

ARGUMENTATION AND ADVOCACY
36 (Summer 1999): 9-21

UNRULY ARGUMENTS: THE BODY RHETORIC OF EARTH FIRST!, ACT UP, AND QUEER NATION

Kevin Michael DeLuca

To save old growth forest, an Earth First! activist sits on a platform suspended 180 feet up in a redwood. Protester and platform are dwarfed by the ancient giant. Deep in the woods, a blue-capped, smiling, bearded head pokes up out of a logging road. The rest of the person is buried in the road. This attempt to stop logging by blockading the road extends the meaning of the term passive resistance.

To protest governmental and corporate policy with regards to AIDS research, ACT UP (AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power) activists chain their bodies to the White House gates and conduct kiss-ins in public spaces. ACT UP occupies St. Patrick's Cathedral and interrupts Mass with a "die-in." Police carry out the bodies of 134 "dead" demonstrators. Together, healthy bodies, emaciated bodies, and wheelchair-bound bodies stop traffic on Wall Street. Queer Nation activists "sit-in" Cracker Barrel restaurants to protest employment policies that discriminate against them for failing to practice "normal" values. They invade straight bars and shopping malls to kiss and otherwise display gay sexual identity.

These contemporary activist groups, whether termed new social movements or postmodern social movements, are particularly notable for three reasons. They reject traditional organizational structures while forming radically democratic disorganizations. They neglect conventional legislative and material goals while practicing the powers of naming, worldview framing, and

identity-making. Finally, and most significantly for this essay, they slight formal modes of public argument while performing unorthodox political tactics that highlight bodies as resources for argumentation and advocacy.

In terms of their stance towards organizational form, Earth First! is exemplary. It is an anti-hierarchical disorganization with no official leaders, no national headquarters, no membership lists, no dues, no board of directors, and no tax-exempt status (Setterberg, 1995, p. 70; Kane, 1987, p. 100). This was a conscious decision, as Earth First! co-founder Dave Foreman explains: "We felt that if we took on the organization of the industrial state, we would soon accept their anthropocentric paradigm, much as Audubon and the Sierra Club already had" (1991, p. 21). ACT UP and other groups are similarly radically democratic and decentralized. AIDS activist and writer David Feinberg's description of meetings is revealing: "ACT UP has no leaders. Meetings are run according to Roberta's Rules of Order and are democratic to the point of near anarchy. The facilitator's role is to try to allow as full a discussion as possible without letting things slide into complete chaos, and to lower the level of vituperative and personal aggrievement to an acceptable level" (1994, p. 10; for descriptions of Queer Nation's designed disorganization, see Cunningham, 1992, Berlant and Freeman, 1993).

Typical of these groups, ACT UP's aims are neither limited to nor centered on the conventional goals of electoral, legislative, legal, and material gains. As Sean Strub, founder and editor of the AIDS magazine

Kevin Michael DeLuca is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Speech Communication at The University of Georgia. The author thanks the students in his seminar "Rhetorics of Bodies" for thought-provoking discussions and thanks Gerard Hauser for his judicious advice on revisions. A version of this essay was presented at the Sixth Biennial Public Address Conference held at the University of Iowa in 1998.

POZ explains,

Someone 25 years old, gay or straight, with AIDS or not, has a different view of their doctor than they would have 10 years ago. There's a reason ACT UP never incorporated, never sought to build a staff. The idea was not to build an institution with a budget and a bureaucracy. The objective was to change people's relationship to the epidemic and the health care system in general, to make us all players. To analyze its impact, don't look at how many people show up at ACT UP's meetings. Look at how many people took ACT UP's values into their lives (quoted in Schoofs, 1997, pp. 42, 44).

These groups, then, are eschewing conventional goals in favor of contesting social norms, deconstructing the established naming of the world, and suggesting the possibilities of alternative worlds.

In performing these goals, Earth First!, ACT UP, and Queer Nation are practicing a form of argumentation that is an important manifestation of what has become known as constitutive rhetoric: the mobilization of signs, images, and discourses for the articulation of identities, ideologies, consciousnesses, communities, publics, and cultures.¹ For all of these groups, formal public address and argumentation are not primary practices, as denoted by the absence of the eloquent orator of Earth First! or ACT UP.² Instead, these activist groups practice an alternative image politics, performing image events designed for mass media dissemination. Often, image events revolve around images of bodies—vulnerable bodies, dangerous bodies, taboo bodies, ludicrous bodies, transfigured bodies. These political bodies constitute a nascent body rhetoric that deploys bodies as a pivotal resource for the crucial practice of public argumentation.³

¹ Greene (1998) provides a compelling history of the development of constitutive rhetoric.

² Dave Foreman and Larry Kramer are important speakers, but their speeches are mostly for internal group consumption and are unheard in the larger public sphere. These groups' primary public rhetoric is the body rhetoric of their image events.

³ In this essay I conflate bodies and images of bodies. My analysis largely focuses on images of bodies represented on televised news. To get into issues of representation

In considering the use of bodies by these groups as argument, it is important to consider such usage as in part an adaptation to the unique possibilities and constraints of television, the *de facto* national public forum of the United States at the close of the 20th Century. Unable to buy time like corporations and mainstream political parties do, groups such as Earth First!, ACT UP, and Queer Nation "buy" air time through using their bodies to create compelling images that attract media attention. Even when they have the media's eye, however, these groups options remain severely restricted. First, the protocols of sound bite journalism that dominate commercial news suggest that most issues will receive only precious seconds and that a few minutes are an eternity. Hardly the time to practice the methods of the Lincoln-Douglas debates. Second, since these groups do not own their time, they know neither if they will be allowed to speak nor for how long. In addition, as radical groups questioning societal orthodoxies, they can expect news organizations to frame them negatively as disrupters of the social order (Gitlin, 1980; Parenti, 1993). These groups are in hostile territory with little control. What they do have some control over, however, is the presentation of their bodies in the image events that attract media attention. Their bodies, then, become not merely flags to attract attention for the argument but the site and substance of the argument itself.

The aim of this essay is to explore the power and possibilities of bodies in public argumentation. After briefly chronicling the relative neglect of the body in criticism of social movement protests, I will perform close readings of the bodies in the performances of Earth First!, ACT UP, and Queer Nation. The purpose of this analysis is not to

would take me far afield from the thrust of this essay. In addition, an argument could be made that images of bodies on television news are perceived transparently, that is as real bodies, in a way that bodies in Hollywood films, for example, are not.

valorize these groups or to privilege body rhetoric, but, rather, to suggest that we must account for their bodies in order to understand the force of these groups' protests, for Earth First!, ACT UP, and Queer Nation have challenged and changed the meanings of the world not through good reasons but through vulnerable bodies, not through rational arguments but through bodies at risk.

THE ARGUMENTATIVE FORCE OF UNRULY BODIES

Although there is beginning to be some attention to the argumentative and rhetorical potential of images,⁴ bodies remain virtually invisible. Even when the tumultuous street politics of the 1960s and the early 1970s forced rhetorical critics to look beyond the boundaries of conventional politics and formal argumentation and consider the implications of extra-linguistic confrontational activities, the scope was limited and bodies escaped sustained attention.⁵ As Brant Short points out, "Although critics acknowledged the rhetorical aspects of confrontation, protest, and agitation, these studies suggest that theoretical accounts of seemingly *nonrational* discourse remained linked to traditional notions of logic, rationality, and artistic proofs" (1991, p. 173). Contrary to this perspective, I propose that Earth First!, ACT UP, and Queer Nation's tactics are arguments in their own right and that their bodies are central to the force of their arguments.

To suggest that bodies and images of bodies argue is controversial and defies the traditional delimitation of argumentation as linguistic. Even those sympathetic to the argumentative force of body images hesitate.

Celeste Condit's discussion (1990, pp. 79-95) of fetus images is illustrative of the hesitation yet demonstrative of the argumentative force of bodies. In a discussion of the role of images of fetuses in the public debate over abortion, Condit offers a nuanced account of the force of images in public argument. Although Condit starts by granting that images can replace narratives and offer a form of grounding, she asserts the primacy of words, contending that the power of images is dependent on their translation into verbal meanings (1990, p. 81). As Condit shouts, "Without verbal commentary, pictures DO NOT ARGUE propositions" (1990, p. 85; see also pp. 81, 86, 87, 88, 90). Despite such protestations, Condit's own argument remains conflicted. First, Condit admits that images can provide general substance for a ground (1990, pp. 81, 85, 91). In Condit's reading of the fetus images of the pro-Life movement, she asserts that "the pro-Life pictures bring us a weighty set of grounds and that those grounds substantiate the claim that fetuses are important and valuable and ought to be protected" (1990, p. 91). Second, Condit seems to be subtly stretching the bounds of public argument and tacitly suggesting that these fetus images *do* argue. For instance, Condit argues that images offer "a different kind of understanding" (1990, p. 81) and, in referring to images, Condit writes "like any other form of argument" (1990, p. 81). Most explicitly, Condit later declares, "I believe that the pictures argue forcefully for the substance and value of the fetus" (1990, p. 91). Finally, belying her earlier assertions privileging verbal commentary, Condit does not argue that the pro-Life argument was more persuasive than the pro-Choice argument due to superior verbal commentary. Rather, it was a battle of images. As Condit herself concludes, "The persuasive force of the image of the fetus, towering over the meager pro-Choice images, would powerfully influence the popular consciousness,

⁴ See Olson (1987), Jamieson (1988, 1994), Condit (1990), Gronbeck (1992, 1993, 1995), Birdsell and Groarke (1996), Lucaites (1997), and Lake and Pickering (1998).

⁵ For examples, see Haiman (1967), McEdward (1968), Scott and Smith (1969), Bowers and Ochs (1971), and Simons (1972).

eventually establishing elements of the pro-Life vocabulary deeply within popular culture and within the lives of polarized subcultures" (1990, p. 94). Significantly, then, not only were images, not words, decisive, but body images, those of fetuses, trumped other images, like those of a hanger.

I side with those who accept that the non-linguistic can argue.⁶ Indeed, in an age of mixed media dominated by a televisual discourse composed of visual, aural, and verbal codes, to cling to an anachronistic definition of argumentation risks rendering it irrelevant. That said, I am not suggesting that a naked, pre-discursive body constitutes an argument. There are no *a priori* bodies. Bodies are enmeshed in a turbulent stream of multiple and conflictual discourses that shape what they mean in particular contexts. I am contesting, however, that bodies are in any simple way determined or limited by verbal frames. To think of bodies as crucial elements of arguments in a televisual public forum, then, requires imagining forms of argument that exceed the protocols of deliberative reasoning.

Bodies in Nature

Since their founding in 1980, Earth First!, a radical, no-compromise environmental group, has deployed an array of tactics as they attempt to change the way people think about and act toward nature. In their efforts to put onto the public agenda issues such as the clearcutting of old growth forests, overgrazing by cattle on public lands, depredations by oil and mineral companies on public lands, loss of biodiversity, and the general ravaging of wilderness, Earth First! activists have resorted to sitting in trees, blockading roads with their bodies, chaining themselves to logging equipment, and dressing in animal costumes at public hearings. As this brief

⁶ See Jamieson (1988,1994), Gronbeck (1992, 1993, 1995), Birdsell and Groarke (1996), and Lake and Pickering (1998).

listing of Earth First! image events makes clear, their tactics are dependent on their bodies. Although these direct actions sometimes succeed and often fail in their immediate goals, their effectiveness as image events can be partially measured by the emergence of clearcutting, old growth forests, spotted owls, cattle grazing, and the 1872 mining law as hot-button political issues. Earth First!, like Greenpeace before them, understands that the significance of direct actions is in their function as image events in the larger arena of public discourse. Although designed to flag media attention and generate publicity, image events are more than just a means of getting on television. They are crystallized argumentative shards, mind bombs, that shred the existing screens of perception and work to expand "the universe of thinkable thoughts" (Manes, 1990, p. 77).

The image events of Earth First! interrogate the fundamental beliefs of industrialism while contesting the actions such beliefs warrant. For analysis, let us look at a protester sitting on a platform 100 feet up in a giant Douglas fir and a protester buried up to his neck in a logging road.⁷ What is striking about both of these images is the utter vulnerability of the protesters as they intervene on behalf of nature. Quite clearly, the Earth First!ers, human beings, are putting at risk their bodies, their lives for wilderness, for trees.⁸ This is an almost incomprehensible act in a modern, humanist, secular culture. In Western culture nature has been displaced in numerous narratives, including Christian, Enlightenment, scientific, capitalis-

⁷ These image events appeared on ABC World News' report "War in the Woods" (August 10, 1987) and are typical of the images of Earth First! bodies on the news. For an extended discussion of grassroots environmental groups and the media, see DeLuca (1999).

⁸ For accounts of violent incidents against environmental activists, see Foreman (1991, pp. 124-127), Helvarg (1994), and Rowell (1996). On September 17, 1998, an irate logger felled a redwood with Earth First! protesters in the area. The falling tree killed Earth First!er David Chain. For a compelling account of the confrontation, see Goodell (1999).

tic, socialistic, and industrial, that place human reason and humans at the center. Humans risking their lives for animals shakes the *a priori* anthropocentric assumption of these narratives, breaks the Great Chain of Being, and disobeys the command in *Genesis* to: "Be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth" (*The Holy Bible: King James Version*, 1974, *Genesis* 1:28, p. 9). In refuting human-centered worldviews, the protesters' bodies give presence (Perelman, 1982) to the proposition that humans are not apart from the natural world but a part of it. They disclose the possibility of an ecocentric world.

While lowering the position of humans in the hierarchy, by risking their bodies for trees the Earth First!ers simultaneously challenge the understanding of animals and nature as mere machines or matter in motion, a storehouse of resources for humans to exploit. These notions are the products of a centuries-long process that Berman felicitously calls "the disenchantment of nature" (1982). In short, by placing themselves at risk, Earth First!ers challenge the anthropocentrism of Western culture and proffer the humble thought that other animals have a right to live and have intrinsic value, not merely economic value.

Perhaps in identification with the forms of nature that they are attempting to save, trees and ecosystems, both protesters have rendered their bodies relatively immobile. The Earth First! activist on the 8-by-4 platform 100 feet up the tree is helpless if the loggers decide to cut the tree despite the protester's presence (this has happened). The Earth First!er buried up to his neck in the road is utterly helpless. He is exposed not only to the potential anger of loggers or law enforcement officers, but to the torturous immobility of not being able to use his hands, whether to

swat away a mosquito or scratch an itch. In performing these image events, the activists translate their humanist bodies into ecocentric bodies. Perched high in the Douglas fir, the protester sees the world from the tree's point of view and "becomes" the tree. Rendered relatively immobile, his movements are limited to the swaying of the tree. The protester, like the tree, depends on nourishment to come to him. Finally, their fates are entwined as the protester depends on the tree for support and shelter while the tree depends on the protester's presence to forestall the chainsaw. This mutual dependence is particularly clear in the case of Julia "Butterfly" Hill, who has lived in a 1,000 year-old redwood, Luna, since December 10th, 1997. She has told of how the tree sheltered her during the worst El Nino storms in California's history. Her presence, meanwhile, has stopped Pacific Lumber from killing Luna. Butterfly's bodily presence is a direct response to Pacific Lumber's practice of clearcutting old growth forests. Her body is a NO. Indeed, it is the only "no" that Pacific Lumber respects. Often logging illegally (they were cited for over 200 violations of California's logging laws in the past two years), Pacific Lumber cut the trees surrounding Butterfly and Luna. In the road blockade, the protester buried in the earth becomes the earth. He adopts a ground level view of the world. People and equipment tower over him. He is immobile and must be spoon fed. But his vantage point allows him to speak for the earth: "Defending what's left of the wilderness, defending what's left of the world." In clinging to treetops and embedding themselves in the earth, the Earth First! protesters both literally perform and symbolically enact humanity's connection to nature. In dislodging the blinders of a human-centered worldview, the protesters bring into being an ecocentric perspective. In identifying with the tree and the earth, the protesters

invite viewers to also identify with the natural world.

As the protester buried in the road speaks, the camera zooms in on him. Technology brings his face and the face of the tree-sitter into my world. Their faces confront me, compel my attention. "A face turned to us is an appeal made to us, a demand put on us . . . there lies the force of an imperative that touches us, caught sight of wherever we see a face turned to us" (Lingis, 1994, p. 167). The weary face of the tree-sitter and the bespectacled, bearded, smiling face popping out of the road testify to their thoughtfulness, resolution mixed with resignation, and humanity. In my encounter with these faces, "I find all that I am put into question by the exactions and exigencies of the other. In the face of another, the question of truth is out on each proposition of which my discourse is made, the question of justice put on each move and gesture of my exposed life" (Lingis, 1994, p. 173). The imperative of these faces call to us and call us to account. They call us to account for proposing an anthropocentric worldview that reduces the rest of the world to a storehouse of resources. They call us to account for industrial practices that destroy a natural world so intimately connected to their bodies, our bodies.

Being buried in the road is significant. In blocking a road, the protester is disrupting literally and symbolically a major artery of industrialism. Indeed, the restructuring of the economy, foreign policy, housing, and social practices around the needs of automotive transportation suggest that our society in the late 20th Century could be termed a "car culture." Although the blocked road is a dirt road, it is key to industrialism in that it is a road for resource extraction. In blocking this road, then, the protester confronts the productive and symbolic capital of the culture and violates social norms:

From an early age, all children are in-

culcated with a necessary respect: pedestrians should

always *give way* to automobiles. Such rules are mostly concerned with letting road users "go about their (and capitalism's) business," and are intended to coerce those who might obstruct their "rights of way" or infringe on their liberty. . . . For these reasons, if no other, the advent of recent road protests marks a radical challenge to the instrumental, one-dimensional, and codified ethos of the modern road (Smith, 1997, p. 349).

This body in this road interrupts the industrialization and homogenization of time and space and calls us to slow down and consider this place. By forcing the industrial juggernaut to pause, if only for a moment, this body gives us pause. Such pause opens a space for refuting the oft-repeated assertion of industrialism that progress is inevitable. In pausing, we stop the clock for a moment. In the moment, we can take the time to notice this particular place.

In short, these images of bodies at risk are encapsulated arguments challenging the anthropocentric position granting humans dominion over all living creatures and implicitly advocating ecocentrism as an alternative. By arguing against reducing trees and ecosystems (old growth forests) to economic resources and instead proposing that they have intrinsic value and inalienable rights, Earth First! contests the linking of economic progress with nature as a storehouse of resources, thus deconstructing the discourse of industrialism that warrants the use of technology to exploit nature in the name of progress.

The bodies of Earth First!, then, question the possibility of property and the definition of the land as a resource and, instead, suggest that biodiversity has value in itself and, following Leopold's land ethic, "[a] thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise" (1949/1968, pp. 224-25). Progress, then, is

not the increasing production of goods through the technological exploitation of nature as a storehouse of resources, but, rather, the recognition of the intrinsic value and fundamental importance of ecosystems and the need for humans to live within limits as a part of larger ecosystems. By implacing their bodies in a region through burying themselves in the ground, perching in trees, hugging trees, and living in these areas until forcibly removed, Earth First!ers constitute an ecocentric community. Through the care of a neighbor, a tree becomes *this* tree, a mountain *this* mountain. The formation of an ecocentric community argues for the possibility of an alternative to the dominant industrial consumer culture.

The inhabiting of trees and regions by Earth First! activists is important. As brief glimpses of camp sites suggest, Earth First!ers often live in the places they are trying to protect. They dwell in the woods. Treesitters live with the trees. As mentioned, Julia "Butterfly" Hill has lived at 180 feet in one redwood for over a year now. Through inhabiting the tree, she feels, "I have become one with this tree and with nature in a way I would never have thought possible" (quoted in Hornblower, 1998). In dwelling in the woods, the activists compel us to dwell on our relation to nature, to meditate on our fundamental relation as dwelling on the earth. I am using the word dwelling in the sense suggested by Heidegger: "The way in which you are and I am, the manner in which we humans *are* on the earth is *baun*, dwelling. To be a human being means to be on the earth as a mortal. It means to dwell" (1993, p. 349). By placing their bodies in the woods, the Earth First! activists bring the wilderness to us and bring us to the wilderness. They make present a natural world too often obscured by the overlaid technosphere that envelops the majority of Americans as they go about their daily routines. In dwelling in the woods they strip away the technological

vener, they reveal nature, and encourage us to confront our fundamental relation to the world as that of dwelling on earth.⁹

The body rhetoric of Earth First!, besides being a sustained critique of the articulation of nature and progress in the discourse of industrialism, also interrogates the accepted universalization of humanity as "rational man," the Cartesian subject. In the image events discussed, we witness people acting passionately ("irrationally") on behalf of nature and place, commitments that owe as much to love and emotional connections as they do to instrumental reason. Indeed, often these image events are refuting the results of a scientific rationality that uses the methods of cost-benefit analysis and risk assessment to sanction environmental destruction and extinctions in exchange for profits. Earth First! is questioning the very possibility of "science" (a neutral universal practice based on reason) as it condemns the science of the US Forestry Service that recommends clearcutting and other practices that most clearly benefit the timber, oil, and mining industries. In putting their bodies on the line in solidarity with trees and ecosystems, the Earth First! activists enact an embodied and embedded defense of nature that belies anthropocentrism's abstraction of "man" from the natural world and contests science's contextless universalization of nature. Finally, in the acts of their bodies, the activists transgress a notion of subjectivity anchored in reason and proffer their bodies as the founding texts for an embodied subjectivity that radically expands the bounds of human identity. Importantly, in using their bodies to perform their arguments, Earth First!ers are enacting a mode of argument that supports the substance of their argument. That is, they are practicing a mode of argument that is less

⁹For more on the importance of piercing the technological veil, plus a consideration of the paradoxical role of technology in making possible the environmental movement and a new understanding of nature, see DeLuca (1996).

focused on an abstract, universalized reason and more attune to the feelings that accompany lived experiences.

The most explicit proposition and refutation dynamic revolves around the network news' consistently negative framing of Earth First!. The framing states two explicit propositions: 1) Earth First! is violent; 2) Earth First!ers are terrorists. These claims are presented by the reporters or Earth First! critics through direct charges or through descriptive language of Earth First! activities. ABC News titles the first in-depth national network news story on Earth First! "War in the Woods" (August 10, 1987). Peter Jennings' introduction begins, "Now, the war in the woods" and ends by claiming that Earth First! "is so angry . . . it has been particularly extreme fighting back." Later in the story, reporter Ken Kashiwahara claims Earth First! has turned the forests into "a battlefield for guerrilla warfare." Kashiwahara interviews a US Forest Service official who warns against going "to war over it. . . . Ultimately somebody could be murdered in this whole event." Then-head of the National Wildlife Federation Jay Hair chillingly pronounces judgment and punishment: "I reject out of hand their being environmentalists. They're terrorists, they're outlaws. They should be treated as such." Kashiwahara's final description labels Earth First! "terrorists or freedom fighters." Though the terms carry different valences, both ensconce Earth First! in the terminology of war.

Other network news stories echo the terminology. Earth First!ers are "outlaws" or "zealots" (NBC News, July 5, 1990). ABC's Sam Donaldson opens a report, "On the American Agenda tonight, what some people are calling civil disobedience, what others are calling a form of terrorism" (ABC News, August 19, 1993). The report goes on to describe a "battle over logging" and "running battles." Reporter Barry Serafin asserts that tourists "have been scared away by

guerrilla war being waged by this country's most radical environmental group."

The verbal framing in these stories of Earth First! activists as violent terrorists is refuted by two sets of body images. The bodies of Earth First! immobilized in a tree or in the earth, chained to logging equipment, holding hands and sitting in front of a bulldozer, bloodied from attack by loggers, peacefully submitting to arrest, are not violent but vulnerable. They embody the counter-proposition: Earth First! practices non-violent civil disobedience.

Many of the images of Earth First!'s opponents in action suggest that the violent framing has been misplaced. Law enforcement officials roughly arrest protesters. Loggers violently confront Earth First!ers. A logger in a pickup trucks speeds toward men, women, and children sitting in rocking chairs blocking a road. A log truck inexorably pushes an Earth First! activist trying to block a road. A leading citizen of a small town sits astride his horse and threatens to rope an Earth First! demonstrator. He tells the sheriff, "I guarantee you're gonna have to arrest me to keep me from dragging that sucker down the street" (ABC News, 1993). The loggers who beat an Earth First!er follow their bloodied victim to camp. Though Earth First! members significantly outnumber the four loggers, all they do is talk with them. Overall, the bodies of the Earth First! activists and their opponents belie the verbal framing and attest to the non-violence of Earth First!.

Acting Up

Although ACT UP was founded in 1987 with the express purpose of improving care for AIDS patients by violating the veneer of civility that was shrouding the deaths of thousands, it is not too much to claim, as the headline on one article proclaims, that the members of ACT UP are "THE AIDS SHOCK TROOPERS WHO CHANGED

THE WORLD" (Schoofs, 1997, p. 42). Besides speeding drug approval, challenging drug prices, and obtaining numerous changes in health care and policy, ACT UP has forced the United States to confront its homophobia on state, institutional, civil, and private levels. It also has given rise to many other gay and lesbian activist organizations, including Queer Nation. Thanks to these groups, mainstream politicians must acknowledge and deal with gay and lesbian issues, the idea of same-sex couples as parents and marriage partners is now imaginable and possible, and homosexuals are becoming a presence in popular culture.

Central to the success of ACT UP and Queer Nation has been an in-your-face body rhetoric. The body is front and center in their arguments for it is the body that is at stake—its meanings, its possibilities, its care, and its freedoms. In their protest actions, the activists use their bodies to rewrite the homosexual body as already constructed by dominant mainstream discourses—diseased, contagious, deviant, invisible. In order to explicate these body arguments, let us take a closer look at some of the actions mentioned in the opening of this essay.

The force of the body makes it a sublime and contested site in cultures, subject to feverish and multiple modes of disciplining and constructing (Foucault, 1977, 1978; Lingis, 1994). In our culture at this time, homosexual bodies are a particularly hot site for they serve as the necessary foil for heterosexuality and yet are evidence of the failure of discursive disciplining and the excess of bodies. Additionally, they are marked not due to physical features but sexual practices, which provokes erotophobia, "the terrifying, irrational reaction to the erotic which makes individuals and society vulnerable to psychological and social control in cultures where pleasure is strictly categorized and regulated" (Patton, 1985, p. 103). More specifically, homosexuality repre-

sents an especially potent boundary transgression that violates the hegemonic discourse of heterosexuality and threatens the social order. As Judith Butler explains, "Since anal and oral sex among men clearly establishes certain kinds of bodily permeabilities unsanctioned by the hegemonic order, male homosexuality would, within such a hegemonic point of view, constitute a site of danger and pollution, prior to and regardless of the cultural presence of AIDS" (1990, p. 132). Taking advantage of their liminal status, ACT UP and Queer Nation activists deploy their dangerous bodies in their tactics.

At a basic level, the presence of their openly homosexual bodies is stunning in a culture where gay bodies do not exist or, if they must, their proper place is still the closet. In many regions of the country, to refuse to be proper, to pass as straight, is to risk being bashed. The penalty for exposing one's gay body ranges from verbal abuse to physical beatings to death (with the horrific murder of Matthew Shepherd serving as a ghastly reminder). Thus, by their very presence at a protest the activists are enacting a defiant rhetoric of resistance.

This resistance is intensified in the context of a social field permeated by medical and homophobic discourses that constitute gay bodies as diseased plague carriers bearing the mark of God's disfavor. Germphobia constructs AIDS as a modern plague that calls for quarantine (Patton, 1985, pp. 51-66). The New Right and Christian fundamentalists read AIDS as a message from God and a warrant for oppressive social policies. As Patton observes, "AIDS is a particularly potent symbol for the hard-line radical right because it is evidence of sin, God's disfavor, and an ultimate solution: it is both a sign and a punishment embodied in one of the groups targeted for political decimation long before AIDS" (1985, pp. 86-87). Medical fears and religious prejudice merge in the comments of a doctor in the *Southern Medical Journal*:

"Might it be that our society's approval of homosexuality is an error and that the unsubtle words of wisdom of the Bible are frightfully correct? Indeed, from an empirical medical perspective alone, current scientific observation seems to require the conclusion that homosexuality is a pathologic condition" (quoted in Patton, 1985, p. 87). In such a hostile context, the presence of gay bodies, sick, emaciated, and healthy, constitute an eloquent and courageous response to discrimination and hate. It is a refusal to be quarantined, isolated, marginalized, silenced. In making their bodies visible, present, exposed, the ACT UP activists call on society to care.

The same-sex kiss-in ups the ante. The romantic kiss, the portal to heterosexuality, marriage, children and the family values that function as the ideological bedrock of patriarchy is subverted, made "bi." The same-sex kiss instantiates the claimed identity of homosexuality and provokes erotophobia. As a performance of gay or lesbian sexuality it violates two taboos—the taboo on homosexuality and the backup taboo on visibility. The same-sex kiss-in, whether at a public protest, straight bar, or shopping mall, turns the normalized terrain of heterosexuality into an alien landscape. It embodies the Queer Nation slogan, "We're here. We're queer. Get used to it."

The kiss-ins of ACT UP were a specific response to the intensification of homophobic discourses as the AIDS crisis developed. As activist Douglas Crimp explains, a kiss-in was "a public demonstration of gay and lesbian sexuality in the face of homophobia" (1990, p. 50). A poster for an April 29, 1988 kiss-in, created by Gran Fury, "a band of individuals united in anger and dedicated to exploiting the power of art to end the AIDS crisis" (quoted in Crimp, 1990, p. 16), shows two male sailors french kissing. One sailor has his arms around his partner's waist. The other sailor's arms are around his partner's

neck. In other words, it is a classic kiss, made famous in celluloid dreams and here transformed into a transgressive political act, charged freedom rhetoric. Part of the charge comes from the bodies of the sailors in uniform, since the armed forces represent the first and last purified bastion of masculinity. At the time, the military was an institution dedicated to weeding out homosexuality in its ranks. Even the Clinton Administration's "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy is simply an official version of *The Closet*. The poster of the sailors kissing is a symbolic coming out that refutes the twin assertions of nonexistence or at least invisibility. More than just a refutation, it also asserts the presence of gays and lesbians in the military. The artists know the argumentative force of the body, for the poster's caption simply says, "READ MY LIPS." Although ACT UP distributed a flier explaining "why we kiss," the force of a kiss-in rests with the body, not the linguistic rationale, which cannot compel attention and is not disseminated through mass media broadcasting.

The Catholic Church is another institution that does not accept the practice of homosexuality. Besides condemning homosexuality and not allowing gays to be priests (of course, the patriarchal Church does not allow straight or lesbian woman to be priests), the Church also opposes AIDS education and safe sex. For ACT UP in New York City, the Church's positions and John Cardinal O'Connor's active lobbying against the availability of condoms in public schools "promotes violence against gays" (quoted in Bullert, 1997, p. 125). On December 10, 1989, ACT UP responded to these positions with a "die-in" during Mass in St. Patrick's Cathedral. The "die-in" is designed to violate the veil of sanctity that shrouds the Church and O'Connor. It makes present the fatal consequences of the positions of an institution that purports to preach love, compassion, and understanding. In present-

ing themselves as symbolic victims and potential actual victims of Church policies, the ACT UP activists practically embody the consequences of Church policies tied to dusty dogma and abstract principles. In interrupting the Mass, the bodies in the "die-in" refuse to be sacrificed on the altar of Church doctrine. In using their gay and lesbian bodies to intervene in a public policy debate over AIDS prevention, ACT UP injects an emotional urgency into the debate. The presence of their individual bodies personalizes the debate and gives faces to the statistics. As one protester shouts, "You're murdering us! Stop killing us! We're not going to take it anymore! Stop it!" (Quoted in Bullert, 1997, p. 126).

Queer Nation, founded at a New York City ACT UP meeting in 1990, deploys the body arguments and other tactics of AIDS activists in the service of the more general aims of challenging heterosexism and queering public spaces. Co-founder Michael Signorile describes the group's tactics: "Utilizing ACT UP's in-your-face tactics to take on gay bashers and increase visibility, Queer Nation spawned chapters across the country. Its members invaded bars and restaurants to hold kiss-ins. Dressed in the most fabulous gay regalia, Queer Nation went into suburban shopping malls" (1993, p. 88). In reterritorializing the terrain of the straight bar or shopping mall through kiss-ins and "fashion shows," Queer Nation activists transgress heterosexist spaces, make them uncomfortable for taken-for-granted heterosexuality, transform these spaces into alien landscapes. This is only a first step. As Berlant and Freeman suggest, "Queer Nights Out" are acts of sexual desegregation that hope to broadcast the ordinariness of the queer body and the banality of same-sex kissing (1993, p. 207). Queering public spaces is a deconstructive rhetoric that does not reverse the heterosexual/homosexual hierarchy, but instead hopes to displace it

and create public spaces that are safe for visible manifestations of multiple sexualities: "*Visibility* is critical if a safe public existence is to be forged . . . secure spaces of safe embodiment for capital and sexual expenditures . . . safe spaces, secured for bodies by capital and everyday life practices. . . . 'Being queer is not about a right to privacy: it is about the freedom to be public'" (Berlant and Freeman, 1993, p. 201)—the freedom to be visible, to exist.

Reterritorializing the mall is especially significant in an America where the mall has become the public space for the display of the normative ideals of its consumer culture. It is the contemporary version of Main Street. Teenagers hang out there and conduct the dating rituals of heterosexual adolescence. Families shop for the goods of the American Dream. Seniors power walk into their Golden Years. Into this mythic space Queer Nation activists assert their public place.

The body rhetoric of the kiss-ins also work to "normalize" homosexuality through denaturalizing the conventions of heterosexuality. In consciously imitating and thus parodying the ritual practices of heterosexuality in a bar or mall, the activists reveal in the possibility of imitation the constructedness and contingency of the practices of heterosexuality. As Butler suggests, "As imitations which effectively displace the meaning of the original . . . parodic proliferation deprives hegemonic culture and its critics of the claim to naturalized or essentialist gender identities" (1990, p. 138). In using their bodies as billboards to disrupt the straight spaces of these places, Queer Nation activists recreate these spaces as sites for multiple significations of sexuality.

CONCLUSION

The aim of this essay is fairly limited. This essay is not meant to offer a theory of the body and, indeed, is implicitly incoherent

with respect to a theory of the body, for the body is a site of incoherence. Still, the discussions of bodies in this essay does suggest that the body is *both* socially constructed and excessive. That is, bodies simultaneously are constructed in discourses and exceed those discourses. This essay is not an argument about or for postmodern politics or new social movements, though others have made those arguments about ACT UP, Earth First!, and other contemporary social protest groups.¹⁰ Still, if postmodern or new social movements are understood as being concerned with discursive issues relating to identity, social norms, ideologies, power, and worldviews; forming grassroots groups practicing radical participatory democracy; and performing unorthodox rhetorical tactics; the interpretation of the groups in this essay is consonant with such a characterization of postmodern politics. Finally, this essay is not an argument about image politics, though since the focus is on bodies that often appear to people as images of bodies through mass media dissemination, the argument of this essay is supportive of what Mitchell (1994) terms "the pictorial turn" and provides further evidence of the need for a visual rhetoric.

This essay is an argument for the necessity of considering the body when attempting to understand the effects of many forms of public argument, especially social protest rhetoric in a televisual public forum. In close readings of the unruly acts of Earth First!, ACT UP, and Queer Nation, it is evident that both the meaning and force of their arguments is dependent on the deployment of their bodies. I would suggest that these groups are not atypical. Bodies are central to the activism of environmental justice groups, Operation Rescue, and other groups. In attempting to understand the dynamics of social change and the role of rhetoric in

constituting identities, ideologies, communities, and cultures, critics must analyze bodies as a rich source of argumentative force. Such a task requires a reconsideration of argumentation so as to take account of public arguments that exceed the bonds of reason and words. Through its readings of body arguments, this essay makes a contribution to such a task.

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¹⁰ See Aronowitz (1996), Cohen (1985), Crimp (1990), Offe (1985), Patton (1985, 1990), and Touraine (1985).

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