Priming the Senses:
The Yes Men and the Affective Character of Disruption

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Abstract

In this thesis I examine the use of disruption in contemporary activist practices. Following the work of Jacques Rancière I argue that moments of disruption, moments when our common sense understandings of the world are thrown into disarray, are the only instances when true politics can emerge. Disruption, I argue, is a common tool in activist frameworks but executions of disruption vary widely. Some activist's introduce new information to disrupt dominant regimes and understandings. Others take a more literal understanding of the term, physically attempting to disrupt objectionable practices. In most cases, I argue, these manifestations of disruption fail to meet the criteria of a political disruption because what Rancière calls the "distribution of the sensible" contains common sense understandings capable of neutralizing the political substance of these claims. I argue that the sort of disruptive act theorized by Rancière is one that works on an individual's internal perceptual capacities. I locate an example of this type of disruption in a particular action of the New York based group The Yes Men.

Dans cette thèse, j'examine l'utilisation de la perturbation dans les pratiques militantes contemporaines. Suite au travail de Jacques Rancière je soutiens que les moments de rupture, des moments où notre compréhension du sens commun du monde sont jetées dans le désarroi, sont les seuls cas où la vraie politique peut émerger. Perturbation, je dirais, est un outil commun dans des cadres militants, mais les exécutions de perturbation varient largement. Certains activistes présentent de nouvelles informations à perturber les régimes et la

compréhension dominants. D'autres adoptent une compréhension plus littérale du terme, en essayant de perturber physiquement les pratiques impliquées. Dans la plupart des cas, je dirais, ces manifestations de perturbation ne répondent pas aux critères d'une perturbation politique parce que ce que Rancière appelle la partage du sensible contient la compréhension de bon sens capables de neutraliser la substance politique de ces allégations. Face à la situation, je dirais que ce genre d'acte perturbateur résultant des travaux de Rancière est celui qui travaille sur les capacités perceptives internes d'un individu. Je trouve un exemple de ce type de perturbation dans une action particulière du groupe basé à New York, the Yes Men.

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Introduction

I write this from the position of someone who has been deeply involved in many causes, ranging from environmentalism to anti-austerity, in many different contexts. I have signed petitions, marched in the streets, held banners, occupied buildings. I have travelled to foreign countries to 'stand in solidarity' with people whose human rights have been violated in ways that many of us could not even imagine. I state this to set a particular tone. Through my own participation in these actions I have seen in myself, and others I have associated with, a particular fatalism set in. Activist burn out, some call it. This is the feeling that no matter what we do, nothing will change. This feeling stems not only from the fact that, often, things do not change, but also the tendency of those in powerful, and not so powerful, positions to belittle and chastise those who fight for change. The 2012 Earth Day in Montreal brought out record numbers of tens of thousands of individuals marching in the streets, presumably in favour of more serious commitment to environment protection (Bonin et al., 2012). In that same year the Canadian government made statements about "environmental and other radical groups" who "hijack" regulatory bodies and 'use funding from foreign special interest groups to undermine Canada's national economic interest'" (The Globe and Mail, 2012). While these statements were not targeted at Earth Day marchers, such comments do discard the efforts of all those who take a stand on that day, and those who took a stand on many other days. It is denunciations such as this that make one wonder about the possibility of true change, or at least true dialogue. In this project I have decided to limit myself to this question of

dialogue. What does it take to bring the sort of questions that those on the left bring, those that challenge the status quo, to be taken as serious political charges worthy of debate? By serious I do not mean the typical sort of debate one sees in the face of most demonstrators, that is denunciations of the actors and their methods, but true consideration of the claims brought forward.

Jacques Rancière provides an analysis which fits the situation I have conjured strikingly well. He argues that modern day political systems can be understood as a "consensus system", and through the language of consensus true political action is curbed (Rancière, 1999, 133). What Rancière is suggesting is that democracies, through approved political practices, proclaim that all perspectives, needs, and wants have been accounted for. When one exists in a consensus society, such as this, certain presumptions are made. One of these presumptions is that those who act outside of the consensual arrangement are a democratic excess, these are individuals who are demanding more than their fair share. Challenging this notion, Rancière argues that politics, true politics, only occurs in the moments when those who have been left out of the consensus arrangement make an appearance, and demand recognition of what has been ignored. Politics, for Rancière, are moments that disrupt the prevailing order (Rancière, 1999, 99).

What does it mean to equate politics with disruption? In one sense, more so on the left I would think, disruption and politics go hand in hand. During the time that this project was developed a number of very public disruptive activities demanded our attention. These have included Occupy Wall Street, The Quebec

Student Strike, and Idle No More. These movements, in some ways, are radically different from each other yet share at least one thing in common. They use disruption to bring attention to their claims. Occupy Wall Street saw individuals around the world setup encampments in downtown financial districts to raise awareness about financial inequality (Adbusters – Occupy Wall Street). The Quebec Student Strike became synonymous, in the minds of many, with massively disruptive acts. The most common of these were the mega marches that paralyzed the streets of Montreal. Those marches were accompanied by the odd occupation of a building, as well as the occasional sack of bricks being thrown onto a metro line (Sorochan, 2012). Finally, there was Idle No More, a movement that has seen street marches, blockades of train tracks, and international borders (CBC News, 2013). These are all disruptive actions, but are they also political actions?

This is a question that I have struggled with throughout this project. To answer in the negative, and say no these actions are not political, is dangerous, especially when writing from a perspective that holds sympathies for these movements. To say no runs the risk of agreeing with sentiments that disruption will always harm a political message. For example, Globe and Mail columnist Jeffery Simpson wrote, in reference to the Idle No More protests, that some "have distanced themselves from it…because they understand that scattered incidents of protest that inconvenience others are a surefire way of dissipating support for the aboriginal cause" (2013). This is not a thesis I agree with, and yet the sort of reactions that disruptive actions often receive needs to be taken into

account. The reactions many have, in regards to disruption, are similar to Simpson's, in that they express anger or annoyance that their daily routines are being disrupted because of a special interest. Anger and annoyance do not lead to new understandings, or interrogations, of present societal configurations. To the contrary, they work to preserve the prevailing configurations. That preservation is what Rancière means when he suggests that political action is curbed through the language of consensus. Hundreds of thousands of students take to the streets in demand of affordable tuition because they do not wish to spend their entire lives in debt, and they are chastised for wanting more than their fair share. Yet, Rancière is also adamant that disruption can also lead to moments when these understanding can be reconfigured and/or challenged.

The question that arises out of this situation is a definitional one. For an action to be politically disruptive, Rancière argues, it must act outside of the distribution of the sensible (Rancière, 1999, 29-30). Something completely new must appear that causes individuals to perceive the challenge as something that makes them reevaluate the understandings that they take for granted. In order to examine what this sort of moment actually looks like I consider three categories of potentially political disruption. These include: informational activism, direct action, and culture jamming. By singling these out, I am not suggesting that these categories fully encompass all of the methods used when attempting to challenge hegemonic powers or attitudes. Nor am I attempting to suggest that all disruptive actions can be neatly sectioned off into these three categories, indeed there is often overlap between these categories. Rather, my intention is to zero in on

several common understandings of disruption in the activist context, and provide an analysis of how those utilizations are often understood by those who observe these actions from afar.

In Chapter One I begin by providing a more in depth examination of Jacques Rancière's work. I focus specifically on his understanding of politics as moments of disruption. Following this introduction I proceed to lay out my understanding of the first two categories of disruptive practices: informational activism and direct action. The intention in the first chapter, in order to offer a more concrete definition of what disruption is, focuses on these first two categories as examples of what a political disruption is not.

Contained within my understanding of information action are many activities, including passing around petitions, picketing, leafleting, and many other similar practices. The mentality that guides these sorts of actions is "if only they knew then they would act differently". We often see this approach in fair trade arguments. For example, where one attempts to convince people that they should stop buying and wearing Nike shoes through informational campaigns that seek to educate people about Nike's use of sweatshops. The Internet has introduced a new era of this sort of activism. Communications theorist, Michael Strangelove, argues that the "Internet has introduced a new era of opposition and challenge to the dominant meanings produced within capitalism…Now we can speak of a globalized alternative media system wherein 'official' meanings are constantly challenged, appropriated, re-articulated, and, to a certain degree, 'unfixed'"(2005, 125).

While I would agree with Strangelove, insofar that "official meanings are constantly challenged" both online and offline, I am hesitant to follow his conclusion that this translates into a true challenge to dominant meanings of global capitalism. This skepticism is largely informed by Jodi Dean's work. Dean highlights the inconsistency between activists' faith in the Internet's revolutionary capability and continued "increases in economic inequality and consolidation of neoliberal capitalism in and through globally networked communication" (Dean, 2010, 31). For Dean, these sorts of informational challenges often fail to bring about true challenges to the status quo because we live in a world that is filled with conflicting opinions and understandings. These are opinions that society is completely comfortable circulating and people do not become strongly attached to or disrupted by them when they are challenged (Dean, 2009a, 147-148).Drawing on Herbert Marcuse's account of one-dimensionality, I will argue that so long as technological capitalism is able to deliver material comfort and convenience to the majority of the population, the circulation of diversity of dissenting opinions is not only easily managed, but also has a system reinforcing character (Marcuse, 1996, 50).

In the face of this situation many have turned to a more literal understanding of disruption. Instead of disrupting hegemonic regimes with new information, such techniques seek to forcibly stop these regimes and their objectionable practices. Such action comes in a variety of forms: streets protests, building occupations, and, most extreme, property damage and arson. Here, I am most concerned with the public reaction following such action. Activists involved

with groups like the Earth Liberation Front or Animal Liberation Front, groups based around the use of extreme direct action, typically take the position that public reaction is inconsequential- that we have reached a point where there is no longer any time to talk about environmental policies and we must act now to stop destructive practices (Leader et al., 2003, 38). While these acts may register in a more prominent manner, as compared to information activism, there is still the question of whether they constitute a political disruption. I argue that most examples of direct action also fail to achieve the status of a political disruption because they, like informational activism, are able to be accounted for in present systems of control, albeit in a different way.

Drawing primarily from Sarah Ahmed's work on "happy objects" I examine how society rallies around happy objects, such as established configurations of society, when faced with external threats. Using the family as an example, Ahmed explains how happy objects become not only objects of our present desire, but ones that we are working towards because they present a promise a future of happiness to us. "The family becomes a happy object through the work that must be done to keep it together…The family involve knowledge of the peculiar, or the transformation of the peculiar into habit and ritual" (Ahmed, 2010, 46-47). Happiness, then, is achieved through the following of example, in this example replicating the lives of the parents (Ahmed, 2010, 47). The consensual system works in a similar manner, a type of life is laid out that holds the promise of fulfillment, so long as it is followed. Refusal to follow is viewed as an act of violence. Drawing on the image of "the feminist killjoy," Ahmed argues

that in the moment when the "feminist killjoy" speaks up about an injustice "the violence of what was said or the violence of provocation goes unnoticed. However she speaks, the feminist is usually the one who is viewed as "causing the argument," who is disturbing the fragility of peace" (Ahmed, 2010, 65). This insight highlights the paradox of disruption- it is necessary to call attention to a wrong, but the disruption is often the only wrong that is noticed. Activists who engage in physically disruptive activities are increasingly understood through this "feminist killjoy" lens and, as such, their claims are increasingly ignored. As Judith Butler argues, "fields of visibility" are coloured by pre-existing understandings and, as such, the activist body, is always perceived as a threat, instead of as an individual bringing forward a legitimate political claim (Butler, 1993, 17).

The problems I highlight with informational activism and direct action are not intended to suggest that all manifestations of those types of actions will fail to bring about political moments. Nevertheless, such actions do seem less capable of acting outside the distribution of the sensible. The conclusion I reach in Chapter One is that a true political disruption is an action that has no response within dominant configurations. Rancière argues that a moment of disruption is defined as "whatever breaks with the tangible configuration whereby parties and parts or lack of them are defined by a presupposition that, by definition has no place in that configuration…" (Rancière, 1999, 29-30). This is a moment where current configurations are unable to account for what has happened, and in that moment re-configurations become possible.

Chapter Two begins to explore what this sort of action might look like. In the first half of this chapter I introduce the work of the Situationist International (S.I.) and several enactments of modern day culture jamming. The S.I. used détournment, a concept theorized by Guy Debord and Gil J Wolman, for combatting the all-encompassing nature of the spectacle. Debord et al. understood the spectacle as a sort of unquestionable worldview that was constantly re-deployed through human interactions and visual media (Debord, 1995, 13). In order to challenge this worldview they argued that critical theory needs to act outside of the confines of the spectacle. This was to be accomplished, not by adding something new that could be absorbed by the spectacle, but by undermining the singular logic that sustains the spectacle and opening the situation up to dialogue (Debord, 1995, 146).). This was accomplished by challenging the meanings and logic of dominant symbols by altering the context from which typical understandings emerged. A modern example of détournment would be the Stephen Colbert show, which offers a parody of conservative talk shows. Colbert challenges political ideas and "truths" coming from such venues by parodying personalities, such as conservative talk show host Bill O'Reilly, in a humorous way with the goal of challenging the apparently infallible nature of what is being said (Meddaugh, 2010, 378- 381).

The second half of Chapter Two introduces the Yes Men. The Yes Men, headed by Jacques Servin and Igor Vamos, is an activist group based in New York that uses parody and humour to challenge dominant meanings and understandings. In a series of anti-WTO protests starting in 1999 The Yes Men

impersonated the World Trade Organization. They begin by creating a fake World Trade Organization (WTO) website, GATT.org, for the (in)famous 1999 Seattle protest. This website was developed as a parody of the real WTO website, a site that "would more honestly explain what the WTO was about" (The Yes Men., 2004, 17). Surprisingly, Servin and Vamos began to receive speaking invitations from all over the world, from people who believed they were communicating with the real WTO. Servin and Vamos accepted these invitations, using them as opportunities to discuss the failures of the WTO, through their impersonation of WTO representatives. Since then, they have carried out numerous similar actions that tell the "truth" from the position of a perceived official. For example, in December of 2009, messages were sent to the press "on behalf" of the Canadian government, committing to far-reaching environmental goals which were not reflective of the government's stance (Woods, 2009).

This project focuses primarily on the Yes Men, however I recognize that the specific technique of shattering dominant cultural codes, or understandings in order to open the situation up to dialogue is not unique to their group. I briefly explore some of those groups in this work. Others, that are not given treatment here, include groups such as the Critical Arts Ensemble (CAE), which was formed in 1987, and their use of tactical media. The CAE describes tactical media as "situational, ephemeral, and self-terminating. It encourages the use of any media that will engage a particular socio-political context in order to create molecular interventions and semiotic shocks that collectively could diminish the rising intensity of authoritarian culture" (Critical Arts Ensemble – Tactical Media, 2009).

One example of tactical media includes an exhibit called "A Public Misery Message: A Temporary Monument to Global Inequality" set up at Pacific Northwest College of Art and Design in 2012. This exhibit saw people being lifted above others, in a helicopter, to a height that allowed them to "visualize the economic separation of the top 1% from the bottom 99%" (Critical Arts Ensemble – Tactical Media, 2009). Other techniques, not necessarily associated with culture jamming, also fit into this paradigm. Perhaps E. Gabriella Coleman's characterization of computer hackers might warrant an inclusion in this understanding of disruption as well. In her description, computer hackers are often reacting against static codes (computer code) and copyright industries that work to limit and shape behavior (Coleman, 2013, 26-27). She argues that computer hackers, and their embrace of the open source movement, can be understood as a challenge to fixed codes. In place of these fixed codes she quotes a developer of open-source software who argues that "free software encourages active participation. Corporate software encourages consumption" (Coleman, 2013, 40).

The difficult question concerning actions such as these, including those undertaken by the Yes Men, is to what extent these actions succeed in disrupting established meanings and practices and to what extent they are simply absorbed by them. Theorists of the Yes Men typically position them as activists who challenge dominant symbols, and understandings, so that the broader public are placed in a position where it can properly assess whether it will continue to invest in those symbols, or support the practices they represent (Day, 2008;

Schönberger, 2006, 290; Duncombe, 2012, 366). However, such challenges to dominant symbols are lodged in a world already full of such challenges, and thus the challenges often fail to make any lasting impact on individual lives. This is primarily because individuals are capable of creating distance between their own lives and symbol of practice that is supposedly being disrupted. In order to sidestep this issue I focus on one particular action of the Yes Men that seems to introduce a form of disruption not typically highlighted in most accounts of their activities.

I introduce this alternative understanding of disruption in Chapter Three. In this chapter I revisit the definition of disruption as an event that truly challenges societal configurations, for example, the configurations that delineate who is deserving of what, what is utopian or realistic, and what is politics and what is not. In this chapter, I put more emphasis on the importance of individual perceptual capacities. Sarah Ahmed argues that individuals, through continued orientation towards certain ideas or objects, become shaped towards those ideas or objects. To be shaped means to be fitted in one particular direction so that one becomes blind to the way that idea or object came to dominate ones vision. Disruption is the moment when the background comes into view, when one comes to understand why they believe or act in a particular manner (Ahmed, 2006, 47). This is a disruptive moment not because it necessarily leads to a moment of re-configuration, but because it opens the possibility for such a moment.

In my characterization this is a very personal experience, I invoke theorists such as Jane Bennett to demonstrate how such a moment emerges. Bennett uses

the term enchantment to describe her practice of trying to see the way non-living objects in the world act, actions that she argues are often overlooked (Bennett, 2001, 32). Taking this project up, Paula Kramer argues that the practice of dancing in nature can bring about personally disruptive moments. One adjusts one's movements to the placement of rocks and trees around them, and through that intentional movement questions might arise, such as why this rock is there, how did it get there, what does this rock's location do to the environment around it (Kramer, 2012, 90)?

Following Kramer, I argue that work needs to be done that primes individuals to be more susceptible to disruptive movements. The Yes Men, in an event where they impersonated representatives of the WTO and announced its impending shut down at an accounting conference in Sydney, Australia, provides an example of this sort of priming. In my examination of this event, contrary to most treatments of the Yes Men, I ignore the wider public reaction to this action: the worldwide newspaper coverage of the initial claim and the coverage once the prank was discovered as a prank. What interests me more about this event is what happens with the audience members present at the event. These were individuals who all, in one way or another, had a strong stake in the dominant mission of the WTO. However, according to accounts afterwards, most of these people in the room expressed their whole-hearted agreement with the reasons provided for the WTO shut down. The reasons provided by the fake representatives was that the WTO had started with a mission of helping poorer countries, but had only ended up hurting those countries in favour of rich countries interests., I argue that

through that agreement the audience members were primed for a disruptive moment that could only come once they discovered they had been deceived.

The character of that disruptive moment is an internal one and as opposed to most attempts at disruptive actions that challenge our understandings about something or someone else, this approach challenges our internal belief system. In the example I provide, once the audience members, who had expressed agreement, discovered the prank, they would have been left in a very odd situation. This is a situation where they, personally, would have agreed with a position that under typical conditions would likely have been written off as radical, illogical, or utopian. Those labels, which work to shut down the disruptive character of a claim, would have been unavailable because the claim was coming from within. In that moment both perspectives, those that support the status quo of the WTO and those that challenge it, would have been visible, absent of the depoliticisation techniques typically available in the distribution of the sensible. While not guaranteed to do so, this is the sort of moment that has the potential to introduce new understandings and reconfigurations. In other words, it has the potential to introduce a moment of disruption.

1. The (a)political nature of disruption

> "Disruptive activity can be categorized according to where it lies along three dimensions: intensity, intentionality, and duration. With respect to intensity, disruptions can range from inconvenience to obstruction; with respect to intentionality, from incidental to deliberate. Duration contributes to the intensity of a disruption in the sense that inconveniences can become obstructions if they persist long enough. In general, the University community should be least tolerant of deliberately obstructive disruptions, and most tolerant of incidental inconveniences. The basic point is that tolerance should decrease as disruptions become more deliberate and obstructive" (Manfredi, 2012, 24-25)

Over the course of the 2011-2012 school year Montreal was a battle ground of students, unionized workers, university administrators, and police. Near daily marches filled the streets with students demanding affordable tuition fees. It was not uncommon to see a gathering of people on university steps, holding signs demanding the same. In several instances tensions boiled over. One student lost an eye to a stun grenade (CTVNews.ca Staff, 2012). Riot police were called on to the McGill University campus where students, gathered in peaceful protest outside the administration building, were ordered off their own campus. When they did not comply they were violently assaulted (Hudson et al., 2011). The quote I have included emerges out of this context. Professors, staff, students, and administers, we were told, were appalled at the prospect of this sort of police action occurring on a university campus, and it was decided that action needed to be taken. That action was the release of a report on the place of disruptive political action on campus. The sentiment of this report, expressed by this quote, demonstrates a problem consistently facing those who seek to bring their grievances into the public sphere by disruptive means. The perceived issue, that the report targeted, was not the suppression of political action on a university

campus. Instead, the issue focused on in this was report was to what level such political action should be tolerated. And, this quote tells us, disruption that is perceived as extreme, disruption that is "deliberate and obstructive", is not to be accorded any level of tolerance.

This attitude, I will argue, is one that most political actions that use disruption face. Jacques Rancière argues that this attitude is an attribute of consensus societies. Consensus societies are ones that, among other things, limit politics to specific modes of expression (Rancière, 2006, 44). Canada, for example, provides its citizens with the right to vote or write an opinion piece in the local newspaper. The reason for these limitations is obvious to many. In democratic societies a balance must be struck between the needs and wants of all citizens, a balance achieved through consensus (Rancière, 2009, 116). Those that choose to disrupt that consensus are an excess, and the quote above, through the language of tolerance, suggests that disrupters want more than their fair share. But what about those whose needs are not provided for by the current consensus, or adequately expressed through the modes of political expression that are tolerated? This question is at the heart of Rancière's critique of consensus democracy. For Rancière, a consensus that includes all people is an impossible task, and inevitably many will be left out. Disruption, Rancière argues, is the moment when those who have left out, the part with no part, make their voices heard

This is a logic that is also commonly embraced by many activist groups. Yet, as the disruption quote indicates, the discussion following disruptive acts seems more concerned with the legitimacy of the disruptive actions themselves, as

opposed to any political claim those actions might contain. This is a situation that seems to plague many disruptive events. The moments following a disruptive event do not often lead to the questioning envisioned by Rancière. Rather, disruptive actions often lead to condemnation. The problem is not that disruption is unnecessary for politics; to the contrary, I argue it is integral. Rather, the problem lies in our understanding of what it means to disrupt.

The following chapter opens this question up by focusing on what a political disruption is not. Traditionally what we understand as political disruptive events range in their deliberate and obstructive nature. At the 'low' end, informational acts are used to disrupt the prevailing consensus with the introduction of something that was previously unknown. As these actions move across the spectrum, they can begin to be characterized as direct action. These are acts that seek to physically, or virtually in the case of hacktivists, disrupt particular systems or processes. I argue that in most cases both these approaches tend to be subsumed back into what Rancière calls the "distribution of the sensible," and fail to achieve the disruptive moment that constitutes politics. This chapter begins by presenting Rancière's portrayal of systems of consensus and disruption. Following this, I examine the way disruptive events materialize, through a common understanding of disruption. These actions, which I broadly define as informational actions and direct actions, often fail to pull individuals into moments of disagreement- moments where all involved seriously examine the foundations of their society. This is what differentiates between typical understandings of disruption and the sort that stems from Rancière's theory. The

latter occurs when all participants desire to step into that moment of disruption. In concluding, I argue that a politically disruptive moment is an event that cannot be responding to, in any way, from within the distribution of the sensible. It is an event that, in the words of Giorgio Agamben, opens one up to "pure potentiality" (1999, 259).

Politics and the Police: The political project of Rancière

Rancière's political project distinguishes between two key categories: politics and the police. For Rancière, the way society functions and delineates what is acceptable or not acceptable stems from what he calls the distribution of the sensible. This entails certain 'common sense' understanding of how people act, who has the right to speak, and in what context (Rancière, 2010b, 36-37). Enforcing the maintenance of this distribution is the police. The concept of the police represents one of Rancière's key breaks with his teacher Louis Althusser. Althusser conjured the example of an individual being hailed by a police officer on the street. The police officer calls out "hey you" to an individual on the street. In that moment, when the individual is hailed, their routine is disrupted, they are compelled to turn around and address the police officer (Panagia, 2009, 121). For Rancière, the power of the police is enacted not through the power to interrupt, but through the continuation of flow. In this way the distribution of the sensible is maintained though continued self-reinforcement (Rancière, 2010b, 37; Panagia, 2009, 121).

The distribution of the sensible operates under the logic of consensus. This consensus, Rancière argues, is brought to together through the guise of an ethical

community. This is a singular community, one where everyone is supposed to be counted (Rancière, 2009, 116). This consensus is one many take for granted, and it is a consensus of a select group of parties. Rancière, as I noted, argues that true consensus is an impossible state. Under the guise of consensus some thrive while others are left out. Rancière calls these others "the part with no part" (2010b, 33). The part with no part has no voice within the prevailing order because the language of consensus is a completed language- it signifies the closing of deliberation, and as such closes down the possibility that the part with no part can enter. This is not a community capable of considering the needs of outsiders- anyone who is not a party to the current consensus. Their intrusion, as opposed to initiating a dispute between parties, is perceived as a challenge to the very ethical foundations of the community.

Politics, while rare and fleeting moments in this understanding, are the occasions when the part with part successfully interrupts the distribution of the sensible in a manner that initiates a dispute about the working foundations of the disruption of the sensible. For democracy to be distinguishable from regimes of management it must be in "the name of what comes and interrupts the smooth working of this order through a singular mechanism of subjugation" (Rancière, 1999, 99). This is a democracy that has nothing to do with states or political representatives. Moments where the ritual that guides us is disrupted, allowing participants the opportunity to question their reality and to engage in open debate about the cultural codes that guide them. Rancière highlights three criteria for the

sort of democratic disruption he is envisioning. These include visibility, claims from the part with no part, and subsequent dispute.

The distribution of the sensible enforces certain sets of cultural codes which affect not only how one acts, but what one can see. Therefore, the first step of any disruptive moment is to render visible that which has been left out (Rancière, 1999, 99; Rancière, 2004, 63). Second is the appearance of people who occupy the part with no part. The part with no part refers to any person, or persons, who are not accounted for in the consensus, people who do not count as political beings- "democracy is the designation of subjects that do not coincide with the parties of the state or of society, floating subjects that deregulate all representation of places and portions" (Rancière, 1999, 100). Finally, this appearance must be marked by dispute. The character of this dispute is extremely important to Rancière, for it marks the difference between an argument that is absorbed into the distribution of the sensible and one that fundamentally alters it. These disputes are about the very delineation of parts, "it is not a discussion between partners but an interlocution that undermines the very system of interlocution" (Rancière, 1999, 100).

This is a moment when the claims of the part with no part cannot be neutralized by de-politicization statements. For example Jodi Dean notes that during George W. Bush's presidency he affirmed the right of activists to protest, while evading any engagement with the claims they were making (Dean, 2009a, 20). This would be an instance where the part with no part have failed to initiate a proper disruption because those in power do not perceive the claimants a true

challenge. The way political actors are perceived and how gazes can be altered to recognize the political claims being made is of key importance to this project.

This rests on perception, which leads to Rancière's work on aesthetics. For Rancière, the connection between aesthetics and politics stems from "the level of the sensible delimitation of what is common to the community, to the forms of its visibility and its organization" (Rancière, 2004, 18). Political disruptions materialize when claims, stemming from outside of the distribution of the sensible, are perceived. This mode of perception is one where the commonalities that previously bound the community are thrown into disarray. Rancière distinguishes these modes of perception as the aesthetic regime and the representative regime (Rancière, 2010a, 205). The aesthetic regime, the mode of view required for a political disruption to take place, is "characterized by its mulitemporality, the unlimitedness of the representable and the metamorphic character of its elements" (Rancière, 2010a, 210). It is a regime that breaks the singular distribution of the sensible, exposing a multitude of possibilities, and in this way allows for the reconfiguration and reevaluation of the prevailing distribution of the sensible (Corcoran, 2010, 15). This stands in stark contrast to the representative regime. The representative regime, similar to the police, delineates what, and who, is representable, what can and cannot be perceived (Rancière, 2004, 18).

In essence, Rancière's distribution of sensible is the bond that holds communities of people together. Slavoj Žižek argues that the very existence of a nation depends on a shared sense of enjoyment that is continually reproduced through shared myths and social practices (Žižek, 1993, 202; Dean, 2006, 14).

Writing in 1989, James Carey brought forward a similar view. He argued that communications theory had traditionally been dominated by what he called the transmission view. The transmission view is defined as "imparting and sending, transmitting, and giving information to others" (Carey, 2009, 15). This understanding framed fears, at the time, that the mass media was being used to brainwash society. In this view, social control was understood to operate as a specific message being sent out en masse, and uncritically received by viewers. Carey, however, argued that such a framing misunderstood the true function of apparatuses like the mass media. Instead, Carey suggested that the true function of the mass media was to promote societal rituals. The ritual view is defined as the process of "sharing, participations, association, fellowship and the possession of a common faith" (Carey, 2009, 18). Drawing on John Dewey, who argued that communication established social bonds, Carey suggests that acts of reading the newspaper, or watching the news, are simply ritualistic acts that bring us together as a group through the establishment of a common set of norms (Carey, 2009, 20-22). These rituals that communication produces, Carey argued, bring reality into existence (Carey, 2009, 25).

In a similar manner, Tiziana Terranova argues that "communication management today increasingly involves the reduction of all meaning to replicable information…Whether it is about the Nike swoosh or war propaganda, what matters is the endurance of the information to be communicated, its power to survive…all possible corruption by noise" (Ward, 2011, 104-105; Terranova, 2004, 58). The endurance and constant replication of these 'myths' is how

systems of control are supposedly established. Reality is formed by focusing, and reinforcing, specific preexisting beliefs. Paul Lazersfeld and Robert K. Merton called this feature the status-conferral function. This refers to the way people, or ideas, gain status when they are focused upon in a mass media environment. Lazersfeld et al. argue that this is a circular process, by which an idea, or person, has status if they are recognized by the mass media and through that recognition they gain more status (Lazarsfeld et al., 1971, 561-562). The mass media's ability to confer status on ideas and people stems from its ability to establish recognizable symbols in society. Carey uses the analogy of a child's map to illustrate this effect. The map, Carey argues, "is capable of guiding behavior and simultaneously transforming undifferentiated space into configured space" (Carey, 2009, 27). A map, drawn for a child to walk to school, Carey writes, becomes a representation of the child's reality. It is very simple in that it highlights only the roads required to walk from home to school and back. In this way it highlights certain areas, which become predominate for the child, and it introduces particular blinders, which the child adheres to. In other words, it shapes a specific understanding of what that area is. A community with multiple major streets, cul-de-sacs, side roads, and alleyways, is reduced to the one or two key roads required for the specific journey. From the child's perspective the extra roads cease to exist, they have no relevance to their present reality (Carey, 2009, 28-30).

The disruptive potential of information

Political disruption, following these arguments and using Carey's analogy, would require highlighting those roads that had been ignored. Indeed, this is the

route that many activist groups, and theorists, have taken. Perhaps one of the first groups to purposefully adopt a publicity-based approach was Greenpeace. Greenpeace has been credited as "instrumental in helping establish the science of climate change and communicating that to the public", and has utilized photography as its primary method of activism (Doyle, 2007, 131). Greenpeace, originally a coalition of activists and journalists, utilized publicity as its primary tool. From their first action of navigating a boat into the drop zone of nuclear bomb test site (Weyler, 2004, 69), to subsequent actions like photographing and attempting to block certain fishing vessels, to pictures, both on- and off-line, of melting icecaps, the belief that showing the public what is going on without their knowledge is at the core of Greenpeace's methods. In another example, Kalle Lasn, the founder of activist magazine Adbusters, writes that one of the major motivations for his work in alternative media was that his many attempts to get television stations to air ads for Buy Nothing Day, a global day when consumers are encouraged to buy nothing, were constantly refused. This was not because the ads were unprofessional, but because the stations disagreed with the content (Lasn, 2000, 29-35). The underlying message in Lasn's efforts is that getting this information out is of the utmost importance. Following this logic, bringing such claims into the field of visibility takes on a variety of forms, including picket signs, pictures, marches, petitions, and Internet activism of various kinds.

Social media has taken this approach, and the ability to publish oppositional or marginal ideas, to an incredibly heightened level. Following this line, Michael Strangelove argues that the "Internet has introduced a new era of

opposition and challenge to the dominant meanings produced within capitalism…Now we can speak of a globalized alternative media system wherein 'official' meanings are constantly challenged, appropriated, re-articulated and, to a certain degree, 'unfixed'"(2005, 125). Supporting this claim, Strangelove makes note of the proliferation of subversive activity, such as activist affinity groups, forming online. For example, he notes that over 4,000,000 instances of the word 'boycott' could be found on the Internet in the spring of 2003 and this increased to 7,450,000 in the spring of 2004 (Strangelove, 2005, 100). Describing the Internet's contribution to challenges lodged against former president George Bush, Strangelove highlights an incident involving former Prime Minister Jean Chrétien's communication director, Françoise Ducros. Ducros famously stated that "Bush is a moron", apparently leading to a proliferation of commentary on the Internet and official press (Strangelove, 2005, 112).

Jodi Dean agrees with Strangelove, insofar that technologies, such as social media, have resulted in the ability to freely circulate and challenge opinions. The problem with this thesis, Dean argues, is Strangelove's conclusion that the mere existence of "4,000,000 instances of the word 'boycott'," or the fact that Greenpeace has "communicated the science of climate change to the public," automatically translates into challenge to rituals of control. Dean argues that "most political discussions…take for granted the existence of a consensus regarding the rules and conditions for establishing truth and falsity, not to mention a shared notion of reality. Quickly formatting the conversation via the exclusion of myriad views and positions as crazy or not serious…This presumption is

misplaced. Our present political-medialogical setting is one of dissensus, incredulity, and competing conceptions of reality" (Dean, 2009a, 147-148). This is also Dean's basis for challenging Rancière's understanding of the distribution of the sensible. In essence the distribution of the sensible, the rituals of control that Carey perceived, no longer exist. We now live in a world marked by skepticism towards all forms of expertise, and instead are committed to the proliferation of opinions by all forms of people, regardless of their expertise on a given topic (Dean, 2009b, 24). For Dean, Rancière's goal of achieving states of disagreement is misplaced because this is already the nature of our present reality. This stems from, what Slavoj Žižek terms the decline of symbolic efficiency. There are presently, Žižek argues, no symbolic reference points that have a strong hold over individuals, leading to a state where subjects feel constantly threatened and unsure of the world around them (Dean, 2009a, 127-128). What this means is that disagreements are constantly sought after, but hold no swaying power, because we are constantly searching for, and exposed to, conflicting ideas. There is intensity here, an "excitement or thrill for more," that comes from the constant cycle of information. We are always in search of that next tidbit of information that can help secure our position in the world. This, however, is a never-ending cycle (Dean, 2009a, 116; Dean, 2010, 117-118).

Dean's critique is a strong one. From a purely practical standpoint it would be a daunting task to sift through millions of activist affinity groups, in order to decide which one holds the most convincing argument that would unfix the thing we wished to challenge. Even in that process of choosing, it is easy to

see how one would get sucked into a never-ending loop through that very search. Lazarsfeld et al. would call this state the failure of monopolization; one of three states that they argue is required for an idea to take hold. Monopolization refers to the ability of a single message to dominate the airwaves. This is a state that Lazarsfeld et al. suggest to be very unlikely. Most propaganda messages are accompanied by a counter-propaganda message. For example, if a single political party, such as the Conservative Party of Canada (CPC), dominated the airwaves one would be more likely to accept the message. However, the CPC message is almost always countered by a message from the New Democratic Party or Liberal Party of Canada. This, according to Lazarsfeld et al, neutralizes the propaganda, and leaves people free to make their own opinions (Lazarsfeld et al., 1971, 573 – 574). Today, as Strangelove established, we are not simply subject to two conflicting views, but a myriad of them. This leads to a state where there is "never any ultimate guarantor" (Dean, 2009a, 64). Following this, Dean challanges arguments, such as those put forward by Strangelove, for valuing the abundance of messages, as opposed to the impact of any message itself (Dean, 2009a, 27-28).

I accept Dean's conclusion that our present reality is one of abundant dissensus. However, I do not think that this necessarily negates the conclusions of Rancière. This stems from two interrelated points. First, the control enacted by the police systems is not a control that prevents argument, or dissensus. Rather, there is a different form of control at work here. Related to this is the second point, specifically Dean's claim that are present society is marked by deep dissensus. As noted, I agree with this point, however there is a distinction to be made between

the form of dissensus Dean observes, and the sort aspired to by Rancière. I will examine each of these points in turn.

The distribution of the sensible: the control of technological rationality

The distribution of the sensible enacts a mode of control that enforces a particular consensus yet, at the same time, permits infinite dissensus. In order to explain this claim, I will draw on Herbert Marcuse. In 1964, Marcuse argued in *One Dimensional Man* that society had fallen under the control of scientific rational thought, which in essence was an infallible faith in progress. This form of rationality works to operationalize concepts and procedures (Marcuse, 1991, 86-87 & 148). All problems have specific answers, or solutions, through the scientific method. Concepts, Marcuses writes, are always "synonymous with the corresponding set of operations" (Marcuse, 1991, 12-13). Operationalization becomes a mode of control because it "repels nonconformist attacks" and a specific mode of being is enacted that links progress to the good (Marcuse, 1991, 86). Progress can be broadly understood as anything that moves individuals forward, and in this way a similarity begins to arise between Marcuse's account of progress and Rancière's conception of the police. Control stems not from a set of specific ideas but forward motion. As long as society keeps moving forward, reaffirming a specific way of living through our actions, the distribution of the sensible is kept intact. Marcuse argues that all ways of investigating problems "are locked within the confines of the society that investigates it" (1991, 114-115). For example, technology is being used to harness the oil in the ground, and transform it into a commodity. Environmentalists who would challenge this mode

of progress are implored to be rational in their critiques- i.e. to critique the tar sands in the terms of prevailing scientific-technical rationality and to justify their critique through economics. And, when they do not reply in this manner, they are dismissed as being irrational. A broad environmental demand, such as to shut down the tar sands, is reduced to a rational request, which can be responded to with a solution that conforms to dominate understandings of rationality. For example, the introduction of a cap and trade system as a response to concerns about fossil fuels or 'tighter regulations' that conserve for the basic practice of tar sand excavation, that is deemed integral for societies well-being.

The suggestion that "new ideas are either repelled or reduced to this universe" as in the above example does not imply that new ideas do not exist or thrive, as Strangelove and Dean argue (Marcuse, 1991, 12). New ideas are plentiful, and it is not difficult to add to the milieu, that much is clear. But despite this abundance the rituals of control highlighted by Marcuse and Rancière are not necessarily challenged. An article from the *Toronto Star*, published January 23 2013, highlights the case of an 88 year-old woman, who is described as a peace activist and a World War Two veteran. This woman, Audrey Tobias, was charged with failing to fill out her 2011 census form. Tobias's reason for not filling it out is that the company that won the contract to process these forms is Lockheed Martin. This company is involved in a number of different enterprises, most concerning for Tobias being their production of cluster bombs, Trident missiles, and F-35 fighter jets. Signing a form that supports the business of Lockheed Martin is something Tobias is unwilling to do, and thus she refused to sign, and in

doing so was faced with the prospect of a fine and jail time (Porter, 2013). This article, which I accessed online, has a comment section, as most papers available online do. The sentiment in this comments section illustrates what Marcuse means when he argued that new ideas are reduced to this universe. Three examples, taken from what was the first page when I accessed this site on January 24, 2013 are included here: a poster named David Sullivan wrote “Frivolous. When is she going to renounce her citizenship? Canada has been involved in war for a long time. We guarded GWB's flank while he waged his illegal war in Iraq. We stood by an [sic] watched as Hutu slaughtered Tutsi in Rwanda. I wonder what car she drives”; Poster meagain1 wrote “Nice hypocrisy Does this woman realize how many things she's done over the course of her life that have involved companies that make/made weapons (including car manufacturers, etc.)? Her stance wreaks of hypocrisy. A (very weak) moral stance is not reason enough to break the law. Let's also keep in mind that LM's weapons division is likely well-separated from its data processing group”; Finally, poster Biased wrote “What else is she willing to boycott? Boeing makes weapons – no more commercial flights, without checking on the aircraft. GM makes Hummers (with gun mounts) – no more rides in GM cars (“sorry officer, I realize you arrested me, but you can't take me to jail in that GM car”). GPSs are used to guide us as well as missiles – no rides in cars with GPSs Mercedes makes GWagons. etc”.

These comments, though differing slightly in content, share the same critique of Tobias’s action. They do not attempt to challenge Tobias’s right to take a stand for her idea, nor is there any challenge of her action on the basis that her

concern about Lockheed Martin might be false. The critiques are all based on the impossibility of this cause. With words like "frivolous" and "hypocrisy" these comments re-inscribe Tobias's political act as an irrational act. Irrational because they establish the "technical impossibility of being autonomous, of determining one's own life ..this submission seems neither irrational nor political, but rather as submission to the technical apparatus which enlarges the comforts of life and increases the productivity of labor" (Marcuse, 1991, 158).

By declaring acts such as Tobias's irrational, a different mode of control is reproduced. This control permits an infinite number of opinions to exist, but ensures that a particular social bond, a ritual, is kept intact. This bond is difficult to name. Marcuse calls it progress, and it is, in essence, a way of life that permits us to take international flights, to purchase cars, or to have a census that is processed electronically. It is a bond that establishes a specific regime of perception that deems living in the way that we do as rational, and any act that attempts to disengage as irrational. Not because we necessarily disagree with the act, but because the regime of perception prevents us from seeing these disengagements as even remotely feasible or desirable. Desirable because as these posters point out, to follow Tobias's protest to its logical conclusion, one would have to forfeit a great deal of comforts that we all enjoy in one form or another (Marcuse, 1991, 50).

The second issue in regard to Dean's critique is the understanding of dissensus she puts forward. In essence, Dean challenges Rancière's understanding of politics on the basis that the state he is aspiring to, one of disagreement and

dissensus, is already the norm. The consensus politics that Rancière is attempting to shatter does not exist, Dean argues. Indeed, both Strangelove and Dean have made strong arguments, although to different ends, about the internet's ability to host a multiplicity of arguments. Social media, Facebook, Twitter, and even the ability to comment on an online newspapers allow for any opinion, no matter how trivial, to be ripped apart, challenged or debated. However, the form of this debate needs to be examined.

Social media, as Strangelove argues, came in with the promise of unfettered access to one another, opening the doors to new promises of democracy. Yet, as Dean argues, the form of these debates is quick, and debates are largely unattached to the content or conclusions of their arguments. This is the nature of our present dis-consensus, as Dean argues. Not only is this present form of participation quick, it also involves a limited level of obligation. The goal of this form of participation is the process of cycling through. We latch on to one argument, debate, or cause, until it no longer satisfies us, and then we move on to another. She argues that we tend to enjoy failure. "Insofar as the aim of the drive is not to reach its goal but to enjoy, we enjoy our endless circulation, our repetitive loop….We can mobilize the loss, googling, checking Wikipedia, mistrusting it immediately" (Dean, 2010, 121).

Amit Pinchevski, drawing on Emmanuel Levinas, provides a distinction between forms of dissensus. For Pinchevski, communicative acts that do not force us to unsettle our own position, effectively work to eliminate the Other (Pinchevski, 2005, 91). The dissensus that Dean diagnoses is one that requires no

risk to the self. It can be mobilized in a quick and uncommitted fashion. It is a disagreement that eliminates the Other, allowing us to stay whole, instead of a disagreement that considers the Other, and fundamentally challenges our inner being (Pinchevski, 2005, 91). Through this portrayal, Pinchevski provides an understanding of disagreements that cannot be mobilized as a form of enjoyment, because it requires an incredible risk. That risk is taking a step outside the familiar, the endless loops that Dean observes, giving up the ability of always being able to safely disengage ourselves and moving on to another argument that satisfies us. Taking this step bring us one step closer to Rancière's disruption. One's life enters a process of what Viktor Scklovksy calls "defamiliarzation", in that we make the foundations of our own life strange (Scklovsky, 1965, 13; Perucci, 2009, 5).

This state is not limited to one particular group, those occupying a part in the distribution of the sensible, or the part with no part, rather it is a state that both share. Those included in the prevailing distribution of the sensible are often accused of the state I describe. They work hard to ignore the part with no part, or to 'understand' them. However this is the sort of understanding that Žižek argues is meant to do nothing more than pacify the Other (Žižek, 2008, 102). It is the sort of understanding that suggests students are unhappy with tuition costs because they are lazy, or do not know how to budget; the sort of understanding that suggests a refugee claimant would give up their home, and everything they have ever known, simply to abuse our health care system; or, the sort of understanding that sees an individual begging society to reconsider their addiction to fossil fuels

as nothing more than a radical, someone who wants to hurt us, or our economy. But those on the other side, those who find themselves occupying the part with no part, are not free of this pacifying indifference either. It is simply mobilized less productively. It takes the form of demonizing those in the distribution, or ignoring them and becoming lost in Dean's circuits of drive- where indifference to our positions ceases to matter, because we can simply move on in constant search for fulfillment.

Direct Action

For many, there are two places to go from this point. One is to continue to mobilize the loss, as in the situation Dean describes. The second option is to do more, to break out of these circuits, exponentially increase the deliberate and obstructive nature of ones distribution in hopes of overwhelming the modes of control that resist any sort of truth claim. The Occupy movement dangled the potential of this opportunity for many. The movement was premised on the idea that the time for talk was over, and there was a way to finally do something. In Cleveland, Ohio, the Occupy encampment was tolerated until October 21, 2012, and on that date participants were informed that they would need to take down their tents. On that date, Sabrina Rubin Erdely writes, a division emerged in the camp. Those who would comply and those who wanted to fight to stay. That fight never materialized and the camp was quickly shut down. In this way, Occupy failed to materialize the action that so many activists craved, and felt to be necessary. October 21, 2012 also sowed the seeds for five Occupiers to be

ensnared in an FBI entrapment scheme that would see them charged with attempting to blow up a bridge (Erdely, 2012).

The events surrounding this situation follow the angst that grew within certain members of the part with no part, when they began to perceive a growing futility in moral or truth claims. No longer satisfied with so called 'clicktivism', the part with no part becomes more militant. Jeffery Juris argues that militant activism is perceived as increasingly important because "everyday activism often goes unnoticed" (2005, 416). Militant activism, or direct action, does not always involve physical acts of destruction, but encompasses a wide range of activities. Tim Jordan, drawing on Henry David Thoreau, argues that direct action requires "a shift to actions that stop what is wrong, rather than simply having faith that moral superiority will lead, somehow, to change" (2002, 61). This, according to Jordan, refers to any action that directly confronts one's opponent, comprising either, or both, violent and non-violent actions (Jordan, 2002, 61). Electronically, Hacktivists attempt to disrupt websites that hold control over certain cultural codes and understandings- such as governments and large corporations. These disruptions range from 'denial of service' (DoS) attacks, where hundreds of thousands of requests are sent to a server, temporarily overwhelming it to a point that it shuts down, to defacing sites, or releasing confidential information. For example, during protests against the World Trade Organization (WTO), at Seattle in 1999, a hacktivist group called the Electrohippies ran a unique Denial of Service (DoS) attack against the WTO website. The Electrohippies version was a DoS attack that required individuals to be behind each request sent to the site,

meaning the only way the site would be shut down was if hundreds of thousands of individuals signed up to do it, thus demonstrating the strong opposition to the World Trade Organization. This attack, in the end, successfully shut down the site (Jordan et al., 2004, 74-77).

Physically, disruptions range vastly in their deliberate and obstructive nature. Marches tend to be the most socially acceptable form of direct action. In essence, concerned citizens fill a road, in order to disrupt commuters and break attention to an issue. One of the more recent mass direct actions, here in Canada, was the 2012 Québec student strike. Fighting to preserve historically low tuition rates, students took to the streets, blocking traffic and, in some cases, blocking access to classes (Sorochan, 2012). In other instances, more extreme groups, call for the destruction of public property. One example are Black Bloc activists. These are activists who dress all in black and are often responsible for smashing the windows of chain business, such as Starbucks, and large banks at anti-globalization rallies. In their view, these companies are key pillars of global capitalism; by visibly, and publicly, attacking these places they believe that they are demonstrating the vulnerability of such systems (Memou, 2010, 345; Juris, 2005, 417). Finally, some groups make it their mandate to actively sabotage, and attack, the structures of their perceived enemies. The Earth Liberation Front (ELF), for example, formed during the 1970s in Britain, stemming out of the more moderate group 'Earth First!'. The ELF relies on property damage, specifically arson, and 'monkeywrenching' to further their cause. Monkeywrenching refers to acts such as spray-painting buildings, super-gluing locks, breaking windows, and

other similar activities (Leader et al., 2003, 42). These jams, it is argued, will bring about renewed understandings of, or opportunities to think about, how society should function (The Invisible Committee, 2009, 118-125). Or, in the words of Ricardo Dominguez, create an initial disruption that eventually leads to a "virtual plaza" where dialogue and discussion are created (Jordon et al., 2004, 158)

The key difference between direct action and informational activism lies in the perceived necessity. The informational approach understands change to be derived from adding to the rituals of the distribution of the sensible. Direct action, on the other hand, attempts to shut down the rituals of everyday life, if only for a moment, and either allow society a chance to reflect on their lives, or introduce a situation that makes it impossible to ignore the part with no part. Indeed, it is true that the more deliberate and obstructive actions are the more difficult they are to ignore. As they increase in their deliberate and obstructive nature, especially if the deliberate obstructiveness affects "me", we think about those actions and the people committing them. But, it needs to be asked, what is it that is being thought about? Michael Rosie and Hugo Gorringea argue that media outlets tend to focus on the most violent groups in order to de-legitmizate movements as a whole (2009, 46); Jeffery Juris and Graham St. John have both, respectively, suggested that media focuses on groups like the Black Block, and implicitly encourage them at anti-globalization rallies in order to negatively characterize the movement as a whole (Juris, 2005, 422; St John, 2008, 184).

Aside from a discomfort that many feel towards violent acts, there is a perceived threat that can stem from these sorts of actions. Sarah Ahmed argues that regimes that provide meaning and security, families in her example, operate as happy objects. Happy objects come to represent, through their continued support of our wellbeing, not only happiness and security, but also a promise of future happiness to come (Ahmed, 2010, 46-47). To put it another way, the distribution of the sensible is society's happy object. Rancière's police limits what can and cannot be done, but it also renders society understandable and manageable (Panagia, 2009, 41-42). We become invested in those objects, and Ahmed argues, they become a gift for those who follow us. The happy object has given "us" security and continuity and in turn it is passed on. "The family becomes a happy object through the work that must be done to keep it together…The family involve knowledge of the peculiar, or the transformation of the peculiar into habit and ritual. For example when you make coffee for the family, and you know "just" how much sugar to put in this cup. Failure to know this "just" is often felt as failure to care" (Ahmed, 2010, 46-47). Happiness, then, is achieved through the following of example, in this example replicating the lives of the parents (Ahmed, 2010, 47). The consensual system works in a similar manner. A type of life is laid out that holds the promise of fulfillment, so long as it is followed. However, that happiness is fragile. If someone turns down the life laid out by the happy object, or refuses to take part in the ritual, their refusal is viewed as lack of care for us. Refusal to follow is also viewed as an act of violence. Ahmed construes the image of a 'feminist killjoy'. The feminist killjoy

is the one who speaks out and breaks the happy peace, with their claim of an injustice. Ahmed argues that in these moments "the violence of what was said or the violence of provocation goes unnoticed. However she speaks, the feminist is usually the one "who is viewed as causing the argument, who is disturbing the fragility of peace" (Ahmed, 2010, 65). Those who raise their voice, or engage in actions outside of expectation are the only injustice perceived because through their actions the happy object is threatened.

Those who engage in direct action, who are very deliberate and intentional about disturbing the "fragility of peace" risk occupying the space of the 'feminist killjoy', putting their action up to scrutiny, and nothing more. During the fall months of 2012 a controversy erupted over a high school gymnasium in the Yukon that was slotted to be demolished. In response, a group of high school students disrupted legislature meetings by storming into the building and chanting loudly. In early December of 2012, Speaker David Laxton, of the Yukon legislative, sent an open letter to these students condemning their actions. That letter was a "warning that, while serving overseas, he has "seen what happens when the democratic process, rights and privileges are compromised and eroded"" and urged them to respect the "freedoms … Canadian soldiers have fought and died to protect" (Hopper, 2012). In a later, clarifying interview, Laxton argued that "If we have discord in the legislature and it's allowed to persist, this could possibly be the first step into something much worse. I don't know. I wanted to express to the students that their actions were not just disrespectful to the

legislature but to the efforts of the many Canadians who have put their life on the line or made the ultimate sacrifice" (Hopper, 2012).

Two important points stem from these comments. The first point comes from Laxon's follow-up interview where the initial wrong, why the students stormed into the legislature, is noticeably absent. Laxton's concern is the "discord in the legislature" and the students disrespect "to the legislature" and to "the many Canadian who have their life on the line or made the ultimate sacrifice". The legislature and the armed forces, for Laxton, are all wrapped up within the happy object of consensual democracy. That happy object has particular ways of acting, and participating, and sacrifices have been made in order to establish the present peace and happiness. Disturbing that peace, attempting to disrupt 'democracy', is the ultimate crime. We are "invested in structures so that their demise becomes a sort of living death" (Ahmed, 2004, 12). That investment comes not only from the happiness and stable reference points, but also the way we are intertwined, and dependent on the mechanisms that may also oppress us, as Marcuse has argued. But Laxton takes this further, in his reference to "what happens when the democratic process…are compromised and eroded" and his suggestion that this sort of direct action could lead "into something much worse". With these words Laxton seems to confirm Brian Massumi's argument that today 'what might' becomes 'what is', "we live in times when what has not happened qualifies as front-page news" (Massumi, 2010, 52). In other words, potential threats to the happy object are perceived as actual threats.

How that shift occurs is important when considering direct action as a path to politics. Objects, Ahmed argues, become "disgusting through their contact with objects already before, they have been designated as disgusting before the encounter took place" (2004, 87). For Laxton, actions with a political impetus, operating outside of a traditional political apparatus, have become, in Ahmed's words, disgusting due to these actions previous contact with other disgusting objects. This contact comes, presumably, from Laxton's experience in the military, and his understanding of what he was fighting for and against. Laxton perceives a similarity between the 'breakdown' in democracy in the places he went and the actions of these students. Therefore, the students come to represent not only the threats of, but the actual, democratic breakdown that he saw in his previous experiences.

Once a body is designated in this way, their utterances become impossible to hear. They are nothing but a "threat." In her examination of the screening the presentation of the Rodney King videos at trial, Judith Butler argues that rituals of understanding, or regimes of perception, shape not only the things we do not see, but also conditions that the things we do see emerge out of. After watching the videos, Butler remarks that her first reaction was that "the video shows a man being beaten," yet these same videos were used were by prosecutors, and later the jury, as evidence of Rodney King posing a threat to police officers. The multiple blows police officers threw at King, despite him spending the entire video on the receiving end, were interpreted time and time again as self-defense (Butler, 1993, 16). The strikingly different understandings of this video, Butler argues, represent

a “contest within the visual field”. The black body is viewed through a racalized perspective. In other words, “the visual field is not neutral to the question of race; it is itself a racial formation, an episteme, hegemonic and forceful” (Butler, 1993, 17). In a similar manner the body of the activist, who threatens the democratic happy object, is pre-construed as a threat. In the context that this video was shown, the white audience “understands” that the black body represents a threat. Butler argues that “the blows he suffers are taken to be the blows they would suffer if the police were not protecting them from him” (Butler, 1993, 19).

While not everyone has Laxton’s experience, the associations he makes, in terms of direct action, are fairly typical, such as the connection between a street march and the threat of Black Block activists. I am not arguing that direct action has no place, or is never successful, but those who engage in such actions do risk these associations and through those associations Rancière’s representative regime gains strength. The regime has a certain configuration that understands these sorts of actions, not as political actions, but as threats. In this way, activists will often fail to break with the current regime of perception or open a place for politics (Rancière, 2004, 18; Rancière, 2010a, 211). This is Rancière’s own argument when he discusses the events of September 11, 1999. Specifically, he targets the claim that the events of September 11th “changed everything”. This event, of course, set off a chain of many subsequent events worldwide. Security increased to an unprecedented level; words, such as ‘enhanced interrogation’ have become common; the nebulous ‘war on terror’ continues to rage; and fear appears to define the lives of many. Despite this, September 11th did not cause any real

change. Rancière notes that the community was capable of utilizing "traditional symbolical points of reference, to integrate the event within a framework in which it represents its relation to itself, to others and to the Other, On this point, no rupture occurred; there was no revelation of a gap between the real of American life and the symbolic life of the American people" (Rancière, 2010c, 99).

Conclusion: disruption as potentiality

Disruption is about moving beyond that which is already there. This "beyond" is typically interpreted as simply adding something new- be it new information through some sort of publicity campaign, or a new situation through direct action. These methods, however, are easily accounted for in the distribution of the sensible. Be it through Dean's circuits of drive, or through a perceived encounter with Ahmed's dirty objects, the political potential is shut down. Tony Perucci argues that "if there is a proper response to ruptural performance, it is to say "What the fuck is that? No, really, what the fuck is that?"" (2009, 16). Responding to an action in this way is important because it signifies both a desire to know more, and an inability to account for what one is seeing. The main character, Bartleby, in Hermen Melville's story *Bartleby, the Scrivener* character opens this space. Bartleby is hired by a lawyer, to act as a scribe. His work, at first, is described as exceptional; he "did an extraordinary quantity of writing. It was as if long famishing for something to copy, he seemed to gorge himself on my documents" (Melville, 1997, 11). However, on the third day of Bartleby's employment something strange happens. Bartleby is asked to assist in comparing copied sheets, Bartleby responded "in a singularly mild, firm voice… 'I would

prefer not to'" (Melville, 1997, 11). Bartleby holds fast to this response throughout the story, the lawyer unsure of how to respond, continues to search for a 'straight answer' through clarification questions, such as "why do you refuse?" but is always met with "I would prefer not to" (Melville, 1997, 13). Deleuze argues that this in-between answer, neither a refusal nor acquiesce, "opens a zone of in-distinction". It allows us to think, and to move beyond the operationalized reality that requires yes or no (Agamben, 1999, 255). For Agamben, Bartleby is holding on to nothing less than pure potentiality, a difficult act, but important nonetheless. "For to hold on to the Nothing, non-Being, is certainly difficult; but is the characteristic experience of the ungrateful guest- nihilism –with whom we are all too familiar today. And to hold simply to being and its necessary positivity is also difficult…To be capable, in pure potentiality, to bear the 'no more than' beyond Being and Nothing, fully experiencing the impotent possibility that exceeds both- this is the trail that Bartleby announces" (Agamben, 1999, 259). Bartleby announces this moment, not simply because he refuses the indistinction of yes or no, but because the lawyer, deprived of a set of reference points to deal with the situation at hand, sought answers. Bartleby may have been the one who opened this new path, but it was the lawyer that chose to follow.

It is this act of following that is so important. The sorts of actions I have examined rarely elicit such a response, not because truth or moral claims can never challenge widely held norms, or practices, but because the distribution of the sensible is capable of handling, and even thrives, on this sort of debate. We expect a multiplicity of opinions, and such opinions are that of a 'healthy

democracy', so long as they do not act outside of their proper place. When the part with no part increases the stakes, and acts outside of their 'proper place' they become chastised, loathed, feared, and, sometimes, even imprisoned, as the individuals from the Occupy Cleveland example have been. Responding in this way is the result of the regime of perception. Those reference points are held to because, following both Ahmed and Marcuse, they promise a happy and secure life. The aesthetic regime releases one from these reference points, but that shift is terrifying, and something that is not done lightly. To make that shift is to renounce the safety of the distribution of the sensible and it is a shift that those who have a place in the distribution of the sensible must be willing and able to make. Conditions must be created that prime individuals, piquing their curiosity, as Bartleby does, to pull them in, to make them ask "what the fuck is that". In these conditions, an aesthetic regime can be reached, and through that regime a disruption can occur. This is a moment where we do not attempt to simply understand each other, but where we are willing to risk a true dislocation of our selves, and engage in disagreement.

2. Culture Jamming and the Yes Men

Paris, the 9th of April 1950. Michel Mourre, Serge Bernard, Jean Rullier and Ghislan Desnoyers marched towards the Cathédrale Notre Dame de Paris. Moure, who the day before had shaved his head except for a tonsure, headed for the front. Dressed in the outfit of a Dominican monk, before ten thousand people he delivered his sermon:

> Today, Easter day of the Holy Year,
> Here, under the emblem of Notre-Dame of Paris,
> I accuse the universal Catholic Church of the lethal diversion of our living strength toward an empty heaven,
> I accuse the Catholic Church of swindling,
> I accuse the Catholic Church of infecting the world with its funereal morality,
> Of being the running sore on the decomposed body of the West.
>
> Verily I say unto you: God is dead,
> We vomit the agonizing insipidity of your prayers,
> For your prayers have been the greasy smoke over the battlefields of our Europe.
>
> Go forth then into the tragic and exalting desert of a world where God is dead,
> And till this earth anew with your bare hands,
> With your PROUD hands,
> With your unpraying hands.
>
> Today Easter day of the Holy Year,
> Here under the emblem of Notre-Dame of Paris,
> We proclaim the death of the Christ-god, so that Man may live at last
> (Marcus, 1989, 279-280).

Swiss Guards stationed in the church drew their swords and charged the men. They ran, Rullier's face slashed by a sword, a mob of people chasing them, and Mourre blessing people as he fled. They were arrested by police, and saved from the mob, when they reached the Seine. This act was executed at a time when Pope

Pius XII, a public anti-Semite, had achieved an irreproachable status. The act was perceived by many as a protest against this (Marcus, 1989, 279-280). Mourre the architect of the plan had spent the years before involved in various socialist and religious groups. At two separate points he had begun the process of becoming a monk. After eventually becoming disillusioned, Moure carried out this action to "destroy the church within himself", and to set himself free (Marcus, 1989, 311). In both characterizations participants assumed the roles of a previously unchallengeable symbol in order to challenge its mythology from within.

Historian Greil Marcus argues that the Notre Dame Affair, as it is now called, was perceived as a moment of opening for the founding members of the Situationists International (S.I.). For them, Marcus argues, the Notre Dame Affair opened up a place for play. It opened up a new pathway, a pathway that did not restrict political challenges to the never-ending circuits described in the previous chapter, and opened up an opportunity to create things anew (Kanbb, 2006a, 151; Marcus, 1989, 311). The methods that stem from this act, and the S.I., have continued on in various adaptations through to modern day culture jamming and the Yes Men.

Stemming from the arguments made in the previous chapter, I have suggested that moments of play, of indeterminacy, provide the only emancipatory path in a world limited by fixed regimes of perspective. How to open and act within that space is the point where we now find ourselves. The following chapter, which is loosely divided into two parts, will explore how such openings have been sought. Specifically, how activists from the S.I. to Stephen Colbert have sought to

challenge these hegemonic modes of control with new understandings of what that control represents. This begins with an examination of founding S.I. member Guy Debord's notion of the spectacle, which in many ways mirrors understandings of control examined in Chapter One. Perceiving control as an attribute of the spectacle led the S.I. to a focus on détournement as a way to shatter the one-way flow of meaning stemming from hegemonic cultural symbols. The portrayal of détournement I offer focuses on four 'rules' developed by Debord and Gil J Wolman. Through that presentation, I will present modern examples of culture jamming by way of explanation. In this way I will not be providing a complete historical examination of culture jamming, rather I simply seek to build a stronger understanding of this method and demonstrate the debt modern culture jamming has to the S.I. The second part of this chapter focuses on the Yes Men, who rely heavily on the techniques that I will explore. The focus is on the Yes Men's development: who they are, a few of their past actions, and how they came to be situated to do what they do. Finally, I will provide a brief examination of their two key strategies, identity correction and humour. The primary purpose of this chapter is to provide a deeper understanding the Yes Men, and the strategies they rely on, and how these actions are often understood. By way of conclusion I will begin to point towards a new way of understanding certain actions of the Yes Men, one that I argue begins to set them apart from traditional executions of the culture jamming technique.

In the previous chapter a considerable amount of time was dedicated to discussing systems of control. Control is a slippery concept. For many theorists

control is best understood as a hegemonic grasp on information and meaning. Following that argument, for many activists and theorists the introduction of new information is the key to breaking free of such systems. However, Jodi Dean, drawing on Slavoj Žižek, has challenged this notion. She has argued that information can no longer be considered a tool for control, or a tool for emancipation. Dean bases her critique on the mass availability of opinions, largely facilitated by the Internet, in today's world. She argues that individuals are caught up in a constant search for something new: information and conflicting opinions. For Dean, this destroys information's emancipatory capability because society is predicated on a multiplicity of opinions, so adding more to this milieu makes very little difference.

Dean's argument compels us to locate control somewhere other than in the strictly informational content of messages. In the previous chapter, I turned to Herbert Marcuse's account of one-dimensional thought in an attempt to capture this extra-semantic dimension of hegemonic control, whereby even a diversity of opinions can exert hegemonic force insofar as they are contained within, and thereby reinforce, well-established parameters of technological and social rationality. The notion of the spectacle developed by Debord in the context of the S.I. represents a practical, as well as theoretical, development of this line of critical thought.

The Situationist International and Culture Jamming

The S.I. emerged in Europe and existed as a formal group from 1957 to 1972. They represented an amalgamation of several avant-garde artist groups of

the time (Knabb, 2007b, ix). Guy Debord based his critique of society on what he termed the spectacle. The spectacle manifests itself through a wide range of imagery, including product advertisements, films, and television show. But, it is much more than these manifestations. Debord writes that "the spectacle cannot be understood either as a deliberate distortion of the visual world or as a product of the technology of mass dissemination of images. It is far better viewed as a weltanschauung that has been actualized, translated into the material realm – a world view transformed into a material force" (Debord, 1995, 13). This is a worldview that arises out of automation and industrialization, a worldview that links capitalist progress with the only possible good (Debord, 1995, 42). This worldview is continually reinforced not only through imagery, but also through social relations and actions. Debord argues that through individual's participation in society, accumulating capital and reaping the goods from that accumulation, they actively work to reinforce and legitimate the weltanschauung of the spectacle (Debord, 1995, 39). "There can be no freedom apart from activity, and within the spectacle all activity is banned – a corollary of the fact that all real activity has been forcibly channeled into the global construction of the spectacle" (Debord, 1995, 21-22) It is not a stretch to suggest that the spectacle Debord perceived, when writing in the 1960s, has only increased since that time. Steven Best and Douglas Kellner have used the term mega-spectacle to describe the state of the spectacle in today's world (Best et al., 1999, 135; Penner, 2012, 66). One trait of the spectacle is a shift from quality to quantity of information and images (Penner,

2012, 39). In this way we could consider the multiplicity of online discussion and floating opinions, observed by Dean, as yet another aspect of the spectacle.

In a similar line of thought to Marcuse, as examined in Chapter One, Debord was not so much concerned with the specific content of the spectacle as he was with the logic that it reproduced. For Debord, these spectacles amassed into an overarching system that mediated all social relations. Through the constant bombardment of imagery it became impossible to think or act in a way that did not draw on the logic put forth in the spectacle. It "reposes on an incessant deployment of the very technical rationality to which that philosophical tradition gave rise" and created a "permanent opium war waged to make it impossible to distinguish goods from commodities, or true satisfaction from a survival that increases according to its own logic" (Debord, 1995, 17 & 30). The technological rationality' of the spectacle, for Debord, establishes a certain mode of living that becomes unquestionable. The very presence of the spectacle constantly justifies itself and it, in a similar manner to Marcuse's one-dimensional thought, is "immune to dialogue" (Debord, 1995, 13 & 17-19).

This immunity is at the very heart of why so much activism gets subsumed back into the systems it attempts to challenge. Challenges, most often informational challenges, are accepted as normal additions to democratic life. Those that attempt to escalate their challenge beyond established parameters are labeled as irrationality, or as a threat. They are assigned the status of Sarah Ahmed's "angry feminist" – a predictable cliché whose extremity and consistency relieves others of the obligation to take her seriously. In order to escape this bind

Debord argued that society needed to challenge the one-way nature of the spectacle. This challenge had to emerge through dialogue. He suggested that, as the current manifestation of the spectacle today, all forms of power have always attempted to suppress activity to the confines of the present society (Debord, 1995, 122). This suppression, as I argued, does not allow for critique or responses, therefore "critical theory has to be communicated in its own language – the language of contradiction, dialectical in form as well as content: the language of the critique of the totality, of the critique of history" (Debord, 1995, 144). This language is completely opposite to the one-way nature of the spectacle, it forces the society of signs to be redeployed in a nature where challenges and discussion become possible. He called this language détournement. Debord and Wolman argued that détournement is a language that redeploys and "plagiarizes" official symbols in a way that subverts their initial meaning (Debord et al., 2006, 16). Détournement offers nothing new to the present situation; instead, to use the language of Marcuse, it is the practice of transforming an engineer's finished product into the product of an artist, a product that is open to a multitude of endings and possibilities (Marcuse, 1991, 238). This is a product that opens up the situation to dialogue (Debord, 1995, 146).

The following section will treat each of the specific elements of détournement in turn, providing examples to illustrate each technique. In each case I will review examples offered by Debord and the SI themselves, as well as more recent examples drawn from the contemporary practice of culture jamming that evolved from this history. The term 'culture jamming' was first coined in

1984 by the band Negativland, an experimental music group from San Francisco. The term was used to describe their particular brand of music, a brand that they explain as “mixing original materials and original music with things taken from corporately owned mass culture and the world around them, Negativland re-arranges these found bits and pieces to make them say and suggest things that they never intended to” (Negativland). From there, Mark Dery first theorized the name in his 1993 essay *Culture Jamming: Hacking, Slashing, and Sniping in the Empire of the Signs.* Following the original meaning of the term, Dery took specific aim at the non-dialogical aspects of modern culture. He focused his critique on the one-way communication prevalent in techno culture, specifically television (Dery, 2003). Culture jamming, for Dery, is best understood in terms of what Umberto Eco described as semiological guerilla warfare. Eco, quoted by Dery, writes that "[T]he receiver of the message seems to have a residual freedom: the freedom to read it in a different way...I am proposing an action to urge the audience to control the message and its multiple possibilities of interpretation…[O]ne medium can be employed to communicate a series of opinions on another medium...The universe of Technological Communication would then be patrolled by groups of communications guerrillas, who would restore a critical dimension to passive reception" (Dery, 2003).

From this initial theorization, culture jamming has been deployed in numerous ways. While widely different in their deployment, practices of culture jamming are connected in their attempt to shatter traditional understandings of widely held beliefs in order to open up space for dialogue. For example, the group

Reclaim the Streets UK holds impromptu parties on busy streets. The purpose is to challenge the idea that the car has a monopoly on the street (Jordon, 2002, 355). In one instance, Reclaim the Streets brought together a few thousand individuals for a party on England's M41 motorway, shutting the highway down for a few hours in protest of a planned expansion (Urban75, 1996). The group Billboard Liberation Front (BLF) goes around altering advertising billboards in order to challenge the messages they try to get across (Frankenstien, 2012, 159). Additionally, bringing culture jamming into the larger public sphere, Kalle Lasn publishes a magazine on the topic, Adbusters, that is distributed worldwide (Lasn, 2009). As well as publishing this magazine, Adbusters has been responsible for a number of prominent campaigns worldwide. Buy Nothing Day, an annual event that occurs from November 23rd to the 24th, encourages consumers to buy nothing for twenty-four hours. According to Adbusters this event has millions of participants every year in over sixty countries (Adbusters – Buy Nothing Day). Adbusters has also been credited with making the initial call for the worldwide Occupy Wall Street actions. This event saw people camping out in their cities financial districts for approximately two months in an effort to raise awareness about financial inequality (Adbusters – Occupy Wall Street). Thus, as the S.I. before them, the task of the culture jammer is to assume the role of an artist, to "plagiarize", and to restructure one-way signs and symbols, making those signs speak in unintended ways, allowing receivers to speak back.

The "Laws" of Detournement – then and now

Acts of culture jamming take something expected, like a highway, and challenge our notion of what it is for by doing something completely unexpected, like holding a party in the middle of it. In essence, following what Debord et al. called détournement, they take pre-existing elements and play with them in order to make them say something new. Debord et al. actually made a distinction between minor détournements and deceptive détournements. The difference between these two concepts lies in the pre-existing understandings attached to the object being détourned. A minor détournement is the act of taking an object or phrase that has no intrinsic meaning. Debord et al. use the example of a neutral phrase, and modifying the context that it appears in. In that situation, the only meaning that stems from the phrase is derived from its surrounding context. A deceptive détournements, on the other hand, is a phrase or object, that has an intrinsic meaning, and thus the alteration of its context will modify that meaning (Debord et al., 2006, 16). Deceptive détournements, hereafter simply referred to as détournement, will be focused on as it is the method deployed in the strategies I examine here. As I have indicated, this method of détournement refers to the alteration of elements that have established significance, such as any symbol that is accompanied by a strong feeling of association with a particular sentiment or idea. An example of this would be the idea that a road is the sole domain of the car (Debord et al., 2006, 16). Debord et al. outline four 'laws' for the use of détournement. The first law is that "it is the most distant détourned element which contributes most sharply to the overall impression" (Debord et al., 2006, 16). This

law, which Debord et al. say are applicable to all forms of détournement, simply refers to the contrast between the original meaning and the détourned meaning. The larger the contrast the more shocking, and thus greater the challenge, the détournement presents (Debord et al., 2006, 16-17). The remaining three laws are only applicable to the method of détournement that we are interested in here. These laws are: the détournement should be simple, the closer the détournement resembles a "rational reply" the less effective it is, and finally the simple reversal of an element is the least effective approach (Debord et al., 2006, 16-17).

The second law of détournement described by Debord and Gil J. Wolman list is simplification. To détourn, as I have described, is to play with already existing elements present in a particular piece of media or communiqué, and to "plagiarize" the elements in their own words in order to change the meaning (Debord et al., 2006, 16). This change is a very simple one, and it does not change the message per se. Instead it targets the tone, or framing, of what is being said. To demonstrate what they mean Debord et al. provide the example of the film The Birth of a Nation. This film is a 1915 silent film, directed by D.W. Griffith, based on a book, called *The Clansman* written by Thomas Dixon (Armstrong, 2010). The Birth of a Nation is an extremely controversial film. Indeed, following its release protests ignited leading it to be eventually banned in a number of cities (Mass Moments, 2013). These protests, and the banning, were a result of the film's portrayal of African Americans. African Americans are played by white people in blackface in what has been described as an extremely demeaning manner. Additionally, in the film the Ku Klux Klan are portrayed as a heroic force.

Despite this, Eric Armstrong argues that "even as D.W. Griffith's explicitly anti-African American work, contrary to its title card, bears the stench of residing on the wrong side of history, "The Birth of a Nation" is as revered as it is reviled. It's unparalleled innovation and audacity, technically and narratively, coupled with its unprecedented cultural impact, makes it perhaps the single most important film ever made" (Armstrong, 2010). Debord et al. share this view of the film, and argue that through small acts of détournement it could be presented in a more acceptable manner. For example, they suggest leaving the film intact, but modifying the soundtrack so that it "powerfully denounces" the activities of the Ku Klux Klan (Debord et al., 2006, 19).

The Colbert Report, featuring John Colbert, provides a more recent example. The Colbert Report was first broadcast on the television network Comedy Central in 2005. The show, according to Rolling Stone magazine, is considered one of the "most trusted names in news", despite being a satirical news program (Meddaugh, 2010, 377). Much of Colbert's material, and his on stage character, comes from conservative journalist figures, such as Bill O'Reilly (Meddaugh, 2010, 378-381). Bill O'Reilly, the host of Fox Television's The O'Reilly Show, is extremely popular among republicans in the United States, and projects a strongly right-wing bias (Leung, 2009). In order to détourn the messages stemming from The O'Reilly Show, Colbert takes on that persona but in a very different way from its original presentation. Colbert challenges political ideas and "truths" coming from such venues by parodying personalities, such as O'Reilly, in a humorous way with the goal of challenging the infallible nature,

among some groups, of what is being said (Meddaugh, 2010, 378- 381). Colbert does not necessarily add anything new in his parody. He simply modifies the existing elements, in order to recast these messages in a new light. “Colbert both simulates and condemns O’Reilly’s zealous suspicion of all things non- American. His pseudo right-wing, manic persona parallels O’Reilly to exaggeration, a reflection one might observe in a fun house mirror” (Meddaugh, 2010, 380).

The next rule of détournement is that it must avoid, as much as possible, the semblance of “a rational reply” (Debord et al., 2006, 17).This is not a critique of rationality, specifically. Rather, it is a critique of prevailing understandings of what rationality is, in a similar manner to Herbert Marcuse’s treatment of the term. As examined in Chapter One, Marcuse argued that technological capitalism has established a specific form of rationality that only allows individuals to operate within the confines of established society. Following this situation, Marcuse argued that one must, instead, move towards aesthetic categories to escape the confines of this form of rationality. Marcuse writes, “aesthetic categories would enter to which the productive machinery is constructed with a view of the free play of faculties…This change would affect the human agent of production and their needs” (Marcuse, 1991, 240-241).

In a similar line of thought Debord et al. argue that a proper détournement cannot simply be a ‘reply’ to an element that has been found objectionable. They provide the example of the, what is in their view a misguided, détournement of an anti-Soviet Union poster. The original poster had been printed by a pro-fascist organization called Peace and Liberty. The proposal was to détourn a poster,

which had the slogan “Union makes strength”, with an addition that stated “and coalitions make war” (Debord et al., 2006, 17). The objection that Debord et al. raise stems from the logical connection between these two phrases. The strategy of attack in this situation is not a true détournement because rather than playing with the elements at hand, it simply replies to the existing elements, in the form of a rational disagreement. In essence, the addition “and coalitions make war” has the same effect as saying that one disagrees with the statement above. This sort of reply is tantamount to the circuits of argument that Jodi Dean has observed. It is a recognizable speech and because of this Debord et al. argue it is not emancipatory (Debord et al, 2006, 17).

Consider the example of The Colbert Report. This show, as I have discussed, bases its critique not on rational replies, but on impersonation and satire. It differs from the shows it impersonates in subtle ways, such as the soundtrack or images played alongside the information, and even the tone and demeanor of the announcer. Through these subtle changes an attempt is made to challenge the very foundations of what is being said, as opposed to simply disagreeing with what has been said. To visualize this difference one could think about two comparisons: the Colbert Report versus Fox News, and the Canadian Broadcasting Corporations (CBC) news channel verses Fox News. Fox News is considered to be a far right news channel, and the CBC, which tends to be portrayed as a more left-leaning station in certain contexts, can be thought of as providing rational replies. Fox News suggests gun control is an infringement upon citizens’ rights, and CBC replies with statistics comparing a lack of gun control

with shooting deaths. This back and forth provides the sort of debate one is used to in popular conceptions of democratic discourse. However, if we recall the argument of Laszerfeld et al. the objections of Debord et al. become more apparent. Laszarsfeld et al, as I discussed in the previous chapter, argued that propaganda messages become neutralized when they are accompanied by a message that challenges it. We could even draw on Dean to argue that as more messages that contradict each other enter the milieu, the less power any one of these messages has to properly convince anyone of anything. In this way, by avoiding a rational reply, Debord et al. are attempting to escape these circuits, and open the path to something brand new. Something that I think we could also say about the Colbert show, in its attempt to demonstrate the insane rationality of prevailing discourses.

The final rule of détournement is that "détournement by simple reversal is always the most direct and least effective" form (Debord et al., 2006, 17). Recently, I noticed a number of stickers that have appeared on light posts and bus stops that serve as an example of the sort of détournement referred to in this critique. These stickers feature prominently, in the center, the familiar Starbucks logo, the twin-tailed mermaid, or Siren, with a crown. On these stickers the Siren has been modified slightly, displaying a large question mark above its head, and a coffee cup has been placed in one hand and a cell phone in the other. Surrounding the logo, where the Starbucks name is traditionally displayed, the words "Consumer Whore" are displayed. This remake was originally designed by comic book artist Kieron Dwyer in early 2000. Dwyer had placed the image on his

website, Lowest Common Denominator, as well as t-shirts and mugs (CBLDF, 2013). His purpose was to challenge the intended meaning of the Starbucks logo, which Starbucks publicist Steve M. writes is a "…true, welcoming face of Starbucks. For people all over the globe, she is a signal of the world's finest coffee – and much more. She stands unbound, sharing our stories, inviting all of us in to explore, to find something new and to connect with each other"(Steve M., 2011). In essence, the Starbucks logo is intended to be about community and togetherness. Phrases that refer to the expenses or monopoly of Starbucks, as phrases such as "Consumer Whore" would appear to do, attempt to détourn the message of community by reversing it. These phrases proclaim that the Starbucks label does not signify the coming together of people, as the company claims, but rather just the opposite: 'clueless' and individualistic consumers, mindlessly buying coffee. The meaning is fairly easy to understand. The logo is easily recognizable, and the new phrases loudly proclaim the sticker's purpose.

Actions, such as this Starbucks sticker, demonstrate what Debord et al. mean, when they suggest that reversal is the most direct form of détournement but also the most problematic. As soon as one sees a reversal, assuming the thing being reversed is fairly well known, we 'get it'. But this ease in comprehension is also problematic because in making the challenge easily known the creators are forced to conserve the original framework of Starbucks own image. I would argue that instead of challenging our understanding of the Starbucks logo itself, this action simply follows the same logic of the informational protests examined in the

previous chapter. Those who agree with the reversal feel satisfied, those that do not think it is kind of stupid (Debord et al, 2006, 17).

The Yes Men – Détournement in Action

Détournement is also strongly evident in the work of the Yes Men. The Yes Men are primarily known for their use of what they have called identity correction. They describe identity correction as the process of giving "a more accurate portrayal of power public figures and institutions than they themselves do" (The Yes Men, 2004, 182). This strategy works to "redirect and reorient the meaning of the product" or person (Allen, 2003, 10). In practice this involves the impersonation of a high profile figure in order to challenge a controversial view held by the target organization they represent. They have impersonated representatives from the World Trade Origination (WTO), DOW Chemicals, and Environment Canada. They have also mimicked specific media outlets in order to contradict, or put forward, certain views. For example, in New York City on September 21st, 2009, the day before the United Nations was set to hold a major climate summit, paper carriers began handing out free copies of the *New York Post*. The *New York Post*, owned by Rupert Murdoch, had adopted a staunch climate-change denial stance, one that was very much not in line with the headline of the day which read "We're Screwed" (Gittens, 2009). That headline was accompanied by numerous articles, all based on real investigations of climate change (YesMen – NYPost, 2009). This newspaper, despite capturing the exact likeness of *the New York Post* was, of course, a fake published by the Yes Men in

their typical use of parody to grab people's attention and increase awareness about climate change issues (Gittens, 2009).

The Yes Men themselves also work hard to confuse and deceive others in regards to their own identities. The people behind the Yes Men are most commonly known as Andy Bichlbaum and Mike Bonanno. Bichlbaum and Bonanno have authored a book, produced two videos, and are the most public names on the Yes Men website: http:///www.theyesmen.org. Yet, they do not exist. Bichlbaum and Bonanno are the most commonly used aliases of Jacques Servin and Igor Vamos. Based on the nature of their work, their aliases are quite numerous. In an e-mail correspondence about their names initiated by Lani Boyd, Vamos and Servin, responding slightly sarcastically, said that they have been called: "Dr. Andreas Bichlbauer, Granwyth Hulatberri-Hulatberri Smith, Guy MaCabre, Hortense Ashaires, Bigguns Carmichael, Louper Garoux, Felix Bitwinder III, Dorris Malbector, Lance Mastercar, Bill Butts, Hope Hopps, Henk Hunk Hamfirster, Man Mandingo, Burt Bactaderth, Fillius Bilaterus, Monk Hoarfeather, [and] HRH Prince Chalsotkovitch Belarovitch-Haskell Price Beckingham III" (Boyd, 2005, 17).

Jacques Servin is currently a visiting Associate Arts Professor in Performance Studies at the Tisch School of the Art, New York University (NYU Search). Igor Vamos, perhaps the more well known of the two outside of their work as the Yes Men, is an Associate Professor of Media Arts at the Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in New York (RPI- Igor Vamos, 2013). Vamos is also an

established multimedia artist, winning the Guggenheim Fellowship in media and art in 2003 (Guggenheim Foundation, 2013).

Prior to the Servin and Vamos's collaboration on the Yes Men, they were both involved in various forms of culture jamming. Two actions, conducted separately, led to their eventual collaboration. In late December of 1993, news agencies began reporting numerous instances of Barbie and G.I. action figures that seemed to have adopted each other's voices. A *New York Times* article titled "While Barbie Talks Tough, G. I. Joe Goes Shopping" outlined the activities of an activist group, known as the Barbie Liberation Organization, or BLO for short. BLO activists, it was reported, had spent the months prior painstakingly purchasing "Talking Dukes" (G.I. Joe Action Figures) and "Teen Talk" Babies, interchanging their voice boxes, and returning them to the stores (Firestone, 1993). Fuelling the story was a video, sent to various news outlets, which prominently featured a Teen Talk Barbie who claimed to be the spokesperson for the BLO. Teen Talk Barbie stated at the beginning of the video that they were "an international group of children's toys that are revolting against the companies that made us, we've turned against our creators because they use us to brainwash kids. They build us in a way that perpetuates gender-based stereotypes. Those stereotypes have a negative effect on children's development. We have set up our own hospitals where we are carrying out corrective surgery on ourselves" (PostSurgeOperative, 2011).

The alleged perpetrators, the BLO, have gained a fair bit of notoriety as an activist organization dedicated to fighting gender stereotypes in Barbie and G.I.

Joe action figures, including their own Wikipedia page (Wikipedia BLO). Despite this, the BLO was and is nothing more than an individual action by Igor Vamos performing what could perhaps be described as the Yes Men's first act of identity correction (The Yes Men, 2004, 11-12). On that above-mentioned Wikipedia page, the only mention of Vamos is not as a perpetrator; rather he is simply characterized as someone who "hyped up" the event to the media (Wikipedia BLO).

Three years later, Jacques Servin was working for Maxis Inc., a computer game development company based in California, primarily known for its work on the Sim games, such as the SimCity game that debuted in 1989 (MobyGames, 2013). At the time, in 1996, the company was working on an extension game, SimCopter, to the extremely popular game SimCity 2000. The now completed SimCopter allowed players to fly around in a helicopter "extinguishing fires, quelling urban riots, and stopping street crimes in progress, players earn points that allow them to purchase faster and more efficient rescue helicopters" (Silberman, 1996a).

Servin's job, at the time, was to design the people that appeared in user's screens. He also reports that he had extremely unpleasant working conditions, and Servin, who identifies as homosexual, describes the editor he was working under as "aggressively heterosexual". This editor, at one point, told Servin to program several "bimbos" into the game, essentially women dancing around in bathing suits. Servin says that when he received this request he "wondered, 'Bimbos - why not studs" (Silberman, 1996a). Servin's 'studs' were men in bathing suits

programmed to appear and start dancing and kissing each other on specific dates, such as his own birthday and Friday the thirteenth. In other game scenes these 'studs' and policemen would start dancing together (The Yes Men, 2004, 12). According to one source, Servin made a slight programming error resulting in his add-on appearing far more often than he initially intended. This resulted in his addition being discovered much quicker, and him being fired from his job (Cantrell et al., 2012). Not, however, before fifty thousand copies of the game, with the dancing men, had been shipped out during the Christmas rush (The Yes Men, 2004, 12).

After Servin's dismissal, he writes that his most prominent reaction was shock at how much press coverage his addition had received in the mainstream press. Indeed, in early December of 1996 he received coverage in papers all over the country, from the *New York Times* which ran the title "Man is dismissed Over a Game's Gay Images" (NYT Technology, 1996) to the *Los Angeles Times* that proclaimed "Maxis SimCopter Saboteur Unhappy With Way Firm Had Him Programmed" (Harmon, 1996). It even resulted in Evan Cohen, a member of ACT UP calling for a boycott of all Maxis products until Servin was re-hired. ACT UP came together in 1987, and was known for their direct and creative actions to protest the silence surrounding AIDS (Kauffman, 2002, 38). Cohen had interpreted Maxis firing of Servin as homophobic, however even Servin rejected this call reiterating that he was only fired for unauthorized programming (Silberman, 1996b). But again, Servin noted the incredible amount of press, and discussion, over an act that for him had been a more or less spur of the moment

action. He concluded “that far smarter things could be done with little forethought or planning” and thus ®TMark, or RTMark.com, was born (The Yes Men, 2004, 12).

Servin describes ®TMark as “an anonymous Website featuring a sabotage stock market on which activist pranks were listed, discussed and (allegedly) funded” (The Yes Men, 2004, 12-13). In order to get the ®TMark name out Servin leaked to several journalists that ®TMark had given him a five thousand dollar grant for the SimCopter stunt. Around that time he also heard about Vamos’s ‘corrective surgery’, so he contacted him and asked if he too had possibly received a grant from ®TMark. It was decided that the BLO had indeed been given a ten thousand dollar grant (The Yes Men, 2004, 13). This number changes slightly depending on where you look, for example on RTMark.com it claims the BLO received eight thousand dollars, channeled “from a military veterans' group” (Rtmark –BLO, 2000). These two events became the first successful projects of ®TMark.

It is not entirely clear whether Servin and Vamos ever actually funded anyone through ®TMark, or if all of the actions they list are their own. Their description of ®TMark’s “alleged” funding suggests not. However others, who may or may not be ‘playing along’ with the ruse, or have in fact been deceived as well, suggest it has (see for example Harold, 2009, 81-82; Giannachi, 2006, 30; Lievrouw, 2011, 93). It is easy to get lost in a who’s who when examining the Yes Men. In an introductory video of themselves, posted on the Yes Men website, Servin and Vamos even claim that ®TMark “approached them” and that was how

the Yes Men began (Yes Men – Video, 2013). Beyond all of this, what is important about ®TMark is that it represents the beginning of a collaboration between Vamos and Servin, and others who eventually joined them, as well as a jumping off point for the eventual creation of the Yes Men proper.

Vamos and Servin's first notable action together that made use of the identity correction technique was executed during the 1999 presidential campaign of George W. Bush. Specifically, they took issue with Bush's claim to be an ecological governor. So they built a fake website, GWBush.com, to "correct" Bush's self-description on his real website GeorgieWBush.com (The Yes Men, 2004, 14). The domain, GWBush.com, is no longer active however it is described as looking identical to the real site, but highlighting other pieces of information about Bush, such as Texas becoming the most polluted state in the United States during his tenure as governor (The Yes Men, 2004, 14). This site was successful enough that on April 14, 1999, the registered owner of the domain, Zack Exley, received a cease and desist letter from an attorney for Bush, claiming that the website violated a number of copyright and trademark laws (Rtmark – Bush, 1999). This letter is referenced by Vamos and Servin as an important key in successful identity correction. They describe other attempts at identity correction, where the target did not respond, and subsequently received very little, if any, news coverage (The Yes Men, 2004, 15). This argument is also put forward by Jonah Seiger, the co-founder of a political strategies firm called Mindshare Internet Campaigns. He argues that "Bush drew attention to it and legitimized it just by responding to it" (Neal, 1999).

From there, Servin and Vamos, through the guise of ®TMark and the Yes Men have been responsible, or have had a part, in many humorous and often effective actions. For a complete list, I would highly recommend a long look at http://rtmark.com/history.html and http://theyesmen.org/hijinks for an extremely entertaining and informative read. One of their more public, and local in the context of this project, actions occurred in Canada, in December of 2009. On December 14th and 15th of 2009 newspaper headlines around the world reveled in the very public embarrassment of Canada's government. The *Toronto Star* carried the headline "Hoax slices through Canadian spin on warming" (Woods, 2009) and *The Guardian*, a newspaper based in England, stated that "Copenhagen spoof shames Canada on the truth about its emissions" (Goldenberg, 2009). At the time, governments from around the world were meeting in Copenhagen to discuss the Kyoto protocol, a far-reaching environmental treaty. The ruling party at the time, the Conservative Party of Canada, had recently unveiled a rather disappointing commitment, pledging to only cut emissions by 20% between 2006 and 2020 (Woods, 2009).

In the middle of the day, while delegates were at this conference, a press release was issued to news agencies around the world. The release, coming from an e-mail address at the domain Enviro-Canada.ca and supposedly written by then Environment Minister Jim Prentice, announced that Canada had reviewed and revised their position on climate change (Goldenberg, 2009). Instead of the disappointingly low commitments, the press releases stated, Canada would instead be committing to a 40% decrease of the 1990 carbon output level by 2020,

as well as the added committed of an 80% cut by 2050. If the plan had been true, it would have been the single most ambitious plan for environmental protection to date (Woods, 2009). Following this announcement what appeared to be the official website for Environment Canada (Enviro-Canada.ca) outlined the importance of this commitment. Congratulations poured in from all over the world, although many it later turned out were also faked. All of this was widely reported by the press. The hoax, Allan Woods writes, also involved "versions of websites for the Wall Street Journal, Environment Canada and the United Nations, and press conferences staged with fake negotiators from Uganda that provoked real federal officials to lash out at those they suspected of masterminding the campaign of shame" (2009).

The result of this campaign, while not successful in strengthening commitments to the Kyoto Protocol, was to flip the one way flow of communication stemming from the Canadian Government. It flipped the discourse forcing those in control, the Canadian government in this case, to go on the defensive. It, in the words of Woods, "forced Canada to say no. No, it would not adjust its planned emissions cuts to make them the toughest in the world. And no, it would not commit $13 billion, and much more in the coming years, to help the world's poorest countries adapt to the ravages of a warmer planet" (2009). In this way, the campaign placed the burden of proof, which so often lays with those who bring the complaint forward, onto those in control.

Since the time of this action, the Yes Men have shifted their primary focus of carrying out actions such as this to teaching others how to do what they do. The

premise for this is that there are many potential targets, and one organization hardly has the capabilities to deal with all of them. Two major projects have been launched in this regard, the Yes Labs and Actipedia. The Yes Lab is based at the New York University's Hemispheric Institute of Performance and Politics. The Yes Lab, described as "mainly a series of brainstorms and trainings to help activist groups carry out media-getting creative actions, focused on their own campaign goals", that draw on the previous experiences of the Yes Men (Hemispheric Institute - Yes Lab, 2013). They hold weekly Yes Labs for students and faculty of the New York University and anyone else who is interested called Yes Lab @ Hemi, where they collaborate on various funny and media-attracting ideas. Presently, at the time of this projects writing, the guiding theme of these collaborations is income disparity (Hemispheric Institute – Tuesdays, 2013).

The Yes Labs also operate as a sort of consulting firm. They charge a fee to groups that would like to enlist their services. The fee pays for what they call a "sherpa" who will lead them, remotely online, in brainstorming sessions (Yes Lab – About). Each lab is built around the specific group's needs, but generally includes:

- Presentation of "laughtivism": developing effective, mediagenic activist projects around the issue at hand
- Brainstorming out numerous project ideas, evaluating the options, and choosing the best one
- Fleshing out chosen project(s) fully, and developing a complete action plan with timelines, deadlines, and chains of responsibility

- Trainings as needed, with the Yes Men and external trainers, to cover media handling, improv, writing, video editing, etc.
- Mapping out teams and determining additional staffing needs (which can come from the Yes Men's network if necessary)
- Bicycle, kayak, or hang-gliding tours of relevant local areas—or other fun activities of some relevance (Yes Lab – About)

In essence, the Yes Labs are an attempt to take the Yes Men strategy and transplant it to as many other groups as possible. Already, in the short time the Yes Labs have been around a number of interesting projects have emerged (http://yeslab.org/projects). For example, in collaboration with a New York based group called People Enraged by Racist Policing (PERP) a campaign was launched called "Three strikes, You're in". This campaign was initiated in protest of the NYPD's stop and frisk program, a policy that allows the police to randomly stop and frisk anyone they deem suspicious. A press release and website emerged offering vouchers, which could be printed from the website, for free McDonald's Happy Meals that could be claimed after being stopped three times by police. People simply needed to fill in the officers badge number and the date of each stop, and then bring the voucher to their nearest McDonalds (Yes Lab – Three Strikes You're in, 2012).

The second project, Actipedia, is a joint work between the Yes Men and a group called The Center for Artistic Activism, another New York-based activist 'consulting' group (CfAA, 2011). To bring together their joint mission of

forwarding the idea of creative activism they have created an open access database, http://actipedia.org/, which was just opened to the public in March of 2013. It is a place where activists from all over the world can share and collaborate on creative actions (Actipedia).

The strategies taught and forwarded by the Yes Men revolve primarily around two categories: the already-mentioned identity correction and humour. Identity correction, as we have seen, is a form of impersonation. The Yes Men adopt the identity of the *New York Post*, George W. Bush, Environment Canada, and many others, in in order to challenge public understanding of that group, or of a particular idea. Using the language of branding, Jason Del Gandio examines the way certain symbols and signs evoke particular experiences. He argues that consumers do not desire a particular product per se, rather that desire is linked to the experience, and fantasy, associated with that product (Del Gandio, 2011, 128). One does not go to Starbucks simply for coffee; one goes to Starbucks for the complete café experience that is associated with a Starbucks coffee. Del Gandio argues that a change in the patterns or feelings associated with a product, such as Starbucks, will also fundamentally alter understandings and desires for that product (2011, 128). This is the logic that flows through détournement, culture jamming, and identity correction. Alter the experience and associations of any product or brand, and the whole thing falls apart.

Changing the meanings of symbols means, first and foremost, adopting the "clothing" of that symbol. Louise Owen argues, when examining a particular action by the Yes Men, that "… Bichlbaum also, in a sense, 'wears' the

ideological apparatuses" of his target (2011, 30). This refers both to the physical and ideological appearance of the Yes Men. For a successful identity correction to take place the person conducting the parody must be able to take on the identity of their target. First, for purely practical reasons anonymity is important, which can also explain why the Yes Men have now, and historically, gone to such lengths to hide who they are. Dennis Allen discusses the hypothetical action of impersonating a Wal-Mart greeter. Wal-Mart, a site filled with strong consumerist and capitalist values, could be targeted by replacing the well-known Wal-Mart greeter with an impersonator, who could disorient the shoppers understanding of the Wal-Mart space. However, the imposter must be a relatively unknown person so that they are not recognized as their true identity (Allen, 2003, 11)

The ideological impersonation is equally, if not more, important. One way to understand Owen's statement is through Mikhail Bakhtin. Bahktin believed that one reason why officialdom is seldom challenged is for fear of reprisal. Following this, he argued that the occupation of these official sites, and identities, could release individuals from that fear when they were shown the inconsistent nature of official power (Bakhtin, 1984, 91-93). We could modify Bahktin's statement by replacing fear with the believed impossibility of alternatives that I have argued tends to exist within such symbols. Bahktin's work uses the concept of carnival, very similar to my characterization of culture jamming, to suggest ways of opening up these different possibilities through the distortion or redefinition of certain identities. These distortions are argued to force observers into conversation because carnivalistic actions resemble known identities and

truths, slightly modified. Mary T. Hufford argues that "what is achieved through carnival is not an alternate world, but an alternate, ludic perspective that fleetingly exposes and distorts this world and the identities of its subjects" (2010, 561).

Owen takes a similar, but slightly different approach. She draws on Margaret Roses's model of two audiences. Roses invokes the idea of two audiences that emerge in the face of a hoax or parody. One is the audience that was present throughout the first chapter of this project. This is the skeptical audience, the one that perceives what they see as a hoax, or in the context of the first chapters discussion, this is the audience that approaches the situation with disbelief firmly intact. The other audience takes the situation seriously (Owen, 2011, 30). They take the situation seriously because they are predisposed to believe whatever the figure that appears before them has to say. For example in one Yes Men action, which Stephen Duncombe has characterized as their most famous act, they impersonated Dow Chemical executives at a press conference following a major chemical spill (Duncombe, 2012, 364). During that press conference it was announced that Dow was taking full responsibility for a spill that had killed thousands of people. The Yes Men also countered their own hoax with a fake reply that said Dow had no intention of repairing the damage. Within twenty-three minutes, Dow's stocks had fallen 4.23 percent. This immediate reaction comes because the releases coming from the Yes Men, under the guise of Dow, were accepted on face value. Schönberger argues that "actions like the Dow Chemical fake again and again force net users to ask themselves the question of whether all this is legitimate, and thus implicitly contribute to the increase of

media competence and the development of media education" about that image of that particular company (Schönberger, 2006, 293).

The second aspect of the Yes Men's strategy is humour. This is featured sometimes more, and sometimes less, prominently, depending on the specific action. At times the humour is simply the act of parody itself. Amber Day argues that "the humor provides the satisfying wink to the audience. The aim is to communicate with existing discursive communities who get the joke and appreciate the critique, while amplifying that critique via the mass media" (Day, 2008). This aspect works both to provide a sense of satisfaction for those 'in the know' but also as a way to extend the impact of the action. Dumcombe quotes Andy Bichlbaum (Jacques Servin) who suggests that "people with no previous knowledge of the issue pass[ed] the site to their friends for its funny value". Duncombe adds that by passing it along people are willingly, or unwillingly, also "criticizing the commodity form itself" (Duncombe, 2012, 366).

In other situations humour is more prominent. For example in 2001, Servin found himself presenting at a "Textiles of the Future" conference in Tampere, Finland, on behalf of the World Trade Organization. At one point, when discussing the "problem" of how to keep track of the workers in overseas sweatshops, Bichlbaum rips off his suit revealing "the management solution of the future: a shimmering golden leotard—which, when Andy [Servin] pulls a rip-cord in his crotch, sports a three-foot-long golden phallus. Andy explains that this tool, the "Employee Visualization Appendage," will allow the manager of the future to watch and control far-off workers while engaging in healthful leisure

activities" (Yes Men- Tampere). At the end of this phallus there was television screen to allow such surveillance. Laughter, once it does come, is suggested to have the power to outgrow prevailing regimes. Mary Hufford argues that laughter is what comes when subjects begin to realize that they have been restrained by "boundaries of an alien intent" and that they are outgrowing them (Hufford, 2010, 575). As well, through laughter we become intertwined and involved with each other as we become co-conspirators in the sharing of the joke.

Conclusion: Interpreting the Yes Men

There are a number of ways to understand what exactly the Yes Men are doing. A common approach is that the Yes Men's work frees society from prevailing images and understandings of people, corporations, and governments who hold dominate roles. Through that freeing, society is then able to challenge those positions from a more informed point of view. Indeed, this understanding makes sense, it stems not only from the history of détournement and the wider culture of culture jamming, but also in the Yes Men's own description of identity correction. To recall, the three rules that were primarily examined include: the détournement should be simple, the closer the détournement resembles a "rational reply" the less effective it is, and finally the simple reversal of an element is the least effective approach (Debord et al., 2006, 16-17). In my examination of these concepts I drew on examples such as the alteration of a movie soundtrack, to change the context that the film emerges out of, and the Colbert show which acts in a similar manner. The context that I, and Debord et al., present this strategy is one that targets images that have wide circulation, and pre-formed public

understandings of. The Yes Men approach their activism in a very similar manner, stating that they provide "a more accurate portrayal of powerful public figures and institutions than they themselves do" (The Yes Men, 2004, 182).

Klaus Schönberger analyzes the Yes Men through Umberto Eco's guerilla communication. Through their acts of parody, Schönberger argues, they are escaping the traditional debates over what is the truth or right information of a situation. Schönberger quotes Barthes who asks "Is not the best subversion to distort the codes rather than destroy them" (Schönberger, 2006, 290)? The Yes Men for Schönberger, take this up through their identity correction by "subverting and delegitimizing" their power (2006, 290). They "aim to create 'true events' through false information" (Schönberger, 2006, 291).

Amber Day argues that the Yes Men, through identity correction, use affirmation as a political tool (Day, 2008). She argues that instead of engaging in debate "they assume their opponents' identities and enthusiastically affirm their adversaries' beliefs" (Day, 2008). Through this characterization one can see strong links between Day's understanding of the Yes Men and the Colbert Report, examined earlier. Day links her conception of the Yes Men to Augusto Boal's Invisible Theatre. The Invisible Theater attempts to orient people, who have no previous connection, towards each other. This happens by setting up pre-scripted situations that these individuals are unaware of. These situations then work to bring outside participants together in unexpected ways (Day, 2008). Day writes that "the Yes Men orchestrate scenes in which only they know that they are following a script, inciting their audience to recognize themselves in the issues

and become involved, and attempting to evoke a critical collective response" against a perceived wrong (Day, 2008).

The critical responses Day perceives, or the 'true events' envisioned by Schönberger, are argued to be effective because they shake the certainty that stems from official roles, allowing us to question them. Steven Duncombe notes that in in order for the challenge of satire to be effective the audience needs to be able, and I would add, willing, to "supply the mirror image – the positive message – themselves" (Duncombe, 2012, 366). That ability emerges when the audience is finally able to place their reality in a different perspective. This opens up a moment where individuals can consider the projected identity against the corrected identity. As Davide Panagia argues, regimes of perception are important for our ability to orient ourselves, however disrupting those regimes is integral because they provide moments to put those regimes up to interrogation (2009, 28).

That outgrowing is the moment when audience members can begin to make that transition form a regime of perspective to an aesthetic regime. Maria Hynes, Scott Sharpe, and Bob Fagan argue that the political moment for the Yes Men is the introduction of something unexpected, "for the duration of the hoax and the period of its becoming public, appearances and ideas are placed, side by side, with equal flatness. The unusual co-existence of these virtual elements actualizes something new, as disjunction becomes a positive synthetic principle" (Hynes et al, 2007, 116). Carrie Lambert-Beatty argues that this might be considered to be "an art of the plausible. It is always possible that Dow will have a change of heart; what the Yes Men did was to make us, for a moment, believe

that it had happened" (Lambert-Beatty, 2008, 320). Lambert-Beatty points to an important aspect of the Yes Men's actions when considering a shift out of regimes where singular, one-way meanings, are dominant. The moment that she highlights is that moment when the alternate point of view, the view of the part with no part, becomes visible. In that moment, competing perspectives can be interrogated and singular dominate meanings or understandings, can lose their status as singular or dominate.

I am sympathetic to these views, and they point to a very important aspect of the Yes Men's work, and the work of culture jamming more broadly. However, one cannot help but wonder how effective this approach truly is in the world described by Jodi Dean, one where culture symbols do not hold that much power over individual lives. Frankenstein writes that "the hope is that when we see that the irrationality and silences of those in power can be manipulated by The Yes Men's interventions, we can become more confident to be more active participants in decision-making in our democracy" (2012, 166-167). Schönberger, in a similar manner, suggests that the Yes Men's acts allow the audience to consider whether they will continue to accept the actions of powerful figures (2006, 293). Finally, David Grindon argues that one of the key contributions of both Bahktin and the S.I. was their use of laughter as a tool for liberating society from authority (Grindon, 2004, 149). Within all of these approaches the Yes Men are, in essence, acting in a similar manner to the informational activism described in the first chapter. They are simply adding more debate and argument about external symbols to a world already full of such arguments. However, there is

another way to understand certain Yes Men actions that might sidestep this issue. The problem, it seems, is one of locality. In other words, the level of connection one feels to the cultural symbol that is been jammed.

In the following chapter I will argue that a shift into politics requires actions that do not necessarily embarrass those in control. Rather, for a political disruption to take place the target must be much more local. This target must be an internal one, one that forces those occupying the distribution of the sensible to momentarily occupy the role of the part with no part in order for them to perceive that part. The Yes Men, in one particular instance that will be explored in the next chapter, demonstrate how an activist group can act as 'sherpas' and lead those in control into these personally disruptive moments.

3. The Yes Men and the internal nature of political disruption

The preceding chapters have sought to connect Rancière's understanding of democracy and disruption with contemporary activism practices. Democracy, in this context, is a moment of interruption, it "is the designation of subjects that do not coincide with the parties of the state or of society, floating subjects that deregulate all representation of places and portions" (Rancière, 1999, 100). These are subjects that make an appearance in the distribution of the sensible who have previously not been counted. The problem for this understanding of politics, and for those who make claims as the part with no part, is that the appearance of the part with no part needs to be perceived *as a political appearance*, and this is typically not the case. Instead, as I have argued, we have a wide range of designations for those who act outside of the distribution of the sensible, all of which make us blind to such claims or that actively work to de-politicize their message. Culture jamming, by contrast, would seem to embody Rancière's understanding of democracy. Instead of acting in a manner that is understood by the distribution of the sensible, culture jamming attacks the very foundations of this distribution. Its techniques resist the urge to add something new to the milieu, and instead détourns the symbols that determine these delineations. In Elanie Gadinger's words, culture jamming "refuses to accept the flawless world of corporate advertising. With a few lines in the right place, they expose its empty promise" (Gadinger, 2010, 40-41). The Yes Men, and theorists of the Yes Men, have followed this pathway in hopes of opening up the possibilities for true

democratic discourse. This is not an approach I intend to discard, but at the same time it seems as if something is missing from these characterizations. Specifically, it does not adequately account for the strength of the connection individuals included in the distribution of sensible truly feel towards large corporate symbols or public figures. Does the act of détourning the Nike symbol make us view sweatshop labourers as political actors worthy of our consideration, or do we just file that away as one more piece of conflicting information that could be important, but does not really challenge the way we perceive or act in the world? If it is the latter, culture jamming, on its own, might not be as disruptive as its practitioners suppose.

In this final chapter, I begin by outlining several reasons why traditional culture jamming might fail to bring about the sort of disruption I have been discussing in the previous chapters. This brings several theorists, critical of the general application of satire, into the discussion. I also reference several past Yes Men actions that embrace a more traditional approach to culture jamming. These actions, for one reason or another, seem to fall prey to many of the critiques brought forward in Chapter One. Following this, I turn back towards the definition of disruption, in order to focus more closely on what it means to be disrupted, to consider the characteristics typically present in the moments preceding a disruption. This discussion will call attention to the deeply personal nature of disruptive moments, not only because disruptive moments work on the perceptual capacities of individuals, but also because disruptions typically occur when an individual is personally and immediately invested in the symbol that is

being challenged. The personal nature of disruption is not something that is accounted for in most acts of culture jamming, nor in the majority of Yes Men actions. There is one instance, an early action, where the Yes Men seemed to recognize the importance of the personal nature of disruption. I am referring to the highly publicized 2002 action in which the Yes Men, before a small group of accountants in Sydney, Australia, announced that the World Trade Organization (WTO) would be shut down in favour of a new organization, the Trade Regulation Organization. The reason they gave for this transition was that the WTO had failed to promote equality in the world, and had instead simply hurt poorer countries and helped rich countries get richer. Through this new organization, there would be a renewed focus on giving back to countries that had sacrificed so much in the name of globalization. What is so interesting about this particular event is that, according to the Yes Men, many members of the audience, individuals quite involved in the WTO's official stance, responded with wholehearted agreement. Through this agreement, I will argue, participants momentarily occupied the perspective of the part with no part. By focusing on this event my intention is to provide a practical example, through the Yes Men, of what disruptive moments can look like in the activist context. Additionally, I hope to introduce a renewed focus on these sorts of personalized actions as opposed to the large scale, depersonalized actions that are often preferred by culture jammers. By personalized actions I am referring to the détournment of internally held beliefs, rather than the détournment of identities and meanings of external objects or people.

Limitations of the Yes Men

Culture jammers and the Yes Men use humourous, and sometimes just shocking, strategies to expose a different understanding of commonly known symbols or identity. The general idea is that through slight changes to widely known identities or symbols activists 'jam' common understandings, opening the space for something different. The level of success we attribute to these jams is often related to the amount of news coverage they receive nationally or globally, depending on the context of the action. This, it seems, is one of the reasons why the Yes Men enjoy the level of success that they do in the world of activism: they have proven in a number of instances that they are very good at creating very large newsworthy events. Their success has led them to shift their focus from carrying out actions themselves to teaching others how to do what they do, establishing themselves as a sort of activist consulting service in order to increase their overall reach. Generally, I think this is an important step, as activism of this sort is exceedingly complex to organize and execute, and the Yes Men have mastered some very effective techniques. But, it is equally important to interrogate the understanding of success upon which this shift is predicated, especially at a time when their influence is growing through teaching projects such as the Yes Labs.

The common understanding of the Yes Men's approach is that they occupy official roles in order to contradict a message typically expected from people in that role. Those who are skeptical of environmental regulations in

general we might not listen to an angry environmentalist on the street calling for such regulations, but if Environment Canada makes such a call, perhaps even the skeptics will listen. The importance of such interventions is located in the moments afterwards, when the prank is discovered. It is in this moment that dominant understandings of the target's practices are exposed as contingent and the onus of justification shifts onto the target of the action. It is also in this moment that the satisfaction arising from humorously "putting one over" on the target is felt most intensely, by activist and audience alike. These are all important outcomes, but at the same time I am not certain that even together they constitute a disruptive moment.

Several of the theorists reviewed earlier discussed the power that comes when we put one over on someone in power, allowing us to make fun of them and challenge their status and authority. This is also one of the core principles of the Yes Men's understanding of themselves, as demonstrated in their mission statement, where they say they are "impersonating big-time criminals in order to publicly humiliate them…" (Yes Men - Index). Public humiliation as form of activism has been widely critiqued (Bruner, 2006; Heath et al, 2005; Langman, 2008). Humour and satire have a long history as tactics for challenging those in power; however such challenges can be safety valves that relieve the pressure for change, as opposed to intensifying it. M. Lane Bruner argues that the Roman festival Saturnalia operated in just this fashion. Saturnalia was held once a year, on December 17th, and eventually took place over a week lasting until the 23rd. The purpose of this festival was to worship the god Saturn, but during that festival

people were also permitted to adopt a carnivalistic attitude of flipping official roles, and to ridicule those who ruled them (Miller, 2010, 172). Contemporary versions of this festival include the New Orleans Mardi Gras, and other similar festivals. However, Bruner argues that this festival was important for maintaining the positions of those in power, as it gave an opportunity for those unhappy with the current situation to vent their frustration, thereby preventing it from building up into something that would present much a challenge to the established order (2006, 138).

Similarly, Lauren Langman argues that no matter how biting a critique advanced by humourous or satirical protest is, it holds no real threat to those in power because it offers a nonthreatening outlet for dissatisfaction and criticism. Individuals are offered a venue where they can act out their frustrations for a designated period of time, and following that return to their everyday lives (Langman, 2008, 674). Finally, Thomas McFarlane and Iain Hay conducted an examination of newspaper coverage of anti G8/G20 protests. In this examination they specifically focused on humourous actions, and techniques aimed at challenging and making fun of officials. Their conclusion was that such actions are typically perceived by outside observers, those not involved in the action but who witnessed it, as nothing more than people being idiots and having fun (2003, 218). Exemplifying this attitude, Joseph Heath and Andrew Potter argue that these sorts of activists are exercising nothing more than juvenile anti-conformity. They argue that those who refuse to conform, “not only cost more to service, they often

gum up the works for everyone else. In this context, individualism often shades over into narcissistic disregard for the needs of others" (Heath et al, 2004, 237).

What these critiques suggest is that the public, by and large, really does not care when large cultural symbols are made fun of, or "exposed". Part of the explanation for this situation can be found in the analysis offered by Jodi Dean, which was examined in the first chapter. Dean does not specifically deal with culture jamming, but the leap is not difficult to make. Following Slavoj Žižek, Dean has argued that we live in a world of declining symbolic efficiency, one where cultural symbols and identities do not have strong connections to individuals. Instead, people are constantly cycling through these symbols, holding on to one for a short period, until a conflicting idea emerges to which they may latch onto, until this cycle continues with the introduction of yet another idea or identity. If cultural symbols have such a fluid hold on individuals, the jamming of any one of those symbols is unlikely to cause any sort of upheaval. Rather, in the words of Dean, we "mobilize the loss" and search for something new to which to attach ourselves (Dean, 2010, 121). Or the challenge becomes categorized, in an attempt to de-politicize the source of that challenge. By categorized I am referring to the ability of those in the distribution of the sensible to label unwanted political challenges as "irrational", "radical", or "dangerous". These labels work to incorporate a claim for something new into an utterance that is already understood within the confines of distribution of the sensible. This raises the question of the actual political impact of culture jamming tactics such as those used and promoted

by the Yes Men and, in particular, whether and how they comprise the sort of disruption we might typically expect of genuinely subversive political activism.

In their early days as members of the Yes Men, Vamos and Servin found themselves representing the World Trade Organization (WTO) in a few instances beginning with the George W. Bush identity correction discussed in Chapter Two. Shortly after they were discovered as the culprits behind this action, a fellow activist, Jonathan Prince, approached them with a web domain name that he had purchased a few years earlier, but which he had not yet put to use. This domain was www.gatt.org. GATT stands for the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, the agreement from which the WTO evolved. Within the world of global trade and international relations, this connection is well known, and it would not be unreasonable for someone to assume that gatt.org was an official website of the WTO (The Yes Men, 2004, 15). Vamos and Servin noted that the timing was particularly perfect. The domain was received shortly before the 1999 WTO meeting was scheduled to come together for in Seattle. Working towards this event, Vamos and Servin decided to design their own WTO website. Believing, correctly as it turned out, that some people might confuse www.gatt.org with the legitimate WTO website www.wto.org (Yes Men – Salzburg).

The first official response to the website came from none other than the WTO itself. In a press release on November 25th 1999, then Director-General of the WTO Mike Moore stated that he was "deeply concerned about the recent appearance of anonymous websites which copy important design features of the

WTO's official websites. This causes confusion among visitors looking for genuine information from the WTO, disrupting a much-needed democratic dialogue" (WTO, 1999). Vamos and Servin note that there was not much coverage of Moore's release, so they took it upon themselves to "forward it on to thousands of their best friends" (Yes Men – Salzburg). While this did not seem to clear up any confusion about which website was genuine, as I will show shortly, it did result in gatt.org receiving high rankings in a number of major search engines (Yes Men – Salzburg).

In May 2000, organizers of a conference in Salzburg on international trade law sent an e-mail to gatt.org, asking whether Mike Moore might be available to speak as a panelist. The reply organizers received was that Moore was not available however Dr. Andreas Bichlbauer (actually Jacques Servin) would be happy to serve as his replacement. The Yes Men's goal for this event was to publically embarrass conference organizers, hopefully leading to mass press coverage about their prank and, by extension, their critiques of the WTO. This goal was to be accomplished by saying absolutely outrageous things until someone caught on. For example, Dr. Bichlbauer advocated such things as the need for violence in the banana trade. He also argued that if we are serious about embracing the free market it needs to be extended to all areas, including encouraging people to sell their votes to the highest bidder if they so choose (Yes Men – Salzburg). This last point was inspired by an American student's satire website VoteAuction.com, which was designed to protest the way moneyed interests undermined the democratic process. That site was actually mistaken by

most as a serious project, leading to a number of legal actions against the site (Yes Men, 2004, 42-43). In this case, however, those claims and Dr. Bichlbauer's staunch defense of "the free-market character of Hitler's economic policy" during a luncheon after the talk were all taken in stride. No substantial objections were raised. The Yes Men left this event disappointed that no one had thought anything was amiss (Yes Men – Salzburg).

Since that first presentation, the Yes Men have had a number of other opportunities to represent the WTO in a variety of contexts. On July 19th, 2001, the day before a massive anti-globalization rally in Genoa, Italy, CNBC Market Wrap Europe e-mailed gatt.org inviting a WTO representative to debate an anti-globalization representative on air (Yes Men - Cnbc; Yes Men, 2004, 52). WTO representative, Granwyth Hulatberi (Jacques Servin) responded to the call and was scheduled to debate Barry Coates, from the World Development Movement. The World Development Movement is a left leaning anti-poverty NGO based in London and Edinburgh (WDM – About). Along with Coates, the host of the show Nigel Roberts and Vernon Ellis, the International Chairman of Andersen Consulting, were present. During the interview Hulatberi made several broad statements, such as how private schooling could prevent Coates's children from thinking the same way as his parents. He also stated that while Coates was correct that mass income inequality existed he was wrong that this was a problem, stating that "the rich are right because they have power, and the poor are wrong because they don't." While Coates was understandably agitated during the interview, no one, before or after the interview, thought anything was amiss. Hulatberi was

even contacted after the program thanking him for his engaging interview (Yes Men - CNBC).

The Yes Men continued their strategy of saying absolutely outrageous things, in the spirit of satire and identity correction, in hopes of generating some sort of strong media reaction. This included the golden phallus event mentioned in the previous chapter. However, with the exception of a speaking engagement at a university, where they proposed a program for "recycling" consumed fast food for the world's poor, they received little, if any, strong reaction from the immediate audience or through the media (The Yes Men, 2004, 135 & 146). This situation, in many ways, mirrors the critiques of informational activism, brought forward in Chapter One. What these responses should begin to remind us of is the void information activism often seems subject to. By void I simply mean the lack of substantial impact contradicting facts, or strong critiques, appear to have in the wider public. As I argued in Chapter One, the enormous circulation of varying claims, of all sorts, renders the shock power of new information as very low.

Of course these sorts of challenges are not always taken in stride. In the 2009 Environment Canada prank discussed in Chapter Two, the Yes Men impersonated Environment Canada, sending out fake news releases claiming to commit to incredibly ambitious environmental goals at a time when Canada was moving in the opposite direction. Reaction to this action was mixed. Several newspapers proclaimed that Canada had been shamed, or embarrassed, by this act that placed a spotlight on the country's questionable environmental record. For

example, the Toronto Star ran the headline “Hoax Slices Through Canadian Spin on Warming” (Woods, 2009). On the other side was anger, not at the content per se, but rather that this sort of action distracts from real processes that lead to actual solutions. After the Yes Men had taken credit for the fake news releases, Dimitri Soudas, a spokesperson for the Prime Minister’s office, replied with a statement that "time would be better used by supporting Canada's efforts to reach an agreement instead of sending out hoax press releases… More time should be dedicated to playing a constructive role instead of childish pranks” (CBC News, 2009). Compare this reaction to the example, in the first chapter, of the gymnasium protest in the Yukon. In that situation, high school students stormed into the Yukon legislature, disrupting the proceedings in protest of a planned shutdown of their school gymnasium. In reply to those students actions the Speaker of the House, David Laxton, released a statement saying that during his time in the army he had “seen what happens when the democratic process, rights and privileges are compromised and eroded” and urged them to respect the “freedoms … Canadian soldiers have fought and died to protect” (Hopper, 2012). While Laxton’s statement is more dramatic, the theme remains the same in both of these examples. The actions of the Yes Men and the actions of these students are framed as an unhelpful interruption of the real work of government. While this parallel is not necessarily indicative of the Yes Men’s action failing, it does suggest that this action may have failed to create a new pathway of discussion. The reason is that like the physical and informational disruptions discussed in the first chapter, this action does not seem capable of acting outside of the distribution

of the sensible. Their actions are applauded by their supporters, and labeled as irrational by those who disagree.

Through these critiques, the charge revolves around the effect these sorts of actions actually have on others, those in control and those we are simply trying to get on board with a cause. In the context of disruption, the goal is not necessarily to bring these others on board with a cause; instead it is quite modest. The goal is to simply make those who occupy positions of power, those who hold a spot in the disruption of the sensible, perceive those in the part with no part as making a political claim and from there, regardless of what happens afterward, a disruption has taken place. In one sense it could be argued that those who disagreed with the action, those occupying the distribution of the sensible, actually perceive actions that they label as irrational or dangerous as political acts. The need, or instinct, to label an action as irrational or dangerous signifies that a particular threat to the distribution of the sensible is perceived- a threat that requires denunciation to prevent it from gaining traction. Despite this, I would argue that the level of perception necessary for a disruption has not occurred in these examples.

There is a distinction in what it means to perceive a claim as political in nature that needs to be made. Rancière argues that popular understandings of democracy can be understood as projects that temper "democratic excess" (2007, 8). He also argues that "consensus is reduced to suppression. It works as a policing agent at depoliticizing conflict so that all interests can function in a

harmonized manner" (Rancière, 2006, 105-106). The tempering or suppression that occurs in response to moments of democratic excess, such as when a group impersonates Environment Canada, are all responses available to those in the distribution of the sensible and tools used for the continuation of that distribution. Access to those responses is what prevents the moments I have been discussing from being political moments. This was the argument made in Chapter One, when I examined Rancière's understanding of September 11th, 1999. He argued that the community was able to draw on "traditional symbolical points of reference, to integrate the event within a framework in which it represents its relation to itself, to others and to the Other, On this point, no rupture occurred; there was no revelation of a gap between the real of American life and the symbolic life of the American people" (Rancière, 2010c, 99).

The perception I am seeking in this project is the revelation of the gap that Rancière discusses. It is a moment when the utterance of the part with no part is perceived and during that moment of perception no symbol reference points, what I have earlier called categorization, are available. Once this level of perception has been achieved, a political disruption has taken place.

Disruption as a personal exercise

As noted in Chapter Two, Greil Marcus suggested that the S.I considered the Notre Dame Affair to be an early example of a disruptive act of détournement. To recall, the Notre Dame Affair involved a number of individuals being led by Michel Moure into the Notre Dame cathedral in France during Easter worship on

the 9th of April 1950. Once at the front of the sanctuary, Moure read aloud a sermon denouncing the Church, and those who followed it. Before Moure even had a chance to complete his sermon, guards charged him with their swords, and the crowd descended upon him. This action can be read as disruptive insofar as it openly challenged clerical authority, and forced parishioners to examine an identity they might have previously taken for granted, in a context where such a challenge would previously have been unthinkable, and in a context where no provision was made for the expression of such views. However, it was not only the Church authorities and parishioners who were disrupted by this action. As we learned at the beginning of Chapter Two, Moure's principal motivation for the Notre Dame Affair was to destroy the church within himself (Marcus, 1989, 311). The Church was something that Moure had long struggled with, and in order to free himself from those struggles he needed to challenge the symbolism that organized his own sense of self and possibility.

There is something in this form of personal disruption that is useful for a world of symbolic inefficiency. In order to explore this I am going to return to the definition of disruption. Rancière's portrayal of a disruptive moment largely rests on the senses. In everyday life those who occupy a spot in the prevailing distribution of the sensible become accustomed to a certain view and way of life. Rancière draws on the regime of perception and the regime of aesthetics to highlight the way one becomes trained, in a sense, to perceive the world in specific ways. Sarah Ahmed argues this training stems from understandings that one perceives as familiar. How we become oriented towards certain objects, or

ideas, and not others is linked to this idea of familiarity. We become oriented towards objects that make us feel "at home" (Ahmed, 2006, 6-7). Ahmed argues that we are continually engaged in gestures that solidify certain orientations over others, and through those gestures one becomes shaped by their orientations (Ahmed, 2006, 55). She argues that such beliefs, or orientations, become more solidified as one takes part in more and more activities geared in that same direction. For example, if one worked for the World Trade Organization, or as an accountant involved in international trade issues, Ahmed would argue that the longer they worked in that context, and the world view attached to it, the more stuck to that perspective their viewpoint would become (Ahmed, 2006, 57). For Ahmed, to be shaped, and oriented, towards an object eventually makes the history of that object disappear from view. Using the example of a writing table, Ahmed argues that "being oriented toward the writing table might even provide the condition of possibility for its disappearance" (Ahmed, 2006, 37). By invoking the term disappearance, Ahmed is sketching a picture similar to Rancière's regime of perspective. This is a situation where only one particular view point is available to us, and our ability to question how objects, or people, emerged in a particular way is largely absent. Disruption is the moment when the possibility of that questioning re-emerges.

Ahmed argues that in order to bring an object into view, we need to be able to consider its emergence (Ahmed, 2006, 38). For that consideration to occur Ahmed draws on Martin Heidegger's distinction between "ready at hand" and "present at hand". Ready at hand is when an object is available to us in the way it

is intended to be. The only thing that is important, or possible to see, is the finished product, operating as we expect it to operate. Thus this object is only perceived, and used, in one particular way. An object becomes present at hand when that single understanding of the object is challenged, for example if it breaks and one is forced to consider it in a different light. For Heidegger, it is only when an object becomes present at hand that one is able to able to examine the properties, the history, that make the object what it is. Through that examination one is finally in a position to evaluate how the finished product came to be (Ahmed, 2006, 47).

Such moments of investigation, or questioning, can arise in a number of ways. They are moments in which a particular world view--where, for example, what is presumed to be definitive of the table (to use one of Ahmed's examples) is that it is a space for writing--is complicated by a competing notion about the purpose, or emergence, of an object, relationship or practice. In a slightly similar manner to Ahmed, Davide Panagia also argues that our modes of perceiving the world are self-policed through a regime of value. For Panagia, regimes of value are the associations one draws on when engaged in an encounter with an object, individual, or idea. For example, when looking at Ahmed's table a regime of value forms that conjures the associations with writing or eating. Or, the association that David Laxton makes between the students who disrupt the Yukon legislature and the crumbling of democratic institutions. Those associations form the context that frames the emergence of individuals or objects. This is the context that also limits one's ability to see beyond what they have always seen or

understood. However, Panagia argues the through senses such as taste, touch, and sight one can enter into a political moment unhindered by a regime of value through the "immediacy of sensory perception" (Panagia, 2009, 27-28).

To experience a moment without a regime of value means to experience that moment without associations, without context. For example, to draw on the Yukon situation one last time, this would be a situation where individuals, like Laxton, were unable to conjure up any associations or contextual understandings with the student's disruption of parliament. If upon these students entrance into the legislature certain associations were unavailable, such as the connection with the breakdown of democratic institutions, the context and perception of that event in the eyes of individuals such as David Laxton would be completely different. Instead of a context shaped by associations with fear and disgust the only understandings would be those available in the immediacy of the moment, the words coming from those students mouths.

This is not to say that a situation devoid of reference points would necessarily lead someone like Laxton to listen to utterances of these students as rational political critiques of his views, or actions. Rather, it is the presence of those words as an event that cannot be categorized that opens the potential for something new. The first encounter with an object, idea, or person is one of sensation. We smell the aroma, we feel the texture, we see the shape, and we hear the high or low pitch of a voice or other sound. From that first sensation a signification, or perception, forms. One walks into a room and sees Ahmed's table,

which becomes significant of writing or eating. Immanuel Kant, quoted by Panagia, makes the helpful distinction between deeming something good and deeming something beautiful. “To deem something good, I must always know what sort of a thing the object is intended to be, i.e., I must have a concept of it. That is not necessary to enable me to see beauty in a thing” (Panagia, 2009, 29).

Panagia argues that beauty is a concept that cannot be categorized; it is a signification that occurs immediately and one that cannot come from any prior understanding. He goes on to argue that “the immediacy of the moment of aesthetic impact will also deny the possibility of a rule governing the beautiful for if immediacy interrupts our regimes of perception to the point of discomposing our way of attending to the world, we must conclude that the immediacy will also disrupt our relationship to rule and rule following” (Panagia, 2009, 30). This moment of immediacy is an interruption in the orientation process described by Ahmed. I walk into the room and initial comprehend the table through sensation. In ordinary circumstance this sensation gives way to signification, we understand the object as it is meant to be, and from there the familiarity of being oriented towards an object we understand. But, if the table is broken, at an odd angle, or positioned in some other unfamiliar way, that signification might fail to emerge. Instead, familiar orientation gives way to disorientation as the signification of this familiar object is challenged by competing significations. In those moments, sensations we are unable to classify or categorize can produce unexpected experiences and thoughts. Such sensations produce an encounter with “the uncanny, by that which resists signification” (Rancière, 2004, 63).

Panagia argues that these moments can occur when an unexpected sensation is experienced, in those moments the regime of value that signify the meaning of an object or person is momentarily unavailable, and it is in such moments that disruptions can occur (Panagia, 2009, 28 & 73). Panagia draws on the example of an individual someone entering a piazza filled with chocolatiers and are bombarded with the sounds, scents, and perhaps even the flavours, of bells and chocolate (Panagia, 2009, 46-49). This piazza, Panagia argues, "creates a spatio-temporal plateau of diverse forms of perceptual part-taking…the piazza is a space where disjunctive vectors of movement create possibilities that extend well beyond the perceptual correspondences of the narratocratic" (Panagia, 2009, 49).

How does one come to be close enough to an object or situation that their sensory capacities are acted upon? In Panagia's examination these disruptive moments occur unexpectedly, when we are suddenly bombarded by a multiplicity of sights, sounds, smells, and tastes. But, at the same time, there is work done that has set the stage that makes unexpected moments more likely. That work is the alteration of a commonly understood situation, so that when the situation is experienced an unexpected sensation might arise. For instance, the example of a piazza filled with chocolate venders. Panagia argues that "an attunement to the aurality of democratic culture reconfigures our perceptual appreciation of what political claim making can sound like" (Panagia, 2009, 17). In another example, Panagia invokes the Slow Food Movement. He argues that the Slow Food Movement is a situation where the particularity of food is focused on to such an

extent that one becomes absorbed in the flavour, and that becoming absorbed allows our sense to be reconstituted in the immediacy of the moment. We become "reconstituted through encounters with external forces…When a food particle enters the mouth a particular sensation occurs that configures an organ of perception…the flavor sensation at once articulates the domain of its organ and disarticulates the regime of perception" (Panagia, 2009, 146). Slow Food Movement participants, as the name suggests, choose to slow down in the act of preparing and eating food (Andrews, 2008, 77). In that choice they prime themselves for the potential of unexpected understandings and sensations with the food that they eat.

There is a crucial distinction that emerges here in our understanding of disruption. Consider the typical characterization of the Yes Men. In their self-description, they say that they are "impersonating big-time criminals in order to publicly humiliate them" (Yes Men - Index). The corollary interpretation is that the Yes Men offer spectators the opportunity to decide whether they will continue to support targeted individuals and organizations. In this view, these actions attempt to disrupt one's relationship with other people, or external symbols. Panagia offers an account of disruption that is more localized, in which disruption is more akin to a singular personal experience that occurs when our absorption by prevailing structures of perception are challenged by competing sensations and the notions they inspire.

To experience this sort of disruption requires work. One must be positioned in a situation of heightened sensitivity to possibilities that exceed established regimes of perception. The S.I. speaks to the work of disorientation in their examinations of psychogeography and dérive. Pyschogeography refers to the way architecture affects an individual's emotions, and following that, how it alters the way one envisions the world around them. It is defined as "the study of the specific effects of the geographical environment (whether consciously organized or not) on the emotions and behaviors of individuals" (Knabb, 2007a, 52). It was pioneered by Gilles Ivan, in 1953, who wrote that "a mental disease has swept the planet: banalization. Everyone is hypnotized by production and comfort – sewage system, elevator, bathroom, washing machine" (Ivan, 2009, 36). For Ivan escaping banalization was possible through the same venues that introduce it. Architecture, buildings, roads, and nature are banal, but they also hold the power to give us a view into something different. This possibility exists, but can only be seen through "shifting angles" and "receding perspectives" because we exist within a closed landscape, where meaning is predetermined (Ivan, 2009, 34-35). Achieving those shifts requires "CONTINUOUS DÉRIVE. The changing of landscape from one hour to the next will result in complete disorientation" (Ivan, 2009, 40). Debord also had a number of proposals for how one could achieve this state of disorientation. For him, the goal was to reorient architecture so that it would bring about these moments. However, prior to that achievement other approaches were developed. In one example, which he describes as a "feeble beginning," Debord discusses a friend who had recently travelled through the

Harz region of Germany, guided by a map of London. In this example, the point is that one is experiencing a setting that one is very familiar with but in a very unfamiliar manner. Through that contrast, moments of disorientation can emerge (Debord, 2006a, 11).

In the contemporary context, Jane Bennett offers another way to consider internal moments of disruption. Bennett's larger purpose is to develop an environmental ethic that considers nonhuman entities as political actors. I will not dwell on this, as it is beyond the scope of this project. However, her goal is to challenge our perceptual capacities so that we might perceive something that has been overlooked and previously understood as incapable of having a political voice. In her discussion of enchantment, Bennett argues, in a similar manner to Debord, that objects hold a multiplicity of meanings and understandings; however a conscious effort must be made in order to perceive that multiplicity (Bennett, 2001, 32). Bennett draws on Henry David Thoreau's courting of the Wild. For Thoreau, going out into the heart of nature, an area unaltered by humans, opened up the potential to experience a moment where new understandings of nature could be perceived. This is how Bennett understands enchantment, a moment where we can understand more of what we have always seen (Bennett, 2001, 95). For example, Bennett discusses an experience she had with three objects she saw in gutter: a dead rat, a glove, and a leaf. These are objects that have fairly set meanings; they are inanimate objects that have no particular purpose. However, on that particular day Bennett notes that the particular way the sun was shining, and the placement of these three objects worked together to produce a surprising

effect, for objects traditionally overlooked (Bennett, 2010, 5). For Bennett, that effect was a demonstration of what she calls thing-power. She writes that "it issued a call, even if I did not quite understand what it was saying. At the very least it provoked affects in me: I was repelled by the dead (or was it merely sleeping) rat and dismayed by the litter, but I also felt something else: a nameless awareness of the impossible singularity of that rat, that configuration of pollen, that otherwise utterly banal, mass-produced plastic water-bottle cap" (Bennett, 2010, 4).

As with all experiences of disruption, to become enchanted, requires work by the individual. Paula Kramer draws on Bennett to demonstrate how this takes place. Examining contemporary outdoor dances, Kramer argues that these dances construct moments where individuals become more susceptible to disruption. The dance she describes is one where individuals go out into uninhabited points of nature and dance, conforming to the objects around them. For example, if one encounters a rock, they alter their position to accommodate it. There is an intentionality here that is not present in the way we typically interact with the world. The dance's entire focus is on the placement of natural objects, and through this focus moments may arise when an individual's regime of perception is challenged. Why is a rock, or tree, placed as it is? What does that mean for one's own actions? Considerations such as this may not arise, and even if they do, may not register as particularly political, or challenging. However, this dance sets the conditions for the possibility of such encounters. Kramer argues that that outdoor dance can offer conditions for noticing "'regimes of perception that

enable us to consult nonhumans more closely', as Bennett calls for" (Kramer, 2012, 90). In a similar line of reasoning, Debord suggests that the drifting activity engaged in by S.I. members "gives rise to new objective conditions of behavior that bring about the disappearance of a good number of the old ones" (Debord, 2006b, 64).

Such practices can be understood as actions that attempt to re-shape individuals. As noted, Ahmed argues that individuals, through repetitive actions, become shaped to fit certain orientations. Ahmed's focusses primarily on the body, but in Anna Gibbs rendering of Brian Massumi a similar claim is made in to what Massumi calls the affective force of thought. This force develops through our initial reactions to the idea being presented. These initial reactions stay with us, regardless of any contradictory information that might subsequently challenge that idea. That initial reaction becomes solidified through the act of repetition (Gibbs, 2011, 256). In order to break with a particular orientation, individuals must make the effort to place themselves in familiar situations to which they have been shaped in a particular way, and engage with them in a way that makes the familiar situation strange. Through that strangeness the possibility of a disruption arises. For the S.I. member who wanted to experience a new understanding of a particular region of Germany, he travelled to that region and walked around in a way that might bring about renewed understandings. In Kramer's dance, participants wanted to experience the disruptive utterances of nonhuman entities so they travelled to where those entities reside and directly interacted with them. Through this immersion, participants work to achieve the immediacy that Panagia

discusses, a moment where the customary regime of value is unavailable and competing understandings emerge.

These moments are, in some ways, very different from the context at hand. In these examples individuals are purposefully placing themselves in familiar situations that bring about strange encounters, encounters unaccountable for within the prevailing distribution of the sensible. At the same time, there are examples that can help us contrive of these sorts of encounters in an activist, perhaps even more antagonistic, situation. The Clandestine Insurgent Rebel Clown Army, otherwise known as CIRCA, provides an interesting example. CIRCA is a group of activists who dress up as clowns and typically make appearances at anti-G8/G20 protests. In 2005 the G8 summit was scheduled for Gleneagles, Scotland. In response a counter summit called the Festival for Full Enjoyment took place in Edinburgh, Scotland on July 4th, 2005. L.M. Bogad, who was at this event, conjures the image of a solid line of riot police, clad in black body armor and armed on one side. On the other was a solid line of clowns, dressed in baggy clown pants, frilly shirts, and face paint. One of these clowns, who went by the name of Trixie, was running up and down the line kissing the shields held by riot police, leaving lipstick stains in her path. Suddenly, in synchronization, the clowns started moving back and forth in place, as if they were towing the police forward and then pushing them back. They were "bending at the hip, arms and hands extended, and going 'Shhhhh', then standing back up while making a 'Whooo' sound" (Bogad, 2010, 537-539). Through this synchronization, CIRCA had made the police unwitting participants in their act.

In this particular instance, in a somewhat surprising turn of events, after about five minutes of this the police turned around and left the scene. One way to interpret this situation is that the police reacted this way because they had entered into, what they perceived as, an antagonistic situation and the understanding was suddenly turned on its head- all of a sudden the police were 'participants' in the event they had come to end (Bogad, 2010, 537-539). By virtue of being pulled into the act and becoming participants, one could argue that the police officers experienced a moment of disruption. This is a moment where the regime of value that established expectations for the roles to be played by both police and activists collapsed, and something unexpected emerged in its place. CIRCA actions can be understood as a deprograming of the space that they and the police were occupying, in order to open up the possibility of new responses (St. John, 2008, 172).

A Yes Men approach to an internally disruptive moment

Following the disappointing results in their first forays as representatives of the WTO, the Yes Men decided that they needed to change their approach. Instead of the usual use of humour, and general ridiculousness, they decided that they would just go in and tell the truth (The Yes Men, 2004, 152). This opportunity came when they were invited to represent the WTO at a speaking engagement to a group of accounting professionals at a conference in Sydney, Australia on May 21st, 2002 (The Yes Men, 2004, 151).

They decided that the Sydney Conference would be different from their previous presentations as representatives of the WTO, which varied little in terms of substantial reaction, with the exception of the outrage that greeted their presentation to college students on their plan to 'recycle' used food for poor people, an instance they chalked up to the possibility that "college students are simply smarter than college graduates. That is to say, people emerge from business school measurably less intelligent than when they entered" (The Yes Men, 2004, 150). In order to have some effect on the "less intelligent group," they decided to try something completely different. "Since parody hasn't worked, they've decided to try that old standby, sincerity" (Yes Men – Sydney). That sincerity would come through an announcement that they were shutting down the WTO, based on "facts. Lots of them. An avalanche of facts, unleavened by hyperbole, promotion, or hype" (The Yes Men, 2004, 152).

Before a crowd of accountants and, by chance, the Canadian Consul-General, Mr. Sprat (the pseudonym for this event), begin discussing the history and evolution of the WTO and how it was "founded with the poor of the earth in mind, upon the principle that a free marketplace benefits all, leading to prosperity for everyone including the poor" (The Yes Men, 2004, 160). He discussed how, despite these admirable intentions, many negative ramifications had since resulted from those policies. These included the fact that from 1960 to 1980 Sub-Saharan economies had grown by 36 percent, but between 1980 and 2000 those same economies declined by 15 percent and the fact that more than two billion people are currently malnourished (The Yes Men, 2004, 162). On the basis of these

alarming facts Mr. Sprat announced that the WTO would be shut down. In its place a new organization would be built, the Trade Regulation Organization, that would be based on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, with its only goal being to "harness world trade so that it benefits all human beings" (The Yes Men, 2004, 168).

In many ways this event followed a familiar trend. For a time those in the room, and many in the wider world, believed this speech had come from official representative of the WTO. In Canada, an MP for the now defunct Canadian Alliance Party, John Duncan, raised the issue of the WTO's impending shutdown in Parliament. Stating that "the World Trade Organization has decided to effect a cessation of all operations to be accomplished over the next four months, culminating by the end of September…The World Trade Organization will reintegrate as a new trade body, the Trade Regulation Organization. Will the government inform Canadians what impact this will have on our appeals on lumber, agriculture and other ongoing trade disputes" (Baxter, 2002)? Later, once the hoax was discovered, a familiar range of responses emerged as well. Duncan was embarrassed for being taken in by the hoax, and pledged to read press releases much more closely in the future. The WTO issued a press release to major news organizations stating "While we can appreciate their sense of humour, we would not wish for reputable news organizations like yours to be counted among those duped" (Baxter, 2002). Others, it is likely, were annoyed at the amount of time spent dealing with this hoax. In other words, the back and forth

confirmed established disagreements between those who supported this sort of action and those who did not.

However, in keeping with our renewed understanding of the personal dimensions of disruption as an experience, this predictable wider reaction must be held against the potential significance of the event at a more local level. The Yes Men write that they expected a number of reactions to this stunt, from being booed off the stage to being arrested. What they did not expect, but in fact got, was widespread approval. In most of the comments they received immediately afterwards participants at the conference suggested that they too had been thinking along the same lines. One individual came up to them saying "I'm as right-wing as the next fellow…but it's time we gave something back to the countries we've been doing so well by" (Yes Men, 2004, 170). Statements such as this, and many others like it, were also reported by Servon and Vamos (Yes Men, 2004, 171-173).

The local context, as noted, was a group of professional accountants (and, by chance, the Canadian Consul-General) who, we can assume by virtue of their attendance, had a professional interest in the WTO. Permit me to make one more assumption here: many of those in attendance likely had a familiar understanding of the WTO that was, more or less, in line with the official rhetoric surrounding it. According to the WTO website, “The World Trade Organization — the WTO — is the international organization whose primary purpose is to open trade for the benefit of all” (WTO mission statement, 2013). Differently put, through decreased

barriers on trade, economic and social well-being will follow. This leaves us with a group of individuals who enter into a familiar situation, one they perceive in a particular way.

Following Louise Owen, and her use of Margret Rose's model of two audiences, this particular group entered the room as a trusting audience. Their dis-belief is suspended, and they listen expecting that what will be said is something they can agree with, their defenses are down (Owen, 2011, 30). Of course, at a certain point, they would realize that what is being said is not the standard WTO line, in fact it is extremely different from what they would traditionally hear in this sort of venue. Despite this, they assume that the speaker shares many of their own beliefs and interests and their defenses stay down, they continue to listen. They listen and, at a certain point, they started to agree. Now agreement, even if it is only temporary, can be understood as a form of imitation. Several theorists argue that we are most easily influenced when we begin to imitate those we associate or identify with (Gibbs, 2011, 252; Bandura, 2003, 77). Gibbs quotes Bourdieu who argues that "deferred thoughts can be triggered off at a distance in space and time by the simple effort of re-placing the body in an overall posture which recalls the associated thoughts and feelings, in one of the inductive states of the body, which, as actors know, gives rise to states of mind" (Gibbs, 2010, 257; Bourdieu, 1992, 73). Even in the seemingly innocent situation when one finds their facial expression synchronizes with another, such as a shared smile, can give rise to an emotional connection (Gibbs, 2010, 186).

That agreement serves as a form of re-placing. Like Kramer's dance and the S.I.'s practice of drift, individuals enter into a familiar situation in an unfamiliar way that alters their regime of perspective and opens the possibility for something new to be perceived. However, unlike the examples of dancing or drifting the potentially disruptive moment occurs later on for these accountants. That moment arose when they realized something was amiss, that they had been duped by a group of anti-WTO activists. Recall the CIRCA example, where police officers were inadvertently pulled in to the action that they had been sent to disperse. When they realized that they had inadvertently become a part of the action, their regime of value became unavailable and they sought an escape from the situation, in that case escape simply meant walking away. In the WTO example escape is not so simple. Once the individuals in this meeting discovered the hoax their regimes of value would also have been thrown into disarray. In that moment defense mechanisms that allow the labeling of anti WTO activists, and specifically their ideas, as radical, misinformed, or dangerous fail to activate because they have momentarily identified and agreed with the activists and their message, because it was presented to them as authoritative. In that moment, the part with no part becomes visible as a political actor with a claim to make, not from some external location, but from within.

Conclusion

In many ways locating disruption as a personal, internal, moment is extremely unsatisfying especially within the context that I have placed this work. This is the context of the spectacle, one where particular worldviews are constantly deployed through mass imagery and common sense understandings. But, at the same time, focusing on internal moments of disruption seems to offer one of the few pathways left for the introduction of something truly different. The first chapter of this project offered a sweeping critique of much modern day activism. I suggested that many of these practices can be roughly divided into two areas, informational activism and direct action. The former refers to any act that seeks wide public change through the distribution of new information. Included in this would be most internet activism, picketing and boycotting businesses, handing out flyers, and so on. The latter is any action that seeks to stop a practice perceived as negative, as opposed to attempting to convince people that a practice is wrong. Examples of this include anything from online denial of service attacks, to Earth Liberation Front activists that use arson as a political tool, as well as anything in between. While I recognize that this binary cannot fully account for the multitude of approaches utilized as resistance strategies, the discussion aimed to highlight a problem constantly faced by those using these sorts of political approaches: modern day society is very capable of absorbing all types of challenges, rendering them nonthreatening to the prevailing order. Informational activism gets lost in a world of conflicting opinions; activism that ups the threat

level is categorized as irrational and/or dangerous and criminalized. In order to escape this bind, I took a turn towards culture jamming.

The allure of de-politicization facing many activists stems from a particularly strong world view. Following Herbert Marcuse, I argued that this is not a world view that dictates a specific mode of thought; rather it is a world view that dictates a specific way of life. Debord presented a similar understanding, and also suggested that this specific worldview is constantly reinforced through mass imagery (news programs, advertisements, etcetera), among other things. Détournment was then offered as a tool to combat the all-encompassing spectacle. This tool has continued in modern day culture jamming. This practice attacks the one-way symbols of the spectacle, challenging their meanings and opening them up to critique. In Stephen Duncombe's formulation "ethical spectacle offers up a different formulation. Instead of a dream's replacement, the ethical spectacle is a dream put on display. It is a dream that we can watch, think about, act within, try on for size, yet necessarily never realize. The ethical spectacle is a means, like the dreams it performs, to imagine new ends" (Duncombe, 2007, 174). This brings us closer to Rancière's understanding of disruption, a moment when parts that have previously been ignored are brought into view. The Yes Men have demonstrated that they are extremely effective at putting this alternative dream on display. This is the argument put forward by Carrie Lambert-Beatty, and others examined in Chapter Two. As noted, Lambert-Beatty positions the Yes Men as "an art of the plausible. It is always possible that Dow will have a change of heart; what the Yes

Men did was to make us, for a moment, believe that it had happened" (Lambert-Beatty, 2008, 320).

The problem I have identified with this approach is that giving society the opportunity to critique corporations or governments does not necessarily escape the prevailing distribution of the sensible. For example, does embarrassing Environment Canada actually amount to a disruption, a moment when those who support destructive environmental policies are forced to consider an alternative point of view? I have argued that, in most cases, the answer to that question would be no. Instead, individuals fall back on to the safety mechanisms available to them within the distribution of the sensible. The challenge is filed away as yet another piece of conflicting information, or its authors are condemned for acting childish. In each of these cases a disruption has failed to materialize because those in positions of authority, security and inclusion do not recognize the claim as new, instead recuperating the claim within the prevailing sensibilities.

Panagia argues that the moments when those sensibilities are truly challenged are moments of immediacy, moments when one's established regime of value is unavailable. Those moments, while not guaranteed, become more likely when one is absorbed in a familiar situation in an unfamiliar way. These sorts of moments, Kramer argues, offer the conditions for one to perceive something they have not previously perceived (Kramer, 2012, 90). These are conditions that make it possible to transition from a regime of perspective to a regime of aesthetics. This is a regime where one-way understandings are

challenged. That shift in perception is the emergence of the part with no part and a moment of disruption. I have argued that the Yes Men, in their Sydney action, set the conditions for the part with no part to appear. That appearance, as in Kramer's dance, may have occurred, but it is just as possible that it did not. This is why my formulation is, in many ways, so unsatisfying. Externally it offers very little. But, at the same time, that is the point I have been trying to get across. Panagia, and others, show us that politics does not have to be a large scale event, marked by mass publicity. Instead these political moments of disruption consist of personal moments, moments when what I have understood about the world is challenged.

In a way what I am arguing mirrors Jeffery C. Goldfarb's thesis that the politics of small things, of daily interactions between individuals, are just as important, if not more, as the large scale events that typically grab the attention of political theorists (2006, 1). Specifically targeting Hannah Arendt, Goldfarb argues that among many there is the tendency to "overlook the political significance of the free public space that is inherent in a wide range of human interactions. Such free space is to be found in workplaces and schools, government bureaucracies and corporate media institutions, and many other places in our daily lives" (2006, 4). For Goldfarb free spaces are interactions, occurring in spaces as small as a single conversation, which allow people to act freely. By freely he means acting in small ways, not in line with dominant power structures or ideologies that, in time, begin to take on a power of their own (Goldfarb, 2006, 46-47). The opening of this free space could be demonstrated in

the moment when a small group of accountants begin to think, and talk, differently about the system that they are apart of.

The Yes Men are an incredibly interesting and powerful model for the left. They have demonstrated time and time again their ability to challenge the one way flow of the spectacle. It is also possible, and indeed it has occurred, that the large scale actions I have been cautioning against will bring about a political disruption. My intention has not been to suggest that such a thing will never occur, or has not occurred in the past. Rather my intention has been to highlight an element of the Yes Men's strategy that is being neglected in most examinations of their work. This is a strategy that primes individuals for an entry into disruptive moments and following theorists like Goldfarb it strikes me that shifting our energies to these small and local venues is one of the few places left where politics can truly occur.

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