Introduction

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Politics revolves around what can be seen, felt, sensed. Political acts are encoded in medial forms—feet marching on a street, punch holes on a card, images on a television newscast, tweets about events unfolding in real time—by which the political becomes manifest in the world. These forms have force, shaping people as subjects and constituting the contours of what is perceptible, sensible, legible. In doing so, they define the terms of political possibility and create terrain for political acts. Following Jacques Rancière, we are interested in how various orderings of social relations become "sensible" as viable sites of contestation by nongovernmental activists. Pursuing this line of questioning requires two interconnected levels of analysis. First, it requires close attention to the formal, aesthetic, rhetorical, and affective dimensions of the images, performances, and artifacts that make up what George Marcus has called "the activist imaginary."[1] Second, it requires an examination of the processual aspect of this imaginary, which is to say, the whole network of financial, institutional, discursive, and technological infrastructures and practices involved in the production, circulation, and reception of the visual-cultural materials with which this volume concerns itself. By bringing these realms together into one complex we examine the political fields constituted by images, the practices of circulation that propel them, and the platforms on which they are made manifest.

The conjunction of visual culture and nongovernmental politics in this volume's subtitle could be presumed to refer to two distinct realms: the representational world of visual culture that somehow encodes and represents the political, on one side, and the domain of the political, on the other. The works in this book refuse this opposition and instead analyze their mutual imbrication. Of particular concern to us here are the ways in which images are tied to "making things public," to the relational processes through which particular relations of social power are

reinscribed as issues of political concern and concrete transformation.[2] A photograph displayed in a newspaper is not the same object when it is displayed in an art gallery. The networks in which the image circulates and the platforms by which it is manifest rest upon differing epistemologies and infrastructures. These different modes of circulation address distinct publics and make possible varying forms of political action, enabling particular claims to be made while foreclosing others.

The emergence of new forms of nongovernmental politics in the last few decades rests upon practices of mediation whereby social movements constitute particular publics, advance claims in the world, and seek to intervene politically. Images circulate in specific institutional and discursive networks, anchored by the specificity of their form of mediation and attentive to the aesthetic and generic demands of their particular platforms. These platforms can be concerts, human rights reports, magazine photojournalism, graffiti, legal cases, documentary films, online videos, or a thousand other such domains. Each one demands its own modes of address, it own techniques of soliciting attention, its own supporting discourses whereby it claims truth, authority, and legitimacy. Attending to political aesthetics means attending not to a disembodied image that travels under the concept of art or visual culture or to a preformed domain of the political that seeks subsequent expression in media form. It demands not just an examination of the visual forms that comment upon and constitute politics, but analysis of the networks of circulation whereby images exist in the world and the platforms by which they come into public prominence.

Diverse activists of all ideological stripes are involved in these projects. This book was conceived prior to the emergence of demonstrations around the world, from the Arab Middle East, to Europe, to the United States, in which protesters are occupying everywhere, including the abstract place known as Wall Street, coming together to locate, reify, and contest performatively the usually vague nonspace of capital or authoritarian rule. Although these movements are in many cases regionally specific, internally fractious, and distinguished from one another through a whole range of highly specific, contingent situations, they have in common a characteristic identified by Michel Feher, following Foucault, in the predecessor to this volume: "a shared determination not to be governed *thusly*."[3]

NONGOVERNMENTS

The premise of nongovernmental politics—organized political action separated from the state—is sometimes mapped onto a simplistic assumption that nongovernmental politics are progressivist and frequently *opposed* to the work of the state. This view has come under challenge in recent years in two main ways.

The first has been a growing scholarship devoted to analyzing the work of NGOs, including aid and humanitarian movements, as forms of what Mariella Pandolfi refers to as "mobile sovereignties."[4] This scholarship has made clear that NGOs, through interventions in the name of disaster relief, care, or humanitarianism, are frequently engaged in what Didier Fassin terms "humanitarian government." By this he refers to the measures, initiatives, and techniques of government engaged in by both states and nongovernmental actors and brought into operation to manage precarious populations.[5] Through the biopolitical care of vulnerable people, aid apparatuses, religious movements, and medical relief organizations enter into territories for particular periods of time and come to take on the de facto status of a government through the act of administering welfare. Operating on similar terrain, NGOs take on tasks that were previously the prerogative of the state.

The assumption that nongovernmental politics are opposed to the work of the state also fails to take into account the ways in which the state, as the object of contest, is configured differently in a neoliberal age in which the hegemonic norm is to deny the legitimacy of state responsibility for the quality of life of its citizens. We can see this not only in the rise of new populist movements such as the Tea Party, with its antigovernment ideology, but also more generally in the common devaluation in countries such as the United States and the United Kingdom of state intervention in favor of the privatization of public services. Whether under the cloak of austerity or that of deficit reduction, the dismantling of subsidies for public education, health care, and housing is at the same time an eradication of the legitimacy of the term "public" itself. The initiatives of the postwar period that strove to make welfare, education, and social equality a democratic right freely available to all were the outcome of a series of political claims that were made upon the state in the name of the public and that have now become increasingly difficult to make in an era that exalts the logic of the market and the "responsibilization" of citizens. It is precisely because so many of the protests of 2011 were staged in order to call attention to the state's failure to perform its customary function (from public education to the regulation of the financial industry, or what Lauran Berlant describes as the place of the state in the production of the "good life") that we cannot adopt any simplistic dichotomy between the state and the nongovernmental.[6] Their relations are not structurally opposed, but tactical and shifting, at times close and at others bitterly contested.

The nongovernmental is a form of politics that involves a reorientation of political analysis away from the dichotomy often drawn between myopic reformism, on the one hand, and antisystemic radicalism, on the other. As Feher points out, nongovernmental politics entails an engagement with the political on the part of the governed "without aspiring to govern, be governed by the best leaders, or

abolish the institutions of government altogether."[7] The politics of the governed is not organized around the "who" of government—the state, for instance—but rather targets the "how" of a particular means of being governed. The claim of the governed is therefore "not to be governed *thusly*," rather than to not be governed at all, on the one hand, or to be governed perfectly, on the other.[8] For Feher, this displaces a "representational" paradigm of the political that would still posit some implicit ideal of adequation between government and governed and thus a potential termination of politics. Far from the abandonment of grand political designs, the structurally incomplete dimension of the political is what keeps the condition of being governed alive as a matter of contestation, rather than of acquiescence to sheer governmental administration or of spontaneous self-determination.

Nongovernment is thus premised on a constitutive split between government and the forms of politics that operate outside of it while at the same time recognizing that this split is not fixed, but mutable, constantly in dynamic interaction. At certain times, the nongovernmental may be aligned with the state and at other times opposed to it. The rise of progressive political figures—Barack Obama's emergence as a presidential candidate, for instance—may produce a situational alignment, but as Feher stresses, the nongovernmental is fundamentally about a politics of the governed that in the last instance will exceed and trouble the practice of government.

In this volume, our focus is on the techniques for sensing the political and on its mediation through infrastructures of circulation and display. The visual culture of nongovernmental politics is about proliferating platforms. It is not about the image, but the image complex, the channels of circulation along which cultural forms travel, the nature of the campaigns that frame them, and the discursive platforms that display and encode them in specific truth modes. This involves form-sensitive analysis of the specificity of differing platforms that chart the imbrication of aesthetic form, medial practice, and political intent into one assemblage.

POLITICAL AESTHETICS

In the most general sense, the rubric of visual culture conceives "vision" not as a naturally given optical faculty, but rather as an historical, shifting assemblage of technical and social forces that shape—without mechanically determining—the perceptual, cognitive, and psychic lives of subjects in their relation to the world.[9] Theories of visual culture have necessarily concerned themselves with questions of power, situating themselves in a broad lineage of critical, skeptical, or even iconoclastic analysis of the hegemonic organizations of visual experience put forth by corporations, governments, and various collusions thereof. While indebted

to Marxist analyses of the relations between media systems, ideology, and subjectivity put forth in the postwar era under the rubrics of "the culture industry" (Theodor Adorno), "the society of the spectacle" (Guy Debord), "ideological state apparatuses" (Louis Althusser), "the consciousness industry" (Hans Magnus Enzensberger), or "the manufacture of consent" (Noam Chomsky), visual-culture discourse has gradually attempted to distinguish itself from approaches that would posit a self-evident transition from ideological mystification to visual enlightenment. Instead of a unilateral, top-down flow of visual manipulation, visual-culture discourse has concerned itself with the complex dynamics of audience reception, suggesting the ways in which the consumers of hegemonic corporate and governmental visual materials might variously refuse, resist, or recode those materials for their own purposes.[10]

Rather than examine this or that form of nongovernmental political work as a self-evident sociological object, the essays in this book retrace mediatic articulation, thus calling attention "to the way in which what had hitherto been considered accessory and intermediary—the program, its transmission, reception, storage, recycling, retransmission—infiltrates the inner integrity of the work, revealing it to be inscribed in and as a network."[11] Though not overtly concerned with the political in this passage, Samuel Weber's sense of the mediatic is germane to our current project in that it treats media as both a general condition of existence and as a specific set of technical devices and practices that define "a relational process which depends as much upon what it is not as upon what it is."[12]

Weber's conception of the mediatic is deeply informed by Walter Benjamin's 1936 essay "The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility," which remains startlingly pertinent to the contemporary world. Of particular resonance is Benjamin's suggestion that photographic media and their avatars involve a general dynamic of displacement, deterritorialization, and dissemination that opens "a vast and unsuspected field of action" and with it a new range of potential agents for whom the "distinction between author and public is about to lose its axiomatic character."[13] Benjamin was not of course a techno-utopian who would assume the inevitable benevolence of any particular technology in and of itself. Alarmed by the successful mobilization of newspapers, radio, and especially film by corporations and governments in constructing reactionary patterns of "simultaneous collective reception,"[14] Benjamin called for progressive movements to make the economies, infrastructures, and competencies involved in mass-media systems a matter of urgent political concern in its own right.

Benjamin's essay, it should not be forgotten, was nominally concerned with the fate of "art" as a specialized category of cultural production and spectatorial experience when confronted with the "world-historical upheaval"[15] of technological

reproducibility. Unlike his interlocutor Theodor Adorno, Benjamin was enthusiastic about the liquidation of the traditional principle of aesthetic autonomy—*l'art pour l'art*—and indeed saw its monstrous dialectical counterpart in what he called the "aestheticizing of politics" by fascism, which is to say, its transformation of collective sociopolitical experience into a spectacular harmonious totality of intensified sensory experience.[16] Against both bourgeois autonomy and the fascist *Gesamtkunstwerk*, Benjamin famously called for "politicizing art" qua counterpropaganda in which the disjunctive principles of photomontage (as in the work of Dziga Vertov or John Heartfield) would play a crucial role in activating the critical acumen and political consciousness of its audience.[17] Despite Benjamin's own complex philosophical dialogue with Romantic aesthetic theory throughout his career—culminating in the messianic figure of the "dialectical image"—his polemical derogation of aestheticization has long functioned as a kind of taboo concerning the category of the aesthetic *tout court* for left-oriented thinkers, artists, and media practitioners.

Without reneging on Benjamin's insights, the recent work of Jacques Rancière has involved a highly generative revisiting of the relation between aesthetics and politics in which aesthetics ceases to be an esoteric philosophical subfield, an indulgent appreciation of art for its own sake, or an ecstatic experience of consensual fusion. Drawing on Schiller's Enlightenment concern with the artwork as the locus of an undecidable negotiation between autonomous play of the subjective imagination and the heteronomous molding, training, or education of the citizen, Rancière's aesthetic emerges as a general inquiry into the volatile role of sensory experience in the organization of relations of power and resistance:

> a delimitation of spaces and times, of the visible and the invisible, of speech and noise, that simultaneously determines the place and the stakes of politics as a form of experience. Politics revolves around what is seen and what can be said about it, around who has the ability to see and the talent to speak, around the properties of space and the possibilities of time.[18]

In this approach, aesthetic techniques—including, but not limited to those occurring within the institutionally sanctioned realms of literature, art, or film, for instance—do not simply create unreal fantasies or, conversely, expose hidden truths in an already constituted public sphere or political realm whose rules are determined in advance. Rather, they challenge and reconfigure what Rancière calls the "distribution of the sensible," which "parcels out places and forms of participation in a common world by first establishing the modes of perception within which these are inscribed." This includes, paradoxically, those in society "who have no part," the surplus or remainder of the population whose conditions, concerns,

and claims do not register as legitimately political for those agencies responsible for governing them. For Rancière, democratic politics—as opposed to the "police order" of the status quo—involves the "challenging of governments' claims to embody the sole principle of public life and in so doing to be able to circumscribe the understanding and extension of public life. If there is a 'limitlessness' specific to democracy," it lies "in the movement that ceaselessly displaces the limits of the public and the private, the political and the social."[19]

Rancière often fixates, with little elaboration, on exemplary figures or events, such as the civil disobedience of Rosa Parks, as metonymic signs for the political as such. In its privileging of exemplary figures and events, such an approach calls out for supplementation with a semiotic perspective that understands the formal devices whereby the figure of Parks, for example, is envisioned and circulated, as well as with an ethnographic perspective that understands the life of the particular, individual intervention as it travels in space and time. Both perspectives call for attention to the processes, practices, and techniques involved in the design, staging, circulation, and aftermath of activist campaigns and media events such as that undertaken by Parks. Her intervention, though often described as the spontaneous act of a courageous individual, was in fact meticulously designed as part of a long-term and multilevel arsenal of media tactics then being developed by civil rights organizers and legal advocates and was thus structured in advance by the cameras, coverage, and eventually, the legal proceedings that it would undoubtedly call forth. The refusal to change seats for a white person was one platform of political display involving the media of body and bus. This moment was rapidly added to by her arrest and booking photograph, which produced a different medial form with its own formal devices, its own capacities for circulation and remediation, its own affectual address to a spectator. The production of pamphlets, the boycott, Parks's legal trial, and the news-media coverage of the events all represent differing sorts of platforms weaving together the semiotic and the ethnographic, the political and the poetic, in a total campaign.

How did Parks's intervention register mediatically? What forms of transmission and retransmission did Parks's media event undergo as it reverberated in time and space at local, national, and global scales in variously contested discursive frames from newspapers, radios, televisions, and courtrooms to activist manuals and eventually to history books and museums? When we look at the iconic image of Rosa Parks on the bus, itself a retrospective staging undertaken with a sympathetic white journalist from the day after the Supreme Court ruled against the State of Alabama, or at Parks's famous mug shot—only one among several hundreds made of bus dissidents a year after her initial intervention—what we are not seeing are the historical processes, practices, and techniques that made that image speak

politically.[20] The point here is not to encourage cynicism regarding the performative force of the event in the reconfiguration of the order of the sensible, but rather to remain vigilant in our attention to the enabling conditions and relational processes that make such an event possible without exhausting the singularity of what Alain Badiou would call "the hole it punches in the order of constituted knowledge."[21]

CIRCULATION AND PLATFORMS

The essays in this book focus primarily on activisms of the recent past. Central to our analysis is the argument that images do not move by themselves, but are trafficked along material networks and embedded in platforms. One way to understand the relationship between the image and its political contexts is to examine the modes of circulation that affect the way an image is allowed to exist in the world and comes to make claims. Benjamin Lee and Edward LiPuma adopted the term "culture of circulation" to move away from the idea of circulation as something that simply transmits meanings to examining it as a constitutive act in itself. "Circulation is a cultural process with its own forms of abstraction, evaluation, and constraint which are created by the interactions between specific types of circulating forms and the interpretive communities built around them."[22] In order to circulate, images must conform to aesthetic and formal modes that allow them to be recognized by the discursive norms of the world in which they travel and to become politically visible. Writing about human rights activism, for instance, Meg McLagan has argued similarly that rights claims are not simply "'something out there' waiting to be realized legally or philosophically," but rather come into being through a process of encoding or "formatting" into cultural forms such as testimony that are legible as political-ethical claims in the international arena.[23]

More recently, Thomas Keenan and Eyal Weizman have advanced this idea through the concept of what they term "forensic aesthetics," the medial form through which truth claims are made and political claims advanced in courts of law. They are particularly interested in what they term "forums" (and we term "platforms"): the performative context in which a circulating object stages its public presence, so to speak, so that its claims can be made. It is the point at which it becomes public. Keenan and Weizman argue that objects can make claims only via the forums in which they are manifest and that to do so, objects must be interpreted and translated by the experts most associated with the aesthetic form of the object that circulates:

> Forensics is not only about the science of investigation but rather about its presentation to the forum. Indeed there is an arduous labor of truth-construction embodied in the notion of forensics, one that is conducted with all sorts of scientific,

rhetorical, theatrical and visual mechanisms. It is in the gestures, techniques, and turns of demonstration, whether poetic, dramatic, or narrative, that forensic aesthetics can make things appear in the world.[24]

Platforms are not neutral spaces, but sites that produce the image politically. These platforms demand particular representational forms, are coded with their own epistemological norms, and employ their own modes of address. Many accounts of the relation between visual culture and political transformation have tended to isolate images or to focus on individual acts of "do-it-yourself" cultural repurposing of corporate icons. Political agency in this mode of analysis is often considered in terms of episodic and opportunistic acts of tactical sabotage on the part of disempowered citizen-consumers and cultural activists vis-à-vis monolithically conceived systems of domination. But this image-centered analysis obscures the embeddedness of cultural forms in broader campaigns that facilitate and build (though never contain) the architecture of circulation.

One example can be found in Ariella Azoulay's analysis of the political consequences of a photograph taken by an Israeli soldier of an indoor scene at a Palestinian house in Ramallah. The image shows four soldiers seated, eating, watching television. "This photograph, like many others taken by Israeli soldiers, found its way into private family albums and was circulated through various family and social networks."[25] Azoulay uses this photo as a basis of a broader critique of the sharp distinction between the aesthetic and the political. But the ground of her analysis is the specificity of a mode of circulation tied to snapshot souvenirs. The image is encoded into the platform of the family album, making it likely that any viewer would know one of the subjects depicted, who perhaps had the album passed on by another family member or friend. This mode of circulation constitutes an intimate public, making the image visible within a discrete interpretive regime. Once encoded in a particular medial form, the image becomes publicly available and capable of being diverted into other circulatory modes, of being made visible in differing forums. Azoulay points out that the indexical nature of the snapshot taken as a casual souvenir "became the document of a crime, of an event to be denounced, to be shared in public" by one of the soldiers in the image, who recognized its political implications.[26] To be resignified from souvenir to evidence, however, means to traffic along different communicative infrastructures, to be made visible on other platforms—a newspaper, a courtroom—with their own discursive norms, their own aesthetic forms, and their own modes of generating visibility and invisibility.

Material networks are important because they shape the nature of the cultural forms that travel along them, but also because, like platforms, they are political actors themselves. Politics does not lie within an image, as if the only political exchange at stake is lodged in the hermeneutical ability to decode a meaning

that inheres in a text. Rather, the modes of circulation and of making public are forms of political action in and of themselves. From the elaboration of publicity campaigns that surround human rights media to the human microphone used in Occupy Wall Street, attention to images, their modes of circulation, and the platforms on which they are made public instantiate a different relation between the aesthetic and the political in which the two are seen as mutually active on the constitution of political subjects.

THE POETICS OF CAMPAIGNS

In citing the example of Rosa Parks above and the issues involved in reading the images that were generated by and around her intervention, we draw attention to the question of the historical legacies and inheritances that mark contemporary nongovernmental activism. The essays collected here are diverse in terms of region, topic, and field and include historical examples as well as contemporary activisms. It has been beyond the scope of the current volume to attempt an intensive historical survey of the image-complexes produced by the visual cultures of nongovernmental politics, but a recognition of the historical depth of the practices we identify retards the supposition that the centrality of visual-cultural practices to political action is an aftereffect of the emergence of modern mass-mediated societies. We hope that the current volume can encourage historically oriented scholars in many fields to consider this dimension of the activisms they study. Although recent activisms have become more intensively engaged with and dependent on images and image-oriented media in both qualitative and quantitative terms, the thought and action of nongovernmental activisms have been, from the beginning, marked by a wide variety of aesthetic repertoires, media networks, and visually oriented publicity techniques. To put it another way, the intensification of mediatic concerns on the part of contemporary activisms retroactively throws into relief similar concerns in the past in a kind of historical parallax.

Feher notes in *Nongovernmental Politics* that the origins of a politics based on the determination "not to be governed *thusly*" can be traced as far back as abolitionism, when activists appealed to the universality of the rights of man to critique and combat the exclusive national sovereignty claimed by governments sanctioning the practice of slavery, whether directly or indirectly. Indeed, the transatlantic abolitionist movement largely constituted itself through technologically reproduced and illustrated reports, books, broadsheets, posters, banners, and eventually photographs designed to call forth an antislavery public with the will to pressure the governments in question into ending the practice. An exemplary image for the purposes of the present volume is the so-called "Brookes image,"

a shipbuilder's diagram demonstrating the optimal design of a ship for the purpose of "tight-packing" a vessel with slaves. As recounted by Marcus Rediker, this diagram, originally designed for functional and promotional purposes within the slaving industry, was appropriated, reinscribed, and recirculated by abolitionists as evidence of the profit-driven brutality of slavers. Through a close reading of the image and its social life across time and space, Rediker shows how the image became an important node of conflict and advocacy in the eventual abolition of slavery in Britain in 1807 and subsequently in the United States.[27]

Throughout the abolitionist era, an image such as the Brookes diagram would have moved alongside a range of other visual and textual forms, ranging from proto-viral images such as William Blake's drawing *A Negro Hung by the Ribs to a Gallows* and the unattributed seal *Am I Not a Man and a Brother?* to illustrated testimonial literatures by former slaves such as Olaudah Equiano and Frederick Douglass. The abolitionist movement was also the first to mobilize photography deliberately for activist purposes, exemplified by the image of "Private Gordon," an escaped slave who joined the Union Army. Gordon displayed the scars of the multiple whippings he endured in captivity for the photographic firm McPherson and Oliver in 1863. The photograph was immediately circulated as both an annotated *carte-de-visite* and as a lithographic engraving in popular periodicals such as *Harpers Weekly* and the *New York Independent*, which opined: "This card photograph should be multiplied by the 100,000 and scattered over the states. It tells the story in a way that even Mrs. Harriet Beecher Stowe cannot approach, because it tells the story to the eye."[28]

"It tells the story to the eye." The journalist here foregrounds the medial effect of the photograph and its mode of address as it is encoded in the platform of a *carte-de-visite*. It is because the form is iconic that it can be remediated as a lithograph and thus circulated to a broader public in an era when the mass reproduction of photographs in magazines was expensive. The photograph, as a reproduction made by a machine, carries with it an evidentiary truth value that the lithograph, as a drawing of the photograph, yet still made by a human, does not (except as a reflection of the originary photograph). Both make an affectual address to audiences, attempting to mobilize sentiments of anger, shame, and outrage by displaying the scarred body of a slave.

To express such faith in the optical veracity of the photographic image does not derive solely from the medium, of course, but from an epistemology of truth that lies outside of the medium and that remains constant in much activist visual media today. The "eye" here is understood not simply as an optical faculty, but as a locus of reception itself endowed with an interpretative power and implicitly ethical structure of witnessing. Yet the attribution by the text to the image of a story-telling capacity belies the actual muteness of the visual image in question. In

other words, the text both calls for and performs the "multiplication" of the image and the becoming story of the violated body that appears before the audience, setting up what Azoulay would call an unforeseeable "civil contract" between the photographer, the photographed subject, the unforeseeable mediatic contexts of the image, and the reception process of those who ultimately encounter the image in its various mediations.[29]

The indissoluble relationship of the photograph—as medial form, aesthetic device, and epistemology—to the broader campaign that constitutes and is constituted by the image is echoed in Thomas Keenan's groundbreaking critique of the paradigm of "mobilizing shame" underlying much human rights activism in the 1980s and 1990s.[30] This paradigm posited an automatic "if/then" relation between the visual exposure of governmental abuses or negligence and an ameliorative result on the part of the offending governing agency due to the "humiliation" it would presumably experience were its dirty deeds brought into the light of public scrutiny. Informed by the relative indifference on the part of Western publics and governments during the 1990s to the genocides in Bosnia and Rwanda, despite intensive visual and textual documentation by both media organizations and nongovernmental activists, Keenan's analysis suggests the inadequacy of the strategic tropes of exposure and revelation invoked by many activists. Rather than bringing this or that abuse into self-evident presentation, Keenan suggests the "relevance of aesthetic categories" to how human rights activists might redesign their discursive and mediatic techniques in attempting to call into being publics with the passion and will to address the crises in question.

Another paradigmatic instance combining these techniques can be found in the work of the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP).[31] Established in 1987 to publicize and challenge the forms of biopolitical neglect and cultural stigmatization to which people with AIDS (PWAs) were subjected by urban, state, and federal governments, ACT UP developed a remarkable visual-cultural repertoire capable of operating in a number of registers.[32] The movement drew upon and hybridized the legacies of previous U.S. social movements, especially the mediagenic techniques of nonviolent civil disobedience pioneered by the civil rights, antiwar, and environmental activists such as Greenpeace, as exemplified by the tactic of the "die-in," in which demonstrators would use their bodies to block pedestrian and vehicular traffic in specifically targeted sites in anticipation of the media coverage such interruptive events would garner. Laid out prone like so many accumulating corpses, demonstrators put forth their own bodies as both memorials to those who had already died due to governmental neglect and to those living PWAs perishing in the present—a group that includes the majority of the demonstrators themselves. While often discussed in terms of "direct action"—and celebrated as such

by later generations of activists availing themselves of civil disobedience—such activities were anything but direct, because such bodily-based activities were irreducibly mediated at every level.

First, as noted, the very bodily techniques in question were themselves inherited from the protest forms of earlier activist traditions—traditions that were themselves oriented toward the creation of media events and photo opportunities for both mainline news organizations and activist documentarians. Furthermore, the bodies in question were always supplemented by a variety of signage combining a rich array of iconic and textual signification through which critiques of and demands upon governing agencies were made. In many cases, the design of such "demo-graphics," as Douglas Crimp famously described them, were informed by earlier histories of visual politics. Most famous in this regard is the inverted pink triangle accompanied by the injunction "Silence=Death."[33]

AIDS activists, like civil rights activists and abolitionists before them, staged their claims via strikingly different platforms, traversing mainstream and alternative media; celebrity, fashion, and advertising culture; legal and policy arenas; direct action, and the artistic and academic worlds. Their work poses a series of questions that continue to inform the current volume, including those relating to affect, such as how cultural forms create structures of feeling that are not yet articulated by politics, how desire and belief shape circulation and what gets taken up, and the vexed criteria of how to gauge the scale and quality of the transformation that a campaign might foment.

Although movements have long sited forms of representation in broader architectures of activism, this is only now being analyzed in its full complexity. One ambivalent consequence, for instance, of the emergence of new forms of political art and media has been an inverse concern with "impact," a term that has become dominant as a result of the entry of a new set of actors into the nongovernmental arena, namely, newly rich social entrepreneurs who are interested in deploying their vast wealth to help solve society's most pressing problems. As believers in investment, rather than in charity, these individuals have brought with them a commitment to the "double bottom line"—the potential of their philanthropy to produce financial as well as social returns—along with a concern for accountability and measurable results.

Nowhere has the interest in tangible metrics of political efficacy by funders been more prominent than in the independent documentary film arena, which, over the past decade, has attained a level of mainstream attention and influence arguably unmatched since the era of the Great Depression. The success of films such as Michael Moore's *Fahrenheit 9/11* and *Sicko*, Morgan Spurlock's *Super Size Me*, and especially Davis Guggenheim's *An Inconvenient Truth* inaugurated a new structure of

documentary filmmaking that has trickled down from commercial successes such as these to smaller independent films.[34] *An Inconvenient Truth*, funded by social entrepreneur Jeffrey Skoll's film-production company Participant Media, was at once a film and a dispersed cultural process in which the material conditions of its public appearance and circulation took on paramount importance, from the presentation of the project to funding institutions, to the advertising campaign and screenings at festivals, theaters, and television, to the long-term aftermath of the film on DVD and its widespread use by educators, activists, and legislators in spatial contexts including living rooms, classrooms, courtrooms, and Congressional hearing rooms.

An Inconvenient Truth's wildly successful outreach campaign became a model for other social entrepreneurs interested in producing social change through film. "Impact" quickly shifted from being an aftereffect of a film's release to being a condition for funding itself, with filmmakers having to imagine their work's circulation and its potential impact before it even exists or is created. Not only has this rendered the boundary between the inside and the outside of the work increasingly porous, it has meant that films that do not conform to the mode of visibility demanded by this logic of impact find it harder to receive funding. It also pushes the demarcation of what counts as a "political" film away from projects that are more aesthetically challenging and not as easily incorporated into broad outreach campaigns.

Our aim in this volume is to further extend the analytical protocols of visual culture by drawing on the vocabularies of art history, anthropology, film studies, and political theory to argue for the recognition and interpretation of the image complex via a double sense of vision, one that treats vision as a metonym for perception, cognition, and aspiration in general and that takes account of the specific configurations of visuality enabled—but never completely determined by—the various image-based technologies through and to which nongovernmental actors address themselves. The concept of the image complex allows us to take realms often treated separately—aesthetics, mediation, political movements—and see them as mutually constitutive. For instance, we are interested in the continuing evolution of digital and social media in which cultural forms such as film, photography, and art have found themselves reinventing structures of display and circulation to take into account wider and proliferating platforms. It is a technophilic commonplace to locate innovation within the realm of technologies and to interrogate the emergence of new cultural forms in relationship to them. But we are also interested in the evolution of political movements, from the Iranian Green Revolution, to the Arab Spring, to Occupy Wall Street, that are themselves just as generative of new modes of communication, new aesthetic acts, that demand novel platforms and technologies to make their movements public. The nongovernmental realm more broadly has in turn seen the emergence of new legal forums

such as truth and reconciliation commissions and the International Criminal Court. These demand forms of evidence—testimony, forensics, visual and written documents of abuses—and they themselves constitute performative platforms in which those modes of evidence are remediated, framed, and entered into new circulations. The creation of these new platforms means that politically oriented cultural producers—and by this we mean artists, filmmakers, and photographers, but also funders, activists, and journalists—have come to shape their works with these new platforms in mind.

Cumulatively, there is a continual feedback loop whereby political actions, cultural forms, and technologies of mediation interact with each other, each with their own dynamics of innovation, but in mutual interdependence. In her contribution, Judith Butler argues that media do not merely report the street scenes, but are part of the scene and action. Media participate in the delimitation and transposability of the scene, constituting it in a time and place that includes and exceeds their local instantiation. Media require bodies on the street to have an event, even as those bodies on the street require media to exist in a global arena. Similarly, Eyal Weizman argues that the increased importance of forensics in legal forums has transformed the communicative capacity and aesthetic life of the objects that circulate within those forums as evidence. But the presence of objects—from DNA samples to forensic analyses of building ruins—also brings about the demand for new forums to be able to amplify, interpret, and publicly perform their significance. All cultural forms bring publics into being, just as publics demand cultural forms in order to exist as publics. In order to circulate, those objects must conform to the infrastructures of the media technologies that distribute them, be transposed into the discursive norms of the platforms in which they appear, yet retain, as Mikhail Bakhtin famously argued about heteroglossic speech, their own stubborn aesthetic autonomy, never fully submitting to transposition.

This volume attempts to make sensible this competitive interaction by bringing together artists and activists, filmmakers and academics, to write short case studies, interviews, and essays. It is why we moved beyond the usual disciplinary distinctions and their particular specialties. This is not because disciplines do not offer specialization—indeed, it is important to draw on specific technical inquiries, theoretical histories, and lineages of argument that each discipline brings to bear. Rather it is because we wish to trace a broader image-complex whereby politics is brought to visibility through the mediation of specific cultural forms that mix together the legal and visual, the hermeneutic and the technical, politics and aesthetics. In many respects, then, the book is more than the sum of its parts, arguing that while many of its contributors address various aspects of this image-complex, in toto they address the thickly constituted and dynamic spaces of contemporary aesthetics and politics.

NOTES

1. George Marcus, *Connected: Engagements with Media* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), p. 6.

2. Here the ambition of the current volume overlaps with certain of the terms put forth in Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel (eds.), *Making Things Public: Atmospheres of Democracy*, trans. Robert Bryce (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2005), though the current volume adheres to a much stricter focus on political activism and its associated visual and mediatic forms.

3. Michel Feher, "The Governed in Politics," in Michel Feher (ed.), with Gaëlle Krikorian and Yates McKee, *Nongovernmental Politics* (New York: Zone Books, 2007), p. 14.

4. Erica Bornstein and Peter Redfield (eds.), *Forces of Compassion: Humanitarianism between Ethics and Politics* (Santa Fe: SAR Advanced Seminar Series, 2011); Didier Fassin and Mariella Pandolfi (eds.), *Contemporary States of Emergency: The Politics of Military and Humanitarian Intervention* (New York: Zone Books, 2010); Ilana Feldman and Miriam Ticktin, *In the Name of Humanity: The Government of Threat and Care* (eds.), (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010).

5. Didier Fassin, *Humanitarian Reason: A Moral History of the Present* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), p. 5.

6. Laurent Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011).

7. Feher, "The Governed in Politics," in Feher (ed.), *Nongovernmental Politics*, p. 12.

8. Feher derives this formulation from Foucault's discussion of the "arts of government" and Kant's definition of enlightenment as the release of the subject from heteronymous power into full self-determination. See Michel Foucault, "What Is Critique?" (1979), in Michel Foucault, *The Politics of Truth*, ed. Sylvère Lotringer, trans. Lysa Hochroth and Catherine Porter (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2007).

9. For general introductions to the concept of visual culture, see Nicholas Mirzoeff, *An Introduction to Visual Culture*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2009) and Marita Sturken and Lisa Cartwright, *Practices of Looking: An Introduction to Visual Culture*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 3.

10. See the subchapter "History of Media Critiques," in Cartwright and Sturken, *Practices of Looking*, pp. 236–42.

11. Samuel Weber, "Introduction: Where in the World Are We?" in *Mass Mediauras: Form, Technics, Media* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), p. 3. For a further consideration of this dual sense of media as both a shifting assemblage of technological devices systems and practices, on the one hand, and as a "quasi-transcendental" condition of human life in general, see Mark B. N. Hansen, "New Media," in W. J. T Mitchell and Mark B. N. Hansen (eds.), *Critical Terms for Media Studies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010).

12. Weber, "Introduction: Where in the World Are We?" in *Mass Mediauras*, p. 3.

13. Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility," third edition, 1936, trans. Harry Zohn and Edmund Jephcott, in Howard Eiland and Michael Jennings (eds.), *Selected Writings, Volume 4, 1938–1940* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), pp. 262 and 265.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 264.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 258.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 270.

17. *Ibid.*

18. Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*, trans. Gabriel Rockhill (New York: Continuum, 2004), p. xi.

19. Jacques Rancière, *Hatred of Democracy*, trans. Steve Corcoran (London: Verso, 2007), p. 61.

20. For an important recent study that resonates deeply with the concerns of the current volume, but which curiously neglects Rosa Parks, see Maurice Berger, *For All The World to See: Visual Culture and the Struggle for Civil Rights* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010). Berger's excellent study, which accompanied an exhibition of visual-cultural artifacts at the International Center for Photography, dwells somewhat inordinately on the racist visual cultures of popular entertainment against which civil rights activists defined their own visual imagery, as well as the post–civil rights imaginary of black power. The civil rights movement in the strict sense actually receives only relative treatment. For a nuanced analysis of the pedagogical framing of Rosa Parks and the images generated around her intervention, see Herbert Kohl, *She Would Not Be Moved: How We Tell the Story of Rosa Parks and the Montgomery Bus Boycott* (New York: New Press, 2007).

21. See Rosalyn Deutsche, "Not Forgetting: Mary Kelly's *Love Songs*," *Grey Room* 24 (Summer 2006), pp. 26–27, for a discussion of Badiou's understanding of the event as what "presents hitherto unknown possibilities that put an end to consensus or dominant opinion in the order it disrupts; its course is uncertain, and it compels the subject to decide a new way of being . . . . After Schoenberg, for instance, I do not go back to writing Romantic music" (p. 29).

22. Benjamin Lee and Edward LiPuma, "Cultures of Circulation: The Imaginations of Modernity," *Public Culture* 14.1 (2002), p. 192. See also Dilip Gaonkar and Elizabeth A. Povinelli, "Technologies of Public Forms: Circulation, Transfiguration, Recognition," *Public Culture* 15.3 (2003), pp. 385–97; Brian Larkin, "Making Equivalence Happen: Commensuration and the Grounds of Circulation," in Patricia Spyer and Mary Steedly (eds.), *Images That Move* (Santa Fe: SAR Press, forthcoming); Michael Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics* (New York: Zone Books, 2005).

23. Meg McLagan, "Human Rights, Testimony, and Transnational Publicity," in Feher (ed.), *Nongovernmental Politics*, p. 306. See also Meg McLagan, "Circuits of Suffering," *Political and Legal Anthropology Review* 28.2 (2005), pp. 223–39.

24. Thomas Keenan and Eyal Weizman, *Mengele's Skull: The Advent of a Forensic Aesthetics* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2012).

25. Ariella Azoulay, "Getting Rid of the Distinction between the Aesthetic and the Political," *Theory, Culture, and Society* 27.7 (2010), p. 240.

26. *Ibid.*, p. 242

27. Marcus Rediker, *The Slave Ship: A Human History* (New York: Viking, 2007).

28. "The Scourged Back," *New York Independent*, May 28, 1863.

29. See Ariella Azoulay, "Regime-Made Disaster: On the Possibility of Nongovernmental Viewing" in this volume. See also Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography* (New York: Zone Books, 2008).

30. Thomas Keenan, "Mobilizing Shame," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 103.2/3 (Spring–Summer 2004), pp. 435–49.

31. See Ann Cvetkovich, *"Sex in an Epidemic* as AIDS Archive Activism: An Interview with Jean Carlomusto," in this volume.

32. See Douglas Crimp (ed.), *AIDS: Cultural Analysis/Cultural Activism* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1989), and Douglas Crimp and Adam Rolston, *AIDS Demo-Graphics* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1990).

33. The pink triangle was originally the graphic marker physically affixed to the prison uniform of homosexuals in the Nazi concentration camps.

34. See Meg McLagan, "Imagining Impact: Documentary Film and the Production of Political Effects," in this volume, along with Barbara Abrash and Meg McLagan, "*Granito*: An Interview with Pamela Yates" and Barbara Abrash and Meg McLagan, "*State of Fear* and Transitional Justice in Peru: A Case Study," also in this volume.