

# *Violence Performed and Imagined*

## Militant Action, the Black Bloc and the Mass Media in Genoa

**Jeffrey S. Juris**

*Arizona State University, USA*

*Abstract* ■ The Battle of Genoa has become an iconic sign of wanton destruction, evoking images of tear gas, burning cars, and black clad protestors hurling stones and Molotov cocktails at advancing lines of heavily militarized riot police. In this article, I explore the complex relationship between performative violence and mass-mediated constructions of violence during the anti-G8 protests in Genoa. Performative violence is a specific mode of communication through which activists seek to produce social transformation by staging symbolic rituals of confrontation. Young militants enact performative violence in order to generate radical identities, while producing concrete messages challenging global capitalism and the state. At the same time, dominant media frames reinterpret the resulting images as random acts of senseless violence, undermining activists more generally. I further argue that the prevailing ‘diversity of tactics’ ethic reflects the broader networking logics associated with anti-corporate globalization movements themselves.

*Keywords* ■ globalization ■ mass media ■ performance ■ political protest ■ social movements ■ violence

On 21 July 2001 the Italian ‘White Overalls’ declared symbolic war on the G8 in Genoa, joining tens of thousands of anti-corporate globalization protesters from around the world in a ritualized siege of the red zone created by the Italian authorities to protect the G8 summit. The urban terrain of resistance (Routledge, 1994) was divided into different spaces to accommodate diverse forms of political expression, including pacifist, White Overall, festive Pink Bloc, and militant Black Bloc tactics. After the siege began, however, symbolic confrontation gave way to brutal repression on the part of the Italian state. For many observers, Genoa is synonymous with protest violence, a metonym evoking images of tear gas, burning cars, and black-clad protesters hurling stones and Molotov cocktails at heavily militarized riot police. Equally evocative are the haunting visions of 22-year-old Carlo Giuliani’s hooded corpse lying prone in a pool of his own blood after being shot twice in the face and then backed over by an armored police jeep. The world was further shocked by pictures of dried blood on the stairs, floors, and walls of the Diaz School, where a special unit of the Italian police carried out a brutal night time raid against sleeping

protestors after more than 300,000 people had taken to the streets earlier that day. Images of street battle cascaded through global mediascapes (Appadurai, 1996), helping to construct a mass-mediated image of the Battle of Genoa as an iconic sign of wanton destruction.

Since protesters shut down the World Trade Organization (WTO) meetings in Seattle in November 1999, anti-corporate globalization activists have staged mass direct actions against the institutions and symbols of neoliberal capitalism around the world. Although activists have used new digital technologies to practice sustained networking within 'submerged spheres' (Melucci, 1989; see Juris, 2004a, 2005), mass actions have largely brought what has been dubbed the 'anti-globalization' movement into public view.<sup>1</sup> Anti-corporate globalization activists have hijacked the global media space afforded by multilateral summits to communicate political messages, construct identities, and generate affective ties. Elsewhere, I explore how activists perform their alternative social movement networks through violent and non-violent embodied action (see Juris, 2004b). Indeed, many activists ascribe to a 'diversity of tactics' principle, which emphasizes the importance of coordinating across diversity and difference, manifesting a networking logic on the tactical plane. In this article, however, I primarily focus on militant protest.

Militant activists practice what I refer to as 'performative violence', in part, to capture media attention. At the same time, police and government officials can use the same images to delegitimize protesters. Protest violence thus forms a crucial terrain in the politics of signification over what constitutes legitimate dissent. This article explores performative violence among anti-corporate globalization activists through an ethnographic account of anti-G8 protests in Genoa, and subsequent analysis of the associated media representations. What is the relationship between performative violence and its coverage in the mass media? How does the interplay between militant activism and mass-mediated constructions of violence influence protest impact? How have these dynamics shaped tactical debates among protesters themselves?

In what follows, I trace the complex relationship between militant violence and mass-mediated constructions of violence during anti-corporate globalization protests.<sup>2</sup> I specifically argue that young militants enact performative violence in order to generate radical identities, while producing concrete messages challenging global capitalism and the state. At the same time, dominant media frames reinterpret the resulting images as random acts of senseless violence, potentially undermining the efforts of anti-corporate globalization activists more generally. I begin with a brief theoretical discussion of violence, followed by an ethnographic account of the Genoa protests. Next, I offer an in-depth analysis of performative violence among young militants. I then examine media representations of violence in Genoa, before concluding. This article is based on ethnographic fieldwork at actions and events in cities such as Barcelona, Genoa,

Brussels, Leiden, Strasbourg, and Porto Alegre, forming part of a larger project that explores the cultural politics of transnational networking among anti-corporate globalization activists in Barcelona and the global circuits through which they travel (see Juris, 2004b).<sup>3</sup>

## Meaningful violence

Performative violence is a form of meaningful interaction through which actors construct social reality based on available cultural templates. As Anton Blok points out, 'Rather than defining violence *a priori* as senseless and irrational, we should consider it as a changing form of interaction and communication, as a historically developed cultural form of *meaningful* action' (2000: 24; emphasis in original). Violence has practical-instrumental and symbolic-expressive aspects (Riches, 1986: 11). The former involves the attempt to directly transform the social environment, while the latter emphasizes the communication and dramatization of important social ideas and values. I use performative violence here to refer to symbolic ritual enactments of violent interaction with a predominant emphasis on communication and cultural expression.<sup>4</sup> This is in contrast to direct political violence (see Bourgois, 2001), meant to cause death or injury to human beings, although the difference is often one of degree. In the context of political action, performative violence can be seen as a mode of communication through which activists seek to effect social transformation by staging symbolic confrontation based on 'the representation of antagonistic relationships and the enactment of prototypical images of violence' (Schröder and Schmidt, 2001: 10).

Violent performances largely function through non-verbal, spectacular forms of iconic display (Beeman, 1993; Zulaika and Douglass, 1996: 11–12), providing grassroots activists with valuable symbolic resources. As Joel P. Rhodes points out in his study of performative protest against the war in Vietnam:

For small militant groups with limited resources . . . violent performances against the symbols of the American system proved the most economical and visually arresting way of immediately achieving a symbolic victory over their more powerful adversaries, while concomitantly radicalizing potential support. (2001: 3)

Young European militants have similarly used performative violence to generate widespread visibility within radical autonomous movements in countries such as Italy, Germany, Spain, and France since the 1970s (see Della Porta, 1995; Katsiaficas, 1997). A parallel argument can be made with respect to contemporary militants practicing performative violence against symbols of global capitalism.

Beyond communication, performative violence is also productive in

another sense: the forging of political identities. On the one hand, violence can help define boundaries between different groups (Bowman, 2001), while on the other hand, specific violent performances are often linked to particular oppositional identities, styles, and practices (see Feldman, 1991; Peteet, 2001; Peterson, 2001). Moreover, aggressive violent performances often involve the kind of risk taking and bravado traditionally associated with male rights of passage and achievement of masculine political identities in many parts of the world (see Gilmore, 1990).

Moreover, mass-mediated representations of violence are crucial to protest dynamics. As Bauman and Briggs (1990) suggest, performances can be extracted as texts, removed from their initial setting and reinserted into new discursive contexts. Militant activists stage spectacular violent performances, partly, to gain access to the mass media, which are constantly in search of sensational stories and images. Everyday protest often goes unnoticed, while the iconic images of burning cars and pitched street battles between masked protestors and militarized riot cops are instantly broadcast through global communications networks. At the same time, police and government officials can manipulate violent images, decontextualizing and reinserting them within narratives that frame protestors as dangerous criminals or terrorists. Indeed, social movement struggles are largely waged through media wars of symbolic interpretation.

### **The rise of anti-corporate globalization activism**

On 30 November 1999, a diverse coalition of environmental, labor, and economic justice activists succeeded in shutting down the WTO meetings in Seattle and preventing another round of trade liberalization talks. Images of giant puppets, tear gas, and street clashes between protestors and police were broadcast worldwide. Seattle became a symbol and battle cry for a new generation of activists, as anti-globalization networks were energized around the globe. On the one hand, the 'Battle of Seattle', packaged as a prime-time 'image event' (Deluca, 1999), cascaded through official media networks. On the other hand, activists followed events in Seattle and beyond through their own email lists, websites, and the newly created Independent Media Center. New networks soon emerged, including the Continental Direct Action Network in North America or the Movement for Global Resistance in Catalonia, while existing networks, such as People's Global Action (PGA), also played key roles during these early formative stages.<sup>5</sup>

Anti-corporate globalization movements have largely expanded through the organization of mass mobilizations, including confrontational direct actions against multilateral institutions. The diverse protest tactics employed by activists, despite emerging in distinct cultural contexts, all produce theatrical images for media consumption, including giant puppets

and theater, mobile street carnivals (Reclaim the Streets), militant protesters advancing toward police lines with white jumpsuits, shields, and padding (White Overalls), and masked, black-clad urban warriors smashing the symbols of corporate capitalism (Black Bloc).<sup>6</sup> Whether images depict roving samba dancers dressed in pink and silver, thousands of Michelin Men advancing toward a 'red zone', or skirmishes between robocops and hooded stone throwers, mass direct actions are indeed powerful image events (see Juris, 2004b; see also Graeber, 2002).

Although specific tactics are often borrowed from past movements, contemporary anti-corporate globalization movements involve a unique articulation among diverse protest forms. Activists have also made particularly innovative use of mobile phones and Internet technology. Meanwhile, the consensus-based process through which mass anti-corporate globalization actions are organized, involving horizontal coordination among autonomous affinity groups, reflects a broader networking logic on the tactical plane. Indeed, anti-corporate globalization movements are more generally organized around flexible, distributed network forms. These are constituted through concrete networking practices shaped by an emerging cultural logic of networking (see Juris, 2004a). Specific practices include: 1) building horizontal ties among diverse, autonomous elements; 2) the free and open circulation of information; 3) collaboration through decentralized coordination and directly democratic decision-making; and 4) self-directed networking. Although these broader movement dynamics are explored elsewhere (Juris 2004a, 2004b, 2005), here I focus on performative violence as a concrete political and analytical phenomenon.

### **Entering the urban terrain of resistance**

On the heels of militant confrontation at protests in Barcelona and Gothenburg, the White Overalls' declaration of war, and the intransigent posture of the Berlusconi regime, the issue of protest violence was high on everyone's minds before the siege in Genoa on 20 July. Moreover, the constant surveillance – including secret police and helicopters, the overwhelming presence of thousands of highly militarized riot cops and *cara-binieri* units, the erection of a fence around the no-protest zone, and a spate of purportedly anarchist bomb scares – had created a climate of tension and fear. It was in the shadow of this emerging terror campaign that activists made their final 'battle plans', involving an elaborate process of negotiation over the use specific tactics, the physical division of urban space, and coordination among diverse networks.

The Genoa Social Forum (GSF) media center would serve as a base of operations during the week prior to the action.<sup>7</sup> The center housed the official press corps, independent media, an Internet lab, infirmary, and space for activist conferences and assemblies. On 14 July I joined roughly

60 international activists outside the center for an action update. Eva, from the White Overalls,<sup>8</sup> explained the GSF guidelines prohibiting violence against people and property, and then reported on the following actions: 1) White Overalls March (involving thousands of young radicals from Italy and beyond influenced by autonomous Marxism); 2) COBAS March (led by COBAS, a radical labor union also influenced by autonomous Marxism); 3) Ghandian Bloc (non-violent sit-ins led by pacifists, anti-militarists, ecologists, and solidarity activists); 4) Western March (led by a COBAS offshoot); and 5) Anarchist Bloc (involving dozens of collectives not planning to follow GSF guidelines, including the Pinelli Social Center).

Over the course of the next few days, international activists would organize additional actions. Many traditional leftists, including reformists associated with ATTAC (Association for the Taxation of financial Transactions for the Aid of Citizens) and Trotskyists with the Socialist Workers Party, planned a theatrical action on the southern edge of the red zone, where activists would playfully send thousands of paper airplanes across the fence. Many anarchist-inspired internationals were unhappy with the organizing process. Indeed, several days earlier, I had spoken with Ricardo, an activist from a squat in Germany active in PGA. He was troubled the GSF had refused to communicate with militants. Influenced by a horizontal networking logic, grassroots anti-capitalists value dialogue and diversity among activists above all else. Along with hundreds of radical internationals, I thus helped organize a Pink & Silver Bloc. In addition to organizing our own mobile and festive protest, involving what activists call 'tactical frivolity',<sup>9</sup> we would help coordinate among alternative protest blocs within and outside the GSF.

We arrived at the Piazza Kennedy convergence center around 11:00 am to make our final preparations on the day of the siege. The atmosphere of nervous excitement temporarily overwhelmed the mounting tension from the previous days as people finished making costumes, wigs, and props. At around noon, the samba band began an improvised drumming circle by the Piazza gate, and the crowd of 600 Pink Blockers filled in behind them. A few minutes later the march took to the streets; our siege had begun. As we moved down the large boulevard to the southeast of the red zone – dancing, drumming, and letting out occasional disco chants – my eyes began to water, as I noticed the familiar smell of tear gas. The major confrontation was not supposed to begin until 1:00 pm, giving us an inkling of what kind of day this might become. I glanced toward the left, where several thousand protesters had begun a pitched street battle near the fence. Riot police launched tear gas canisters, while small groups of hooded, black-clad activists began darting about, tossing back the canisters, along with rocks and bottles. 'That's the COBAS march,' someone pointed out, 'it looks like they've gotten mixed up with the Black Bloc.' Eager to get to the northern side of the city, we hurried past the fray.

After frolicking our way along the eastern flank of the red zone, where

thousands of White Overalls decked out in spectacular foam padding would soon begin their march behind massive plastic shields, we approached a tunnel that would take us to Brignole station and the northern side of the city. Just before we entered the tunnel, a group of several hundred young anarchists bearing dark colors, hoods, handkerchiefs, and the occasional stick joined us. 'They must be from Pinelli,' I thought. Things did not look good. On the other side of the tunnel, we realized, several large containers had sealed off our route. After a brief meeting, we moved into the hills earlier than anticipated. As we moved along parallel to our initial trajectory, we noticed several heavily armed police lines had taken up positions along the side streets. We continued down the other side of the hill, before heading to the boulevard leading to Piazza Manin, where the pacifists had assembled. Just before reaching the boulevard, we came to a terrace affording an excellent view of the city below. I recorded the following in my field notes that evening:

It was now unmistakable, the clouds of tear gas had become larger and darker. There were clearly loads of tear gas in the air, as we could feel it in our eyes all the way from the terrace, and the smell was incredible. However, many of the clouds we saw began to appear like real smoke. There were two or three huge clouds of thick, dark smoke rising up in the distance. The city was clearly ablaze.

I later learned that several groups of what appeared to be Black Bloc had begun smashing windows and torching cars and buses in the zone near the White Overalls. We continued moving toward the boulevard. Our plan was to turn left and march toward the red zone fence, where pacifists would later stage their sit-in, and then move to the next plaza. We would then begin our action at the fence, while the Pink & Silver march would separate and move to another section of the red zone. However, when we got to the boulevard, the pacifists had already begun their descent, and we were trapped at the intersection. By this point, our contingent had grown to over 1000, and people began fearing a major stampede if the police decided to attack. The pacifist march took up most of the boulevard from the red zone up to the Piazza Manin, so we decided to move alongside them and down a small street leading over to the next plaza.

At that point, however, instead of dividing into separate blocs, a large group started to descend toward the fence, while the rest of us milled about the plaza. I noticed several police lines moving toward us from the small street we had just marched from, sealing off the escape route. A police charge seemed imminent, so I moved up the hill to maintain a safe distance and get a better view. All of a sudden, one of the French women in the crowd by the fence erected a metal cable, which she climbed to the top of the fence. The police began firing water canons at her, dousing the protesters behind with chemically treated water. The crowd became agitated, as people began throwing bottles and sticks at the police on the other side of the fence. Moments later, the police began a brutal charge with batons

and tear gas, unleashing severe panic as protestors frantically scattered toward the top of the plaza. Meanwhile, a small group of us who had taken up a secure position on a nearby stairwell quickly fled up hill to avoid another charge. The morning's tense calm had given way to generalized panic and fear.

The Pink & Silver Bloc regrouped at the Piazza Manin, which was filled with hundreds of ecologists, pacifists, and feminists. Shortly after meeting with my affinity group, a few dozen Black Bloc activists suddenly appeared. Several of us explained this was a non-violent zone and that they would do better heading over to another part of the city. After they moved on, the Pink Bloc assembled next to the plaza, but after just a few moments a large police helicopter flew directly overhead and began firing tear gas canisters at the crowd. Before we had a chance to realize what was happening, the police attacked us from the side streets with more tear gas and batons. I quickly ran up the hill again, and when I turned back to look through the clouds of gas, I saw riot police brutally clubbing peaceful protesters. The Black Bloc was nowhere to be seen. Meanwhile, I heard horrible screams from the midst of the chaos. A group of protesters suddenly began running toward me, followed by charging riot police. Overcome by panic, I quickly turned around and began fleeing up the hill to escape.

### **Militant protest in Genoa**

Like many protestors in Genoa, I had several encounters with what appeared to be the Black Bloc, but it was impossible to say whether they were activists, right-wing infiltrators, or provocateurs. Indeed, the ambiguity and rumor helped contribute to the epistemic murk through which state terror operates (Taussig, 1987). As we moved through the urban terrain of resistance, I saw not only devastated bank machines and shattered windows of transnational corporations, but also burned out cars, ransacked storefronts, and broken glass. The city was a war zone. Black Bloc militancy generally has a specific communicative logic: destruction of the symbols of corporate capitalism and the state. Although there may be tactical disagreements, destructive actions against ordinary cars, homes, and shops fall outside the bounds of accepted militant signification. Black Bloc performative violence tends to be neither random nor senseless.

The Black Bloc is not an organization, or a network, but rather a specific set of tactics enacted by groups of young militants during protests. Although repertoires vary with each action, they often include destruction of private property, usually banks and transnational storefronts, ritualized confrontation with police and a series of more specific practices: such as 'de-arrests', marching in small, compact groups with elbows linked, or jail solidarity. These tactics are connected to a broader militant style, including the use of black pants and jumpers, combat boots, and black masks or

bandanas to cover the face, and an aggressive, confrontational attitude. Masks are worn for instrumental reasons – to protect identities for personal security – but also serve certain iconic functions, such as expressing collective solidarity through anonymity or portraying archetypical images of youth rebellion. Black Bloc styles and practices can be seen as the physical embodiment of a political vision based on anti-capitalism, physical confrontation, and a total rejection of the market and state. Such values are communicated through specific stylistic codes and signifiers and highly sensational ritualized violent performances.

Militant protest tactics involve the enactment of specific styles of violent performance through distinct bodily techniques, styles of dress, ritual symbols, and communicative practices. The typical image of the Black Bloc activist reflects a masculine ideal of militant rebellious confrontation. Moreover, as Peterson (2001: 55) argues in the context of Sweden, militant activists construct identities through emotionally powerful embodied ritual performance that both constructs the militant body as the ground of political agency and produces an ‘embattled’ activist identity. Within anti-corporate globalization movements, performative violence thus provides an important mechanism through which militants construct radical anti-capitalist subjectivities. Moreover, as Carles Feixa (1998) points out, alternative youth styles and practices have become globalized. Black Bloc tactics thus circulate through global communications networks, providing cultural scripts enacted by militant activists in distant locales.

Performative violence – including the accompanying bodily techniques, dress codes, and iconic symbols – helps constitute particular youth subcultural styles (Hebdige, 1979). Spectacular subcultures are systems of communication through which diverse forms of discourse and fashion are adapted, subverted, and transformed through subcultural bricolage (Clarke, 1976). As Dick Hebdige (1979: 102) explains, ‘The communication of a significant difference, then (and the parallel communication of a group identity), is the “point” behind the style of all spectacular subcultures.’ Within many anti-capitalist activist networks, squatting and militant protest tactics, styles, and icons thus comprise central elements of a radical youth counterculture. In addition to the production of identity and difference, particular stylized performances can also communicate directed messages, such as rejection of the dominant order, or radical confrontation with the symbols of global capitalism and the state. In this sense, Black Bloc tactics can be seen as the active use of specific counter-cultural practices to engage in spectacular rituals of resistance.

The Pinelli social center served as base of operations for the Black Bloc in Genoa, while militant internationals slept at the nearby Sciorba stadium.<sup>10</sup> The first evening planning assembly took place on 16 July, where activists decided to separate from the GSF due to their restriction on sticks, rocks, and firearms. The number of participants had doubled to several hundred by the second assembly, including activists from the USA, Italy,

France, Germany, Greece, and Spain. The evening before the siege, a large bloc from Pinelli decided to march together with COBAS in the southeast. They moved to Albaro Park that evening to be closer to the start of the action. They were supposed to meet up with another group from Pinelli the next morning, but the police had surrounded the social center. In the end, 500 Black Bloc militants marched together from the Park toward the center of the city to join up with COBAS, as an activist recalled:

We arrived at the point with other masked comrades and red flags from COBAS. We met and some of us moved toward specific objectives. Our target was a bank, and the police arrived from the right. There was a brief scuffle, and some Molotov cocktails and rocks were thrown. . . . The police stopped their repression briefly, so we took advantage of the opportunity to make barricades with garbage cans, wood, and anything else we could find. We set some of the garbage containers on fire while a part of our block, a group of about 300, continued attacking the face of capitalism: the banks and gas stations.<sup>11</sup>

Black Blocs carried out similar actions throughout the day against banks, transnational corporations, and gas stations, while engaging in pitched street battles replete with barricades, stones, and Molotov cocktails. When it became too dangerous, many activists removed their masks and black clothing to avoid detection. Beyond the more directed violent performances, which communicated clear anti-capitalist messages, indiscriminate violence was also practiced against cars, storefronts, and buildings. Because these actions did not fit established ritualized patterns of militant performance, many activists, including militants themselves, suspected the Italian police had used provocateurs. Indeed, several Black Bloc activists commented that police had allowed them free reign, while selectively repressing peaceful protesters. Others noted that just before major police attacks, a Black Bloc group would pass nearby, escaping repression.

### **Media representations of violence in Genoa**

Given that social movements wage battles, in part to transform dominant understandings of political reality, mass media provide a crucial terrain for the politics of signification. Anti-corporate globalization mobilizations also provide an important space for autonomous media production, as evidenced by the bustling Indymedia Center in Genoa (see Juris, 2005). In order to reach a mass audience, however, activists engage in what John B. Thompson (1995) refers to as 'struggles for visibility'. Images of violent confrontation thus provide a crucial resource for attracting media attention, while at the same time, violent performances can be decontextualized and reinserted into hegemonic narratives that seek to marginalize young militants as criminals or 'deviants' (Gitlin, 1980; Hall, 1974). As Stuart Hall suggests, through selecting, presenting, structuring, and shaping, mass media carry out the 'labor of making things mean' (1982: 64). This

happens through resonant media frames, defined as ‘persistent patterns of cognition, interpretation, and presentation, of selection, emphasis, and exclusion, by which symbol-handlers routinely organize discourse, whether verbal or visual’ (Gitlin, 1980: 7). Media framing does not follow a simple logic of determinism; rather, meanings are produced through cultural struggle (Hall, 1982: 70).

Social conflicts that challenge liberal core assumptions – such as private property or the legitimacy of the state – are usually muted, tamed, and incorporated within hegemonic frames. The mass media tend to construct militant protest in particular as dangerous and criminal. On the one hand, violence is an important form of media entertainment (see Altheide and Snow, 1991; Castells, 1996), as news media thrive on spectacular images of violent confrontation. On the other hand, dominant media discourses tend to frame protest violence as a heinous crime against society itself, a grave threat to the prevailing moral order (Hall et al., 1978: 68).

Through their rebel styles, imagery and tactics, militants lend themselves to dominant media frames that would construct them as deviants. Mass media appropriate and reinterpret images of protest violence as ‘senseless’, defining its purveyors as social problems rather than legitimate actors. As Hall suggests:

Under certain circumstances, legitimate political minorities are subjected to severe ‘status degradation’ ceremonies, and are lumped with more marginal groups. They are then subject to quite different forms of public opprobrium, stigmatization, and exclusion. They have been symbolically delegitimized. (1974: 267)

Images of masked, black-clad activists throwing stones or Molotov cocktails, particularly when linked to scenes of shattered glass, burning cars, or street combat, are powerful icons of generalized destruction. Moreover, Black Bloc styles, particularly their masked faces, operate as signs of a ‘savage other’, resonating with received terrorism iconography (see Zulaika and Douglass, 1996: 204).

Militant styles are thus linked to media discourses of terrorism and fear, which have become prevalent since 9/11. Images of protest violence can be used by the state to delegitimize entire movements by alienating their base of potential support and isolating them politically, which helps explain the use of agents provocateurs (Gitlin, 1980: 188). Moreover, such strategies serve to justify brutal repression. Alternatively, the state can use images of protest violence to distinguish peaceful majorities from violent minority fringes in order to politically divide social movements and reinforce their least confrontational elements.

In the remainder of the section, I analyze how the Italian and Spanish press covered the Genoa protests, while also briefly considering US sources to provide comparative perspective.<sup>12</sup> Media representations initially helped spread tension and fear in the days preceding the protests, then

reproduced classic images of anarchist violence during the action, and finally shifted toward a critical stance with respect to Italian law enforcement, as widespread testimonies regarding police violence and abuse became available. The initial state media strategy, based on raising the level of tension and then using images of protest violence to delegitimize certain sectors, if not the entire movement, was initially successful, although testimony from the raid on the Diaz School and widespread police abuse led to a transformation in dominant media frames.

On 17 July 2001, for example, several days before the protests, media reports were dominated by the explosion of a letter bomb at a Genoese police station, severely injuring a *carabiniere* officer, and a bomb scare outside Carlini stadium – the White Overalls’ home base. The main headline on the front page of the center-left *La Repubblica* read, ‘Genoa, a day of fear’, followed in small print by ‘Letter bomb injures a *carabiniere*. Another attempt foiled.’ Just above the main headline was written: ‘The tension around the G8 grows: the anarchists are investigated.’ The headlines indicated a situation of chaos and fear linked to anarchists, while the accompanying image of an urban crime scene portrayed the police as the calm defenders of order. A front-page story in the center-right *Corriere della Sera* went further, directly linking the bomb scare to militant anarchists, explaining: ‘The first analysis of the investigation has led to a possible clue that leads to the insurrectionary anarchists.’

With the stage set for radical conflict, the events on 20 July surpassed all expectations. The headlines from the following day’s press coverage were dominated by two themes: 1) the death of Carlo Giuliani, and 2) the appearance of a ravaged, war-torn city. Both *La Repubblica* and *Il Secolo XIX*, a conservative Genoese daily, presented visual sequences from Giuliani’s death by a Reuters photographer. For example, the front page of the 21 July *Il Secolo XIX* featured an image showing the young masked protester preparing to throw a fire extinguisher at a police jeep. Meanwhile, a police officer inside could be seen pointing his gun at the protestor. The next image showed the van backing over Giuliani’s corpse. The text alongside the photos portrayed a situation in which a young anarchist was preparing to attack a police vehicle, causing a fearful young officer to fire in self-defense. Questions as to why the officer carried live ammunition, why an inexperienced officer was placed in such a dangerous position, and why the driver backed over the corpse were avoided. *La Repubblica*’s front page also featured an image of the hooded Giuliani lying in a pool of his own blood, as the text explained, ‘The “Seattle People” now have a martyr . . . the violence of a minority sacrificed him . . . at the end of a cursed day.’

The corpse of Carlo Giuliani is a powerful political signifier, but its ultimate meaning remained ambiguous. On the one hand, he was constructed as an innocent young victim of excessive police force. On the other hand, however, his death was indirectly blamed on the violence caused by the protesters themselves. Moreover, just before he was shot, the

hooded Giuliani was shown preparing to throw a fire extinguisher at a frightened officer inside a police jeep, situating the activist inside the movement's violent anarchist fringe. The implication was that Carlo Giuliani had only himself to blame for his death. An article in the centrist international weekly magazine *Time* (30 July 2001: 22–3) used the incident as a contemporary morality play marking the line between acceptable protest and tragically misguided violence, as the author writes:

One man died in Genoa; a man, we must presume, who was swayed by the false promise that violence – not peaceful protest, not participation in the democratic process – is the best way to advance a political cause. It is not too much to hope that the next time his friends stoop to pick up a cobblestone, they will remember a lesson learned when plows first broke the Mesopotamian earth: you reap what you sow.

Meanwhile, the Italian and international press coverage on 21 July was filled with images of burning cars, masked protesters dressed in black hurling stones at Italian police, armored *carabinieri* firing tear gas and brandishing shields, and the occasional shot of a bludgeoned protester receiving first-aid. The violent anarchists associated with the Black Bloc were the ultimate villains, however. In *Il Secolo XIX*, for example, the main front page headline read, 'Genoa, blood on the G8', while the sub-headlines just above explained, 'City succumbs for hours to the guerrillas. Throwing of Molotovs, incited by the anarchists.' Just below, a lead article titled, 'Everyone Defeated', included the following text:

The images are of a proletarian Genoa in a state of death, devastation, and shaken by violence not seen at other protests. There was the first death of an anti-globalization protester, 180 people injured; it is a depressed and humiliated city, shaken by a day of unending madness. Only the death of this young boy stopped the assault of the terrible Black Bloc, anarchists and professionals of urban guerrilla warfare. . . . A helpless city, invaded by tens of Black Bloc contingents with only one objective: destroy everything.

An article on the following page, placed next to an image of two Black Bloc militants hurling stones in front of a burning garbage container, began with the following description:

Black sweatshirts and pants, black ski masks, and red handkerchiefs wrapped around them. Molotov cocktails, sticks, stones, and crowbars. The classic image of the violent squatters, which the Genoa Social Forum has spent months working against, descended on the city of the G8, reducing it to a battlefield of car skeletons, burning barricades, and devastated stores. The Black Bloc had a free hand in Genoa for four hours . . . it unleashed the most disastrous urban guerrilla warfare ever seen around a summit.

The coverage in the Spanish press was less sensational, and tended to emphasize the role of the police. For example, the lead front page headline in the center-right *El Mundo* on 21 July read, 'The Italian Police Kill an Anti-globalization Demonstrator during the G8 Summit,' while underneath was

an image of a medic attending to Carlo Giuliani's corpse. The center-left *El País* cover page was dominated by a large photo depicting riot police marching with their shields past Giuliani's body. The headline from the article below read, 'Demonstrator is Killed by Police Fire in the Ruthless Battle of Genoa.' Still, repeated images of iconic street fighting and militant violence were littered throughout both papers, which also emphasized the distinction between legitimate peaceful protest and the criminal violence of the radical minority. The 21 July edition of the *New York Times* drew a similar conclusion, explaining that: 'As in previous demonstrations – from Seattle to Gothenburg, where a man was shot and badly wounded by Swedish police – a small number of more radical youths, bent on battling the police, instigated a form of violence that most demonstrators did not condone' (p. A7).

The Italian and international press coverage on 22 July was similar to the previous day's, focusing on the militant street violence that broke out during the massive unity march. For example, an article in *Corriere Della Sera* explained: 'From the back of the march the Black Bloc advanced rapidly in small groups, and was able to insert itself at three points: head, middle, and tail. A precise strategy, the same used the first day with the COBAS to hide within the crowd and attack the police' (p. 3). However, after the protests ended, media frames shifted abruptly.

Coverage began to emphasize activist testimony about police violence, particularly in the international press. For example, the 23 July *El País* described the police raid on the GSF media center in the following terms: 'In the middle of a generalized panic, journalists and members of the organization were obliged to lay down on the floor, face down with their hands in the air, in a scene reminiscent of "those experienced in Latin America during the 70s," as the President of the Genoa Social Forum later pointed out' (p. 4). On the same page was a testimony from a Spanish activist tortured in a police van. The column began:

Before the voluntary lawyers of the GSF, Pedro, one of the Spaniards detained during the White Overalls demonstration last Friday, showed bruises left on his body during his detainment by the police. This is his story: 'I was in a *Carabinieri* van in which they beat me until the blood began pouring from my head.'

During the next few weeks, the Italian and international press carried numerous stories about the mass protests in Italy against Berlusconi, the ongoing investigations into police brutality in Genoa, and additional activist testimony regarding police abuses.

The media did not just report on the space of terror in Genoa, they helped produce it. Despite differences with respect to political leaning and national context, the sources examined here painted a relatively consistent picture by using similar representations.<sup>13</sup> Exaggerated stories of potential conflict between militarized protesters and police before the protest began along with sensationalist reports of anarchist bomb scares helped create an environment of tension and fear. Police took advantage of the situation to

provoke militant confrontation. Once the siege began, the media played their part by constructing images of destruction carried out by young urban guerrillas, and blaming this 'senseless violence' on the Black Bloc. Editorial commentaries used the situation to distinguish between the reasonable majority and violent minority, reinforcing the sacred status of peaceful protest and constitutional democracy. Although the police dealt with protestors indiscriminately, the press emphasized the need for the movement to break with its violent fringe. Even the images of young Carlo Giuliani's dead corpse were constructed as a morality tale about the tragic consequences of wrongheaded protest violence.

Media images are multivalent, however, and many people interpreted images of Carlo Giuliani's corpse differently – as a sign of excessive police force employed by an authoritarian regime. After a peaceful protest was ruthlessly broken up the following day, and as testimonies became available about torture and abuse, including the brutal raid on the Diaz School, dominant frames began to blame the violence and chaos on the Berlusconi regime, whose posture came to be seen as a threat to democracy nearly equivalent to that posed by young anarchists. At this point, media frames shifted abruptly, focusing on activist testimony regarding excess use of police force and the widespread physical and psychological abuse of detainees.

## Conclusion

Hundreds of thousands of activists came to Genoa during the G8 protests to denounce the structural violence associated with capitalist globalization, and to undermine the symbolic order from which the legitimacy of multi-lateral institutions such as the G8 derives. Most sought to achieve this through non-violent action, while others chose performative violence to achieve the same ends. The overall framework was a symbolic declaration of war on the G8, followed by a ritualized siege of the red zone. The Berlusconi government had other plans, and the Italian police responded by employing mass-mediated images of anarchist violence to justify the transformation of a symbolic protest into a horrifying space of terror.

What was the relationship, then, among performative violence, media representations of violence, and the impact of the Genoa protests? On the one hand, as argued in the first half of this article, young militants in Genoa generated potent oppositional identities and communicated a radical anti-systemic critique by enacting prototypical scenes of youth rebellion against the symbols of global capitalism and the state. Indeed, performative violence is neither random nor senseless, but rather responds to a specific economy of signification. The resulting mass media images helped bring a great deal of public visibility to anti-corporate globalization movements, and even to many of their political demands.

On the other hand, as illustrated in the second half of this article, once violent performances have been physically enacted, they can be appropriated for other ends. In this sense, dominant media frames skillfully decontextualized and reinserted images of militant rebellion into a larger narrative of dreaded criminal, if not terrorist, deviance, threatening to alienate potential supporters and wrest legitimacy from the broader movement. At the same time, authorities used violent images to separate the 'reasonable' majority from the radical fringe, thereby hoping to steer activists in a more reformist, containable direction. However, when the police brutality reached extreme heights, many sectors of the liberal establishment became shocked and dismayed. Dominant media frames shifted toward condemnation of the Italian police and Berlusconi regime, mobilizing activists and eliciting broad public sympathy.

When taken together, the analysis of militant protest in Genoa, along with the subsequent interpretation of media representations, suggest that performative violence constitutes a double-edged sword. Militant performances in Genoa and the resulting violent images did energize certain movement sectors, while generating significant visibility, but they also contributed to official efforts to criminalize dissent. Moreover, given the way authorities manipulated images to spread fear and tension, performative violence helped officials justify brutal repression. Indeed, although the police may have gone too far in Genoa, the physical and psychological terror inscribed on activist bodies produced memories that may have blunted the combative spirit among moderates and radicals alike. Performative violence thus provides an important tool for resource-poor actors in their struggle for visibility, but only at the substantial cost of reinforcing the media frames and repressive strategies promoted by police and government authorities.

Finally, what are the implications of this analysis for movement debates? As we have seen, violence is a powerful cultural construct. Contests over what it means as well as when and where it can legitimately be used help construct alternative political identities, involving what we might call a cultural politics of violence. Predictably, arguments raged after Genoa, particularly when Susan George, from ATTAC, publicly criticized young militants, as she asked:

Are you content demonstrators? I am not talking about the vast majority within the GSF. I know you were terrorized, and some bloodied, and also not to those among the Black Bloc who were police. Rather, I am talking to the authentic Black Bloc, who didn't take part in the preparatory meetings . . . and who didn't belong to the 700 responsible Italian organizations who decided to practice active non-violence.<sup>14</sup>

George's public declaration unleashed a barrage of criticism. Some radicals continued to support militant tactics, while placing blame for violence elsewhere, as one activist argued: 'The violence is not provoked by

any of the organizations that form part of the anti-globalization movement. It is a natural part of the process of expansion of the capitalist system.’<sup>15</sup> Beyond these poles, many protesters disagreed with Black Bloc tactics, but recognized that effective critique can only be waged from inside the radical speech community. Indeed, many radicals, particularly those active with PGA and the Pink & Silver Bloc, emphasized a networking logic, involving coordination among diverse forms of action across diversity and difference. According to the prevailing ‘diversity of tactics’ principle, the main lesson derived from Genoa involved the need for dialogue, coordination, and innovation, as an MRG-based activist argued:

The ‘good activists’ will have to choose between saving themselves by taking part in an anarchist witch-hunt or accepting ‘diversity of tactics’ and trying to criticize within this context, not leaving ‘outside the movement’ those who started it. All this without discounting that police infiltrated the Black Bloc. With more sophistication, they took advantage of the lack of coordination between anarchists and the GSF to attack the Bloc as they passed in front of non-violent demonstrations. One thing has become clear: we have to coordinate direct action with all other types of protest. Who knows when a sit-in or a Molotov cocktail will be useful? It depends on the moment. And according to Asian wisdom: ‘always do what the enemy least expects.’<sup>16</sup>

At the same time, Genoa provides a limiting test case for the diversity of tactics model, particularly as it relates to performative violence. Though elites may attempt to divide protesters into peaceful and violent camps, police tactics in Genoa did precisely the reverse: creating terror by mixing violent and non-violent protesters to justify indiscriminate attacks. In this situation, maintaining separate spaces for distinct tactics may be impossible, as performative violence can place others at risk. Paradoxically, extreme tolerance for certain tactics can actually undermine the ability of other protesters to implement more innovative direct action practices. In this sense, as we have seen, the same permissive ethos that promotes diversity and creativity can also serve to discourage movement critique, particularly when viewed as coming from ‘outside’. Emerging networking logics within anti-corporate globalization movements thus pose a particularly vexing challenge with respect to protest violence, even as they remain an exceptionally potent source of tactical, political, and cultural innovation.

## Notes

- 1 With respect to naming, radicals tend to emphasize ‘anti-capitalism’ while moderates prefer ‘anti-corporate globalization’ or ‘global justice’ (among English-speakers). Since my research is based in Catalonia, I employ ‘anti-corporate globalization’, emphasizing that activists do not oppose globalization per se, understood as increasing social, cultural, political, and economic interconnectedness, but rather globalization that specifically benefits transnational corporations.

- 2 The dynamics of low-intensity state terror in Genoa are explored elsewhere (see Juris, 2004b).
- 3 The Wenner-Gren Foundation and the Social Science Research Council (with Andrew W. Mellon Foundation funding) provided support for Barcelona-based research from June 2001 to August 2002. I also conducted prior fieldwork in Prague, Seattle, and among US networks.
- 4 Performative violence is often used interchangeably with symbolic violence, given that it involves ritualized symbolic activity. In order to avoid confusion with Pierre Bourdieu's (2001) more restricted use of the latter term, I use performative violence here.
- 5 The Continental Direct Action Network came to a standstill during the year after Seattle. The Movement for Global Resistance proved more sustainable, coordinating activities from summer 2001 to January 2003, when activists 'self-dissolved' the network as a response to declining participation and a political statement against the reproduction of rigid structures.
- 6 US-based political art collectives, such as Art and Revolution or Bread and Puppet Theater, have specialized in the use of colorful puppets and dynamic street theater during mass protests. The UK-based Reclaim the Streets (RTS) emerged in the 1990s when activists started to organize impromptu street parties as part of a broader cultural critique of corporate dominated consumer society. The White Overalls tactic, developed most elaborately by Milan-based Ya Basta!, involves a form of action where large, orderly groups of activists advance behind large plastic shields toward police lines where they initiate bodily contact, including pushing and shoving. Finally, as we shall see, Black Bloc refers to a set of tactics and styles employed by loosely organized clusters of affinity groups, often involving targeted property destruction against capitalist symbols. Black Blocs initially surfaced during 1992 protests against the Gulf War among young protesters in the USA who modeled themselves on the practice and styles of German Autonomen, or radical squatters (see Katsiaficas, 1997).
- 7 The GSF involved roughly 800 organizations and networks from around Italy, including the White Overalls, reconfigured Communist Party (Rifondazione Comunista), NGOs, and other civil society organizations.
- 8 Pseudonyms have been used to protect activist identities.
- 9 Pink & Silver, which involves mobile festivals and carnivalesque samba dancing, and the related tactical frivolity tactic, were adapted from RTS street parties and first put into practice at the anti-World Bank/IMF protests in Prague during September 2000.
- 10 See Riera (2001: 191–222).
- 11 Cited in an anonymous testimony from Riera (2001: 202).
- 12 The following analysis examines media representations in the Italian and Spanish press, given that events considered here took place in Italy, while Spain is the site of my own research. I tried to maintain a balance between right- and left-leaning national periodicals in each country, though I also examined a conservative local Genoese paper. Specific sources included: *La Repubblica* (popular center-left paper based in Rome), *Corriere della Sera* (center to center-right Milan-based daily, most widely circulated in Italy), *Il Secolo XIX* (local right-wing paper in Genoa, most widely read in the state of Liguria), *El País* (highly respected center-left paper, most widely circulated national periodical in Spain), and *El Mundo* (popular center-right Spanish daily). In addition, I also consider the *New York Times* and *Time* magazine in order to provide comparative perspective. Generally, I attempt to trace broad patterns across the various

sources. A more finely-tuned analysis of differences with respect to political line and national context would be an important exercise, but is beyond the scope of this article.

- 13 As noted in the text, Italian sources tended to provide more sensationalist coverage than their Spanish or US-based counterparts, particularly *Il Secolo XIX*. In general, left-leaning papers in Spain and Italy were more critical of Berlusconi and the Italian police, but differed only slightly in their portrayal of militant violence.
- 14 Cited in email message posted on 29 July 2001 to bcn2001@yahoogroups.com
- 15 Cited in a Spanish-language document entitled 'Manifiesto in Favor of Violent Direct Action'. Retrieved from <http://www.sindominio.net/fiambrrera/web-agencias/nkotbb/textosnewkids/14.html> on 8 June 2005.
- 16 Cited in Spanish-language document entitled 'Info for a Puzzle'. Retrieved from <http://www.sindominio.net/fiambrrera/web-agencias/nkotbb/textosnewkids/11.html> on 8 June 2005.

## References

- Altheide, David L. and Robert P. Snow (1991) *Media Worlds in the Postjournalism Era*. New York: Aldine de Gruyter.
- Appadurai, Arjun (1996) *Modernity at Large*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Bauman, Richard and Charles L. Briggs (1990) 'Poetics and Performance as Critical Perspectives on Language and Social Life', *Annual Review of Anthropology* 19: 59–88.
- Beeman, William O. (1993) 'The Anthropology of Theater and Spectacle', *Annual Review of Anthropology* 22: 369–93.
- Blok, Anton (2000) 'The Enigma of Senseless Violence', in Goran Aijmer and Jon Abbink (eds) *Meanings of Violence*, pp. 23–38. Oxford: Berg.
- Bourdieu, Pierre (2001) *Masculine Domination*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Bourgois, Philippe (2001) 'The Power of Violence in War and Peace', *Ethnography* 2(1): 5–34.
- Bowman, Glen (2001) 'The Violence in Identity', in Bettina E. Schmidt and Ingo W. Schroder (eds) *Anthropology of Violence and Conflict*, pp. 25–46. Oxford: Routledge.
- Castells, Manuel (1996) *The Rise of the Network Society*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Clarke, John (1976) 'Style', in Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson (eds) *Resistance through Rituals*, pp. 175–91. Boston, MA: Unwin Hyman.
- Della Porta, Donatela (1995) *Social Movements, Political Violence, and the State*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Deluca, Kevin Michael (1999) *Image Politics*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Feixa, Carles (1998) *De Jovenes, Bandas y Tribus*. Barcelona: Ariel.
- Feldman, Allen (1991) *Formations of Violence*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Gilmore, David D. (1990) *Manhood in the Making*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Gitlin, Todd (1980) *The Whole World Is Watching*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Graeber, David (2002) 'The New Anarchists', *New Left Review* (13): 61–73.
- Hall, Stuart (1974) 'Deviance, Politics and the Media', in Paul Rock and Mary

- McIntosh (eds) *Deviance and Social Control*, pp. 261–306. London: Tavistock Publications.
- Hall, Stuart (1982) 'The Rediscovery of Ideology', in Michael Gurevitch (ed.) *Culture, Society, and the Media*, pp. 56–90. New York: Methuen.
- Hall, Stuart and Tony Jefferson (eds) (1976) *Resistance through Rituals*. Boston, MA: Unwin Hyman.
- Hall, Stuart, Chas Critcher, Tony Jefferson, John Clark and Brian Roberts (eds) (1978) *Policing the Crisis*. New York: Holmes and Meier.
- Hebdige, Dick (1979) *Subculture*. London: Methuen.
- Juris, Jeffrey S. (2004a) 'Networked Social Movements', in Manuel Castells (ed.) *The Network Society*, pp. 341–62. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.
- Juris, Jeffrey S. (2004b) *Digital Age Activism: Anti-Corporate Globalization and the Cultural Politics of Transnational Networking*. Unpublished PhD dissertation, University of California, Berkeley.
- Juris, Jeffrey S. (2005) 'The New Digital Media and Activist Networking within Anti-Corporate Globalization Movements', *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* (Special Edition, Cultural Production in a Digital Age, ed. Eric Klinenberg) 597: 189–208.
- Katsiaficas, George (1997) *European Autonomous Social Movements and the Decolonization of Everyday Life*. Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press.
- Melucci, Alberto (1989) *Nomads of the Present*. London: Hutchinson Radius.
- Peteet, Julie (2001) 'Male Gender and Rituals of Resistance in the Palestinian Intifada', in Catherine Besteman (ed.) *Violence*, pp. 244–72. New York: New York University Press.
- Peterson, Abby (2001) *Contemporary Political Protest*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate.
- Rhodes, Joel P (2001) *The Voice of Violence*. Westport, CT: Praeger.
- Riches, David (ed.) (1986) *The Anthropology of Violence*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Riera, Miguel (ed.) (2001) *La Batalla de Genova*. Barcelona: El Viejo Topo.
- Routledge, Paul (1994) 'Backstreets, Barricades, and Blackouts', *Society and Space* 12: 559–78.
- Schröder, Ingo W. and Bettina E. Schmidt (2001) 'Introduction', in Ingo W. Schroder and Bettina E. Schmidt (eds) *Anthropology of Violence and Conflict*, pp. 1–24. Oxford: Routledge.
- Taussig, Michael T. (1987) *Shamanism, Colonialism and the Wild Man*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Thompson, John B. (1995) *The Media and Modernity*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Zulaika, Joseba and William A. Douglass (1996) *Terror and Taboo*. New York: Routledge.

■ **Jeffrey S. Juris** is Assistant Professor of Anthropology in the Department of Social and Behavioral Sciences at Arizona State University. He received his PhD in anthropology from the University of California, Berkeley, where his research explored globalization, social movements, and transnational activism. He is currently writing a book about the cultural logic and politics of transnational networking among anti-corporate globalization activists in Barcelona. *Address:* Department of Social and Behavioral Sciences, New College of Interdisciplinary Arts and Sciences, Arizona State University, West Campus, PO Box 37100, MC 3051 FABN250, Phoenix, AZ 85069–7100, USA. [email: jeffrey.juris@asu.edu]