, excitement, joy, guilt, hope for the future,

⁵⁵ White's (2005:249) term in a different context.

solidarity, and/or commitment to the cause. Emotion management may also involve attempts to mitigate fear, depression, hopelessness, and boredom. Activists may also try to calm down especially angry people, whose behavior may cause problems for the movement, especially if it professes nonviolent principles."

The emotional arc of the Billionaires for Bush extends from the "dizzying" intensity of the 2004 presidential election campaign to a defiant primal scream and an interlude of demoralization in the post-election year. The group's focal emotions include excitement, joy, hope, pride, pleasure, and solidarity—all of which may be cultivated both publicly and privately in response to anger, pain, fear, rage, sadness, isolation, and hate.⁵⁶ Also part of the mix are vanity, ambition, envy, intimidation, and lust on the one hand, and compassion, generosity, kindness, nurturance,⁵⁷ and sympathy on the other. Group norms emphasized that emotional investment in the collective endeavor (helping to defeat George Bush) should outweigh individual rivalries and feelings such as envy or resentment of members who were photographed or interviewed often by the media, or who dominated planning meetings, or were better thespians, or better policy wonks, or more talented slogan creators. Yet it was necessary to manage or to contain the play of inclusion and exclusion, the differential mastery of codes valued within the group, contestation over such valuations, and the forms of "distinction" (cf. Bourdieu 1984) within the group that embodied in miniature those parodic forms crafted for external consumption in public performance.

Billionaire planning meetings themselves were a performance genre. During the height of the presidential campaign, they were spirited, fast-paced, high-energy events at which remarkable intellectual talent and creativity were on display. Such meetings often included a period of brainstorming in small groups, which yielded dozens of ideas for new slogans, themes, fund-raising, street actions, ways to assist other chapters, and other strategies. During the spring and summer of 2004, television and print journalists were often present at Manhattan chapter planning meetings (CBS, ABC, CNN, USA Today, New Republic, among others). A newcomer in her mid-thirties, while chatting with several of us after her

⁵⁶ There is little agreement, as Lindholm (2005:36, 32-33) notes, among contemporary psychologists or earlier philosophers on a catalogue of emotions, though he observes that "all the categorizations of primary emotions include at least the four posited by [Theodore] Kemper (and Aristotle)": fear, anger, depression, and satisfaction.

⁵⁷ For example, post-election talk among Billionaires as well as from one of the group's outside consultants, included admonitions to "take care of one another."

first meeting (spring 2005), said she had found it "intimidating" (e.g., for its emphasis on quick one-liners and coming up with good ideas fast), and noted that at one point the moderator had cut her off when she was speaking. It was the responsibility of the organization's Minister of Love to welcome newcomers, find out how they wished to contribute, and put them in touch with the appropriate committees or sub-groups.

Immediately after the 2004 election, group emotion management focused on efforts to mitigate depression, despair, and cynicism. The election outcome and departure of the organization's informal leader and founder (Andrew Boyd, officially co-chair) were a double blow, and led to two long "strategery"⁵⁸ meetings (the first of which Boyd attended) to rethink organizational structure and activities, political vision, and appropriate responses to the altered national political environment. Many members noted it would not have been possible to sustain for more than a few months (without jeopardizing their day jobs even more than they already had) the extraordinary levels of energy and time devoted to the organization during the height of the presidential campaign.

The Manhattan Billionaires' first post-election meeting (two days after the election) was large (45-50 attendees) and was described by a group photographer as "very emotional;"⁵⁹ the more formal part of the meeting began with Andrew Boyd saying, "I think a primal scream is in order," at which point a loud collective roar filled the room for several seconds. Paradoxically, a collective scream could contribute to reclaiming "dignity" or a sense of agency after defeat (cf. Wood 2001 and Polletta and Amenta 2001:304). Boyd's co-moderator at that meeting then asked "how's everybody feeling?"--which produced another uproar as people shouted words such as "great," "pissed," and "sucky." That meeting had been billed in the listserv announcement as "a chance to debrief, check in, and just mull over where we're at and where we're headed....Hugs, commiseration, solidarity, and fierce primal screams of defiance, mixed with some light conversation about our plans for the future." A form of post-defeat group therapy, its discussion of sources of inspiration and future possibilities included Boyd reading

⁵⁸ The term "strategery" is a Bushism.

⁵⁹ Photos from this first post-election meeting are available on Dave Gochfeld's website: <http://www.dagimage.com/BFBPostElection/>

aloud a chapter titled "Hopelessness Can Change the World," from his humorous 2002 book, *Daily Afflictions*. As he concluded the reading, he had the group repeat in unison (amidst laughter) the selection's final line: "I dedicate myself to an impossible cause." That gathering marked the end of the 2004 Billionaire campaign machine and provided a glimpse of debates about organizational strategies and focus that would become salient during the post-election year. By mid-2005, the Billionaires continued to receive many invitations from other groups to participate in their actions and, as one put it, that "keeps us scrambling like mad." At a June 2005 "strategery" meeting, as the Billionaires reflected on the 2004 campaign, Merchant F. Arms said, "looking back, it was a helluva ride, a magical ride."

Conclusions

This paper has sketched a politics of emotion rooted in perceptions of economic injustice. What White (2005:247) terms "socially significant emotions" help to propel political organizations such as Billionaires for Bush, which reached its peak size and emotional engagement during a highly charged national election campaign that itself is an example of how emotions can be organized and made prominent through ritual.⁶⁰ Building on suggestive comments by Calhoun (2001:55), one might view the 2004 U.S. presidential campaign as a discursive opening or ritualized occasion for liminality (Turner 1969) that allowed "reversals of conventional norms." In particular, during the 2004 campaign season, dissent that had been "staved off" in post-9/11 America could be "contained as part of our business as usual," cartoonist Art Spiegelman (2004) writes. Thus in 2004, dissenting messages carried new force as they entered a public arena enlivened by the launch of the liberal Air America radio (featuring Al Franken), Jon Stewart's satirical televised news program on Comedy Central's "Daily Show," Michael Moore's film "Fahrenheit 9/11," advocacy groups such as MoveOn.org and America Coming Together, the documentary "Outfoxed: Rupert Murdoch's War on Journalism," and critical best-selling books by former Bush administration insiders such as Treasury Secretary Paul O'Neill (Suskind 2004) and counter-terrorism adviser Richard Clarke (2004).

⁶⁰ Calhoun (2001:55) suggests that social movements "involve steps outside of ordinary structural routines" and "make emotions prominent" in ways suggested by Victor Turner's (1969) notion of liminality, but not in the sense of collective action as a "breakdown in normative order."

The Billionaires for Bush are symptomatic of both the possibilities and the limitations of that discursive moment. Their style, described by a *New York Times* reporter as a delicate balance of “earnest intent and absurdity,”⁶¹ both mocks and upholds the genre known as political protest. The group's approach was remarkably suited to a time when many preferred to consume critiques of political rule in the form of irony (as in Jon Stewart's "Daily Show"). Yet it is likely that the Billionaires would have attracted less media coverage and held less popular appeal had their satirical critique not been conveyed by elegantly dressed activists who projected a glamour that appeared to signal complicity with—and indeed derived legitimacy from--the very culture of celebrity and wealth they critiqued.

Calhoun (2001:55) notes that “[s]ocial movements differ greatly...in the extent to which they involve steps outside established routines and normative organizations of emotions.” The Billionaires' for Bush strong moral critique of growing economic inequality and corporate power was packaged in a media-friendly (and police-friendly) polish and glitter that was uncharacteristic of many activists. In contrast to high-risk mobilizations such as the U.S. civil rights movement (Goodwin and Pfaff 2001), whose emotion work required managing fear (of “economic reprisals,...verbal and physical harassment, imprisonment, bodily injury, and even death”⁶²), the Billionaires encoded a high-risk message in a low-risk form. In that way, they managed to penetrate corporate news media filters but in a way that left much interpretive work up to audiences, since mainstream media coverage exposed the public to the group's name and slogans on placards, often without using such text as a springboard for explicit analysis of alternative positions on the economic policy issues to which the group wishes to call attention.

The reach of the U.S. Patriot Act and government surveillance of a remarkable array of activist groups suggest a contemporary parallel to elite discourses of “fear of the dominated other” that have been noted in studies of colonial violence (Abu Lughod and Lutz 1990:14; see also Stoler 2005). Today official responses to peaceful dissent as well as expansion of government secrecy and attempts to

⁶¹ This phrase is from Jack Hitt, 2004, “The Birth of the Meta-Protest Rally?” *New York Times Sunday Magazine*, p. 20, March 28, 2004.

⁶² Goodwin and Pfaff (2001:286). Note that “risk” is understood differently in analyses of “free riding” in some theories of collective action (see Edelman 2001:289-291).

prosecute journalists for disclosing "classified information"⁶³ can be read as just a few signs that U.S. officials are troubled by what Stoler (2004:5) in a different context terms "states of mind and sentiment" or "*distribution* of sentiment." The state, she argues, seeks to "fashion techniques of affective control" and these are overlooked if sentiment is treated as an "embellishment to, rather than the substance of governing projects" (Stoler 2004:5). The contemporary moment, like the colonial situations Stoler (2005) analyzes, calls attention to the ways sentiments such as fear, rage, nostalgia, or humiliation are products of, rather than metaphors for, political systems.⁶⁴ *How* sentiments matter to statecraft (Stoler's 2005:6 formulation) and "what sentiments, in whose hands" authorities fear will be contagious (Stoler 2005:18) appear to be issues that are as overlooked in much contemporary political analysis as they have been in the scholarly readings of colonial archives Stoler explores. Attention to the affective dimensions of social movements thus affords an opportunity to reinstate sentiment in the anthropology of politics.

Protest and statecraft mock as well as mirror one another. Participants in social movements, who embody sentiments likely to trouble the state, are attuned to the state's affective strategies. They adapt to official responses to their expressions of dissent (surveillance, rhetorical disparagement, tear gas, mass arrests) in ways that may reconfigure both private and public sentiment. We have glimpsed these worlds of sentiment in a merry band of pranksters, impersonators of fictional billionaires, and singers of satirical songs.

Postscript: Agrarian Billionaires?

These Billionaires seem to be mostly city folks. But one catches sight of agrarian worlds in songs on their CDs. For example, "Race to the Bottom" opens with the lines "Come work for me! Under the hot, hot sun, until the harvest's done, you'll work night and day. A fake ID is what you're gonna need, so you can get your lousy pay!" "America, the Bountiful" (to the tune of "America, The Beautiful") opens

⁶³ On the latter, see "Criminal Inquiry Opens Into Leak in Eavesdropping," Scott Shane, *New York Times*, December 31, 2005, p. A1.

⁶⁴ Stoler (2005:18) refers to "a colonial order of things in which sentiments (nostalgia, humiliation, and rage) were produced by political systems. They were not metaphors for them."

with "The farmer in Benares loves his Roundup Ready wheat, there's Golden Arches in Madrid on almost every street." And lyrics to "Piece of the Forest" (to the tune of "Piece of My Heart") are as follows:

"Scientists say our climate's in a warming trend, and if we keep cutting down the forests, we will meet our end. We should do business in an eco-friendly way, but that would cost too much, so all I've gotta say is come on, come on, come on, come on! Slash it! Slash another little piece of the forest, baby! Burn it! Burn another little piece of Brazil, it feels so good! Cut it! Cut another little piece of the forest down, baby! No need to worry, cause there's plenty more wood!...Our corporations don't get enough respect, so come on, come on, come on! Slash it! Slash another little piece of the forest, baby!...."

In short, the Billionaires' critiques of economic neoliberalism and Bush administration policies readily encompass issues dear to the hearts of agrarianistas....I thank you for reading this far and I look forward to your comments!

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