

A Short, Personal History of the Global Justice Movement

(from New York's community gardens, to Seattle's tear gas, Quebec's fences, the 9/11 backlash, and beyond). An interview with L.A. Kauffman by Benjamin Shepard
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“All War, All the Time?” asked the small pink and black stickers, encouraging people to sign up for Mobilize New York's anti-war email alerts. They were the first in a series of stickers that suddenly appeared on the streets of New York in late 2002. In the four weeks before the February 15, 2003 anti-war protests, you couldn't go anywhere in New York City without seeing bright blue stickers that featured a flag flying above the globe, bearing the slogan, “The World Says No to War.” It seemed like every phone booth, subway car, and mailbox sported one of these stickers. Highly stylish, yet concise and action-oriented, the stickers were designed by L.A. Kauffman, a longtime activist and writer whose specialty is effective movement mobilizing and organizing.

I met Kauffman on February 8 at the offices of the United for Peace and Justice coalition on West 42nd Street. The space was packed with the stickers, buttons, and posters she created to promote the February 15 “World Says No to War” protest, and filled with the hustle-and-bustle energy of a convergence center. More than a hundred volunteers were just finishing a morning meeting before heading out on the streets for an afternoon of leafleting, stickering, and wheatpasting. By the time the five-week campaign was over, UFPJ distributed more than 1.1 million pieces of literature. More than 55,000 of Kauffman's leaflets were downloaded off the Internet for photocopying. During the weekend of the interview alone, more than 250 people handed out leaflets in all five boroughs of the city.

Kauffman, wearing her trademark fedora hat and dark horn-rimmed sunglasses, plus a Green Bay Packers T-shirt from her beloved home state of Wisconsin, discussed her journey from public space/community garden activism in Manhattan's Lower East Side, to the Seattle WTO protests, through the peak years of global trade summit protests, to September 11 and its aftermath, and finally to the staff of United for Peace and Justice. Just the day before, UFPJ had gone to court to challenge the NYPD's rejection of a parade permit for February 15. At issue was the core principle of the right to march, as well as to rally, to express opposition to the Iraq war. The themes that run through the interview mirror the issues raised by the march permit fight: the project of building a robust and colorful public commons, and a pulsing democratic politics that arises from the street.

BS: Do you want to explain what you are planning for next week, what the conditions are right now?

LAK: Well, right at this moment, you and I are sitting down to have this conversation in the

middle of a huge firestorm of controversy over the February 15 protest. We're in court and fighting for the incredibly basic right to get a march permit from the City of New York and the New York Police Department. They're saying that – because of “security concerns” – they will not allow us to march anywhere in the city. They'll allow us to have a “stationary event,” a rally. But they won't allow us to march. The federal government sent an attorney to stand with the City today at our court hearing and support their case.

For me, having spent much of the previous five years doing direct-action organizing, this is a very peculiar position to be in. I never really imagined that I'd find myself organizing a classic mass march and rally, much less embroiled in a dispute over getting a permit from the police. The groups that I've been part of over the years have never asked for permits. We just do what we want to do. If you have enough people, the police usually accommodate you, and you usually end up with fewer barricades and restrictions on your movement.

But while I cringe at the idea of asking the police for permission to exercise my rights, I also think the reasons why UFPJ applied for a permit were good ones. We're making a real effort to bring in lots of people for February 15 who are first-time protesters, and to bring in a more racially diverse group of people than have historically been involved in the peace movement. We want it to be a safe place for old people, children, immigrants, everyone.

The irony is, having a simple, permitted march and rally – the type of protest that, five years ago, seemed so dull and tame and circumscribed from the perspective of the direct action global justice movement – has now become a dramatic act of defiance. The political space for dissent has shut down so dramatically that merely gathering in large numbers has become a bold move.

The Struggle for Community Gardens in New York's Lower East Side

BS: Let's go back to five years ago, when that political space was opening up. When I first met you, you were planning for the big April 1999 civil disobedience around the community garden issue, which was another public space struggle. We were fighting for another set of spaces that were getting squeezed and homogenized and globalized.

LAK: The fight over community gardens in New York City in some ways was a very local community fight, with purely local relevance, and yet it was more than that, too. From 1997 to 1999, that campaign pulled a lot of new people into activism and, as far as the East Coast was concerned, was a real incubator for the kinds of creative political energies that were expressed in the Seattle WTO protests, and in the big trade summit protests from November 1999 until September of 2001. Many of us who were working on the garden fight took inspiration from ACT UP and a lot of other direct action movements that had come before us.

BS: The West Coast Earth First! stuff, too, right?

LAK: Yes, definitely. There were people who shuttled back and forth between the New York City community garden fight and old-growth forest blockades in remote Oregon. The New York City community garden fight was one of the first times that Earth First!-style blockading techniques were used in an urban context.

Those tactics are often most effective for groups whose numbers are small but whose appeal is broad. And they worked really well here, putting the gardens issue onto the agenda, making the controversy something that everyone knew about, and helping transform what was a very small movement into a relatively large movement.

The action you are talking about took place when the movement had grown a fair bit, it was a civil disobedience action with something like 50 arrests. These were people from all over the city, many of whom had never done anything like that before, sitting in the street, breaking the law to defend public space in New York City.

Fall of 1999 – an expanding movement space...

BS: The space for people to do all sorts of things, including organize and build communities. By the fall of that year, you started hearing rumblings about Buy Nothing Day, which we were working on in New York City, and people were starting to buy tickets out to Seattle. When did you first start hearing about what was happening?

LAK: I don't remember when I got the sense that Seattle was going to be huge. The word was spreading that it was going to be bigger and size and different in character from anything we'd been seeing in recent years. It grew out of a deep political radicalization that was happening in a lot of movements, like the garden movement, that were working on local issues or what people might write off as "single issues." People were coming to see the connections between all these local and particular fights, finding a common foe in corporate globalization.

Obviously, the global justice movement had been building throughout the Global South long before Seattle and there were major, important protests around the world long before Seattle. We were just about the last country in the world to have a vibrant movement around these issues.

I'll never forget the chills that went down my spine in Seattle – I was in a joyous crowd that was blocking the streets in the face of riot gear, tear gas, and pepper spray – when I first heard the chant, "This is what democracy looks like." There was this immediate sense that a new force was on the scene. Within the United States, Seattle opened a huge political space for dissent overnight. It was a period of incredible creative energy, where huge numbers of new people – especially young people – were coming into activism, were questioning the structures of global power, were experimenting with art and culture and decentralized forms of organizing. And the global justice movement as a whole around the world was doing something that was very extraordinary, which was putting big issues about power and wealth, about the organization of the global economy, onto the agenda. We were making our critiques part of the global discourse about trade policy and development.

I hadn't seen that before in my lifetime, a movement that was managing to alter the terms of the debate at such a high level, at such a large scale. And all of that together just created such a sense of possibility and momentum. The phrase "another world is possible" seemed not to be an empty slogan at all. Large numbers of people were not only envisioning another world but also acting in creative ways to bring it about.

BS: What happened over the two years after Seattle? How were people building on that beyond the protests?

LAK: Those were incredible, chaotic, whirlwind years, marked by a series of big actions: Seattle WTO in November 1999; the A16 IMF/World Bank protests in Washington, D.C. in April 2000; the Republican and Democratic Conventions in summer 2000; the Quebec City Free Trade Area of the Americas protest in April 2001.

There were two major dynamics in play during those two years between Seattle and September 11 that were in some respects at cross purposes.

One dynamic was the broadening of the global justice movement. Faith-based activists, organized labor, and big national progressive organizations were putting more and more resources and energy into the global justice movement. But simultaneously, there was a dynamic in the direct action end of the movement toward more and more tactical militancy. Outside of the Seattle WTO protests, there wasn't all that much actual property destruction in those years, but there was a move toward more and more militant tactics and toward direct confrontation with the police.

The notion of "diversity of tactics" emerged as an attempt to reconcile these two dynamics. Some people took the phrase simply as a synonym for property destruction. But the idea behind it was more complex. It was a way for all wings of the movement to work together, without flattening out their differences in the name of some false "unity." Those who were going to engage in direct action of whatever kind would agree to make sure that their tactical choices did not endanger other people, especially those who wanted to engage in safe and legal forms of protest. Those who were organizing safe and legal forms of protest would agree not to publicly denounce others for their tactical choices, especially in the media.

The IMF/World Bank protests that were slated for September 29-30, 2001, were really going to be a watershed moment. There were going to be simultaneously broader and more militant than anything we had seen before. There were going to be very large numbers of people who were going to be engaging in quite militant tactics with the hope of shutting the meetings down. But there was also a major mobilization happening by church groups, by the AFL-CIO, by more politically mainstream forces. And there were discussions, productive discussions taking place behind the scenes among all these different forces about how to coexist in a single protest, how not to denounce each other to a media, but also not to endanger each other – so that, for instance, the folks who were mobilizing their churches knew they could ask people to come without putting them in danger of arrest.

Quebec City and the Need for an Aesthetic Intervention

BS: When you say more militant tactics, I have an image of people locking down. I have an image of people blocking streets, and occasionally people will break a window...

LAK: And fighting with cops.

BS: Like the Days of Rage, 1969.

LAK: Actually, on a far bigger scale. The Days of Rage was just a few hundred people engaging in an isolated protest. Compare that to the April 2001 summit protest in Quebec City, which was the apex of that tactical radicalization on the North American continent. Quebec City was absolutely insane. It was a protest against the Free Trade Area of the Americas, a trade agreement that would expand NAFTA to the entire of hemisphere and push forward the agenda of corporate globalization. There was a gathering of political leaders from the hemisphere to negotiate the agreement and a huge protest gathering outside. The summit protests were making world leaders increasingly nervous, and they were responding with over-the-top security measures. For the FTAA summit, the entire downtown area of Quebec City was closed down and fenced off.

People were really angry, and they attacked the fence. The police responded by barraging us with just a staggering amount of tear gas and pepper spray – big, poisonous clouds of it. There were long standoffs, lasting hours, with police in riot gear shooting off canister after canister while the crowd did its best not to back down.

There were tens of thousands of people, and easily hundreds of them fought back against the police. Now, in most contexts, I think that fighting the police is stupid and counterproductive; it's not something I would do. But in this case, I felt like, this is a meeting of illegitimate authorities who have retreated into a fortress, the police are reacting to our righteous anger by absolutely barraging us with tear gas, and so fair enough: I cheered every person who threw a tear gas canister back at the cops. *Return to sender.*

But at the same time, I had a big problem with the aesthetics of the Quebec City protest, and with the aesthetic drift of the global justice movement more generally. Our side was becoming more and more militaristic. All those people – mainly, but not exclusively, young men – dressed in black, looking all menacing and ominous, getting off on confrontations. They had unwittingly become almost a mirror image of the repressive forces that they were up against. And the spirit of carnival that had been so striking in Seattle, that sense of a carnival of resistance, was getting lost.

A friend and I, as we drove back down to New York, starting talking in a culture-jam way about, What would it have been like if the people who were throwing back the tear gas canisters had been wearing pink ball gowns instead of black hoodies? Or if everybody were wearing pink ball gowns, would the police still attack them with tear gas? We starting talking about, okay, how can we make an aesthetic intervention into what's going on, influence the tone and look of the next big summit protest? And how might that affect the success of the event?

BS: I don't want to interrupt, but can you explain what is the metaphor of the carnival at a protest? And why is that effective?

LAK: Well, the central idea behind the carnival is that protests gain in power if they reflect the world we want to create. And I, for one, want to create a world that is full of color and life and creativity and art and music and dance. It's a celebration of life against the forces of greed and

death. And it's a way of protesting that gets out of the angry shouting shrill position that you can get put in when you're just simply saying no. Having a carnival is a way of saying yes. In a funny way, it's not unlike creating a community garden. It's a way of saying, we not only oppose what's happening now but we have a vision of a different moral order, in which people are free to express their creative energies to the greatest extent, a world where public space is dedicated to community-building and fostering public expression, instead of given over to commercial expression.

BS: OK, so back to the IMF/World Bank protests

LAK: There was a real sense heading into the IMF/World Bank protests that there was the potential for a level of repression that was similar to Quebec City. So a few of us started a group called the Masquerade Project. We raised a bunch of money and bought hundreds and hundreds of gas masks, because we thought the police were likely to be using tear gas against us down in DC. And we got all these huge boxes of rhinestones and glitter and feathers and sparkles and paint, everything you can think of, and we starting throwing gas-mask-decorating parties. We decorated all of these fabulous gas masks and gave them away to people. We were giving them away well in advance of the protest because we were afraid of them being confiscated if we kept them in one place. So there were already hundreds of them out in the world before September 11th.

The idea was that people were going to need to protect themselves. Tear gas is no joke, it can have very serious health consequences, and a vinegar-soaked bandanna just isn't adequate. We felt really strongly that we wanted to protect people, but if you are wearing a regular old gas mask you look scary and ominous, even if you are just protecting yourself. It all changes when the gas mask has been transformed to look like a bug or a psychedelic flower or what have you – that was the aesthetic intervention we were after.

We were planning a fundraiser at a nightclub – we were going to have a gas mask fashion show and walk the catwalk showing off our fabulous creations. That fundraiser was scheduled for September 12.

Needless to say, we canceled it. A day later, a call went out via the local media that the rescue workers needed additional respirator devices – and we immediately decided to donate our gas masks. One of my most surreal memories of that period was the night, I guess it was September 13, when a couple of folks and I sat up until something like four in the morning un-decorating the gas masks. We were prying off the rhinestones with kitchen knives, peeling off the paint, picking off the sequins, and then we took them down to somewhere on the edge of the frozen zone around Ground Zero and donated them to the rescue workers. We were quite aware of the irony: some of the gas masks that we had purchased to protect people *from* the police ended up being worn *by* the police, and that was okay with us.

BS: I saw you on September 12 at about noon in Union Square, the day after the attacks. We were sitting in the park. There was a huge cloud of smoke coming up behind us. Everybody was shell-shocked. And you said, “The global justice movement has got to become a global

peace and justice movement.” It was the first time I’d thought of, wow, I guess this is where we are going to have to take this thing.

LAK: Yeah, I remember saying that. That was such a haunting meeting. A bunch of us – 30 people, maybe, or more – were sitting in a big circle in the grass, in a place that until the day before had been a prime spot for viewing the World Trade Center. The smoke from Ground Zero got closer and closer until that horrible stench surrounded us and we had to flee. We went and reconverged in the back of the New York City Independent Media Center because you couldn’t breathe.

BS: I remember the week after 9/11 you were in a frenzy of organizing. I was in my apartment with my sheets over my head. That was a horrible time. And you were out leafleting. Tell me about that.

LAK: We all had our ways of coping with the initial shock. Mine was that I just threw myself into organizing, printing up thousands of leaflets and just handing them out on the streets for the peace vigils we were having in Union Square. That first week was such an extraordinary time in terms of the atmosphere in the city, in the way people related to each other in New York. People were devastated, and yet there was this amazing gentleness in people’s demeanor. For me, I didn’t want to be in my apartment looking at the television set, I wanted to be out on the street talking to people. I wanted to do something.

There was an extraordinary protest shortly after September 11 that got virtually no media coverage. I think it was on the Friday night after the Tuesday attacks. It was a nearly spontaneous march that went from a candlelight vigil in Union Square up to Times Square. It was very emotional, and very non-ideological. It wasn’t about the intricacies of interventions and imperialism, it was just all these people who did not want to see mass slaughter committed in our name as revenge for the mass slaughter that had just happened in our city.

But then each succeeding protest became less interesting and compelling. It felt like all the nuance and emotion was drained out, as more and more people – people from the global justice movement, people from the anti-authoritarian left – pulled back out of ambivalence, and all that remained were the sorts of groups that have ideological certainty no matter the circumstances. Out came the boring old “Money for Jobs, Not for War” signs that you see at every fucking demo – I always paraphrase that one as “Money for Soul-Draining Wage Slavery, Not for War” – with fewer and fewer homemade or heartfelt signs.

BS: I remember on October 7, 2001 – the day the bombing of Afghanistan began – we were at a march that went from Union Square to Times Square. You were getting more and more pissed off by the signs and the speeches, and you said, I’m getting really bored with this knee-jerk anti-imperialist politics. And you just walked off.

LAK: Yeah, I was disgusted. I decided on the spot, I’m not going to another one of these things. And I didn’t.

You know, the people who destroyed the World Trade Center were attacking many things.

They were attacking the United States as a symbol of global imperialism and global might. But they were also attacking the United States as a symbol of religious tolerance, of cultural diversity, the emancipation for women and gay people. A good deal of what Al Qaeda and the Taliban sought to destroy were things that we progressives had fought dearly to create.

Not everything, it was a very complex situation. It absolutely had to do with US military aggression throughout the world, but it wasn't just that. And you didn't hear anybody at the protests talking about the religious fanatics who oppose all those aspects of a diverse, secular society that we treasure. You didn't hear anybody talking about much of anything outside of a crude anti-imperialist analysis, in which you quickly get backed into the "enemy of my enemy is my friend" corner. People did not have a way of talking about how ambiguous the situation was.

The politics felt very cold, cerebral. And it made me sick. It made me physically sick to think that the movement that I was part of was merely showcasing the shrill and the simplistic, was dominated by people with cold and creepy politics. I had this very strong sense after September 11 that if you do not have humanism and a genuine love for other human beings at the core of your politics, I don't want to work with you. I don't want to be in coalition with you. If you could not genuinely mourn and grieve for the thousands of people who were slaughtered in our city, forget it. I am certainly not marching with you.

It was a very clarifying political moment. I happened to get an insurance settlement from a car accident around that time, and I retreated to a house on a mountain hours from New York City and pulled out of activism completely for most of a year. I stopped writing, stopped organizing, just needed time and space.

BS: That was a hard space to work in after that. We always do a permitless parade in December, and I wanted to do a dance party for a world without war. But people said we couldn't do it. People were mourning. It was like that old Larry Kramer argument that you can't tell a joke in a world with AIDS, which I really disagree with. You have to.

LAK: But there was a period of such extreme mourning that you really couldn't dance. There was certainly a sense within our circles, among people who had embraced that carnival model, of where does this go. It was certainly not relevant for that moment. It's like any other tactic or mobilizing style – context is everything.

One Year Later – Global Justice Meets Anti War

BS: There was a moment after the first anniversary of September 11 when spaces started to get opened up again. I think that is worth talking about.

LAK: The one-year anniversary was absolutely a turning point emotionally and politically, for many people, including myself. It was only after the anniversary that I felt free to start organizing again. I was at a writer's colony, and every day in the newspaper the Bush Administration was threatening war with Iraq, and I started feeling that drive to do activism.

As you know, I came back to New York and said, "Let's get an antiwar group going," and

pulled together a lot of the people who had been in the community garden fight and Reclaim the Streets and the Carnival Bloc to say, OK what can we do and how can we come together and have an impact.

We created a couple of different groups. And we turned back to that carnival model. We formed what we called An Absurd Response to an Absurd War to go down the October 26, 2002 ANSWER march in Washington, D.C. We decided after great debate that we would indeed go down and participate in a Worker's World event – that was my quota, one Worker's World event is all I can stomach in my lifetime – and we had what we called a “Party for Perma-War.” People loved it and responded really well to reintroducing satire, humor, color, dance, music into the movement. It helped that some of the satire was directed *toward* the movement: When we'd pass, say, an ANSWER sound truck, we'd switch from our exaggerated pro-war chants like “We need oil, we need gas, watch out world we'll kick your ass” to things like, “March march, chant chant, rhetoric rhetoric, rant rant.”

BS: Playfulness. That's where creativity comes. So now you are working with dovetailing the global justice and the antiwar movements, working towards February 15. What has that been like?

LAK: The global justice movement – at least in the United States, it was different elsewhere in the world – really went quiet after 9/11. That was part of my sense of mourning for that whole year, the fact that one of the most promising and innovative movements of my lifetime had been seemingly destroyed overnight.

But there was a network of connections in place, a whole infrastructure, which people were able to reactivate pretty quickly after September 2002. The whole global character of February 15 has everything to do with the global justice movement and the institutions it created: The date was selected at a November 2002 meeting of the European Social Forum, and then was really picked up by activists all over the world after the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre, Brazil, which was in late January 2003.

The anti-war movement is, of course, much larger in terms of numbers than the global justice movement was. It contains a lot of forces that were just beginning to become active in the global justice movement. But the infrastructure that the global justice movement built meant that people have been able to go mobilize much faster than they perhaps have ever been. February 15 is likely to be the single largest day of protest in world history. Obviously, the Internet has greatly facilitated this mobilization, but without the foundation built by the global justice movement, it simply wouldn't have happened on anything like this scale.

Working here in the United for Peace and Justice office has been just amazing. We can't print enough stuff. We print a half a million pieces of literature and they just fly out the door. More than 300 people are out on the streets of New York leafleting this weekend. The scale of the thing is incredible. People's level of motivation is incredible.

And I think it's especially extraordinary given the degree to which the political space for dissent in this country shrank in the wake of 9/11. Mobilizing this number of people, getting

people out on the streets on this scale, is a very radical act at this moment. That's why we're having such a huge fight over the permit, over our right to have an anti-war march in New York City. Tactics that a lot of people wrote off as too tame or uninspiring or ineffective during the peak years of the global justice movement have a different significance now.

I think one of the real weaknesses of the global justice movement – and of direct action movements more generally – is the tendency to confuse tactics with strategy, and to see tactics as principles. For a while there, a lot of people had the attitude that if you weren't doing the most in-your-face kind of direct action, you weren't doing anything at all.

This period is an object lesson in the point that tactics are tools. And just as you don't use a hammer when a screwdriver is what you need, different tactics have different effects at different times. The classic march and rally is a very powerful way of expressing dissent right now, a powerful way of opening up political space. Is that same style of protest going to be effective five years from now? Who knows. But I think one of the real lessons of this chaotic five years, from an organizer's point of view is that you absolutely have to keep strategy front and center. And strategy means assessing real world conditions.

BS: So where are you at today after having gone through all of this?

LAK: Well, I'm organizing full-time-plus again, after a long hiatus. And I don't think I'm alone in that. I think there are a lot of people who pulled back after 9/11 and now are back organizing more than ever. We are in a movement-building, movement-expanding phase again. And while I'm very alarmed by the direction that the country is taking and the world is taking, very apprehensive, I'm also very hopeful about the scale and commitment of this burgeoning movement. There was certainly a setback, a period of mourning and shock, a period of reflection and reassessment, but now activism is back big time and – at least for the foreseeable future – is only going to grow.

[add illustrations – all war all the time and the feb. 15th flyer]

Afterward

This interview was completed on February 8. As the week before the February 15 protest progressed, things only got weirder. The Bush Administration sent attorneys from the Justice Department to file a friend of the court brief backing the City of New York's case that the march represented a security threat. After the Office of Homeland Security put the country on "orange" full terrorist alert, the *New York Daily News* ran a headline with an ominous black cover with the words, "SHOW OF FORCE, Officials warn stepped-up security will jam city streets, crossings, subways," on February 10. By Tuesday, the *New York Times*' cover showed a picture of police officers with automatic rifles in Times Square (where some activists planned to converge after the rally) with the headline, "Alert on Terror." The paper reported that courts had rejected United for Peace and Justice's appeal for a permit, arguing that a "Stationary Rally Poses Less Risk." The same edition published the Administration's guide to preparedness for a chemical attack: duct tape, plastic sheeting, and fresh water, in a message

that seemed reminiscent of the Cold War warnings for school children to hide under their desks if attacked by an atomic bomb. The following day, papers showed long lines of people stockpiling duct tape, as hysteria took hold nationwide. In the meantime, Fox News ran “Homeland Security: Terror Alert High” graphics during evening programming about a new Bin Laden tape broadcast around the world; silly putty in his hands.

As the week progressed, news became more and more Orwellian. Protesters at the rally responded to the sentiment. “We’re already at War with Iraq. We’ve always been at war with Iraq. War is Peace!” one placard read. Riffing on 1984, another stated, “Support the Military Tribunals. If you’ve done nothing wrong, you have nothing to fear.” Countless others played on the duct tape warnings. It was clear that amid the warmongering, a backlash was unfolding. The Saturday march offered its culmination. By Saturday, the administration was acknowledging that the information they had about an imminent attack was not quite as solid as first thought and was back-peddling that it didn’t really want people to start duct taping their homes, just yet.

The day of the rally, despite the state-imposed barriers, activists from all walks of life descended on the city. The day of the protest, the police sent horses to break up feeder marches heading to the rally, sought to separate crowds from each other, pushed marchers off sidewalks with batons, and arrested nearly 300 people.

My father, a 66-year-old retired pastor who was in town over the weekend, observed, “We started out at 51st St, then 57th, then 62nd, and then 68th up 2nd Avenue. At 68th Street, we realized we were being pushed out of town. Every time we’d try to turn down to go to the rally, the police would push us up away from the rally. It was perfectly clear that was what they were trying to do. It was crowded like a VE day. They brought out batons to push us and we chanted, ‘Let us through!!! Let us through!!!’ Every time it would calm down, the police would try with to stop us, yet most of us broke through anyway. I was just a citizen trying to gather with other citizens to have a conversation with the President. I was trying to communicate how I felt about this. I’m a citizen. I pay for this war. My friends are going to go get shot for it. I’d like to have a say so. I don’t want to have my head patted or told what to think, being told my opinion doesn’t count. Being told to pay attention to people who know what they are doing like Kenny Boy and Dick Cheney, the important people. We’re going to war. Bush says, Trust me. I’ve got a memory long enough to remember the last time a president said, trust me, I have a secret plan. Nixon’s secret plan to get us out of Vietnam was to invade Cambodia. All Saturday, it was quite clear they were running the marchers out of the streets, like a defense used to run Tony Dorsett out of bounds. They were running people away from the rally.” By the end of the day, this 66-year-old retired pastor had engaged in direct action, working with a crowd to push up through a police line to get past police to get to the rally. And he was not alone.

Over a half a million marched through the streets of New York, in coordination with protests in a staggering 800 cities and towns around the world; 700,000 mobilized in London, one million in Rome. All weekend long, the protests were the top news story. Many described the day as the largest day of simultaneous peaceful protest in world history. Two days later, the *New York Times* cover story compared the weekend’s mobilization with the Velvet Revolution of 1989 and the Revolutions of 1848. “The fracturing of the Western alliance over Iraq and the huge antiwar demonstrations around the world this weekend are reminders that there may still be two superpowers on the planet: the United States and world public opinion.

In his campaign to disarm Iraq, by war if necessary, President Bush appears to be eyeball to eyeball with a tenacious new adversary: millions of people who flooded the streets of New York and dozens of other world cities.”

Leslie and I spoke again on Monday, two days after the protest. Chills ran through my body as we spoke about the possibility that the weekend had created. Seattle was no longer the baseline for protest. Out of the ashes of an extraordinary backlash, we’d created a new organizational possibility, in many ways, thanks to the ambitious work of organizers such as Kauffman.

Benjamin Shepard

February 17, 2003