POLITICAL PRANKS: THE PERFORMANCE

OF RADICAL HUMOR

by

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This thesis examines the performance of political pranks by contemporary radical activists and anarchists. Pranks, used symbolically to subvert authority and collapse hierarchy, have become important tools for grassroots political movements. Activists utilize pranks as a form of "culture jamming" to undermine, humiliate, and educate. This thesis documents political pranks pulled by Earth First!, the Yippies, the Biotic Baking Brigade, and the Eugene Anarchists for Torrey (EAT) Campaign to show how pranks are performed and narrated within anarchist subcultures. Drawing on cultural and performance studies, as well as on anarchist theories, this thesis demonstrates how pranks can become performances of resistance and criticism that disrupt the status quo.

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DEDICATION

Dedicated to all of us with a subversive sense of humor: Let's hope

that everyone finally gets "the joke," and the system crumbles beneath

our cacophonous, riotous, revolutionary laughter.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In Corvallis, Oregon, 1985, the Forest Service had reserved a high school auditorium for a huge Smokey the Bear birthday party for elementary school children. There were going to be 300 kids present, plus parents. We printed up a leaflet (written in big letters so a child could understand) saying that the chances of Smokey's favorite forest being destroyed by logging was 10 times greater than being burned down in a forest fire. Actually logging accounts for most of the fires. Campers account for a small percentage; lightning accounts for the widest variety of fires, but they're small and they usually put themselves out because of accompanying thunderstorms. Children hardly cause *any* fires! Yet the Forest Service spends millions of dollars a year having Smokey tell kids not to play with matches. We had heard that the Forest Service didn't have a Smokey the Bear costume – someone had washed it and the bottom had shrunk way down. Earth First! did, so I put on the bear costume and walked into the party and the kids immediately surrounded me because it was Smokey's birthday – I was moving through this *sea of kids* passing out flyers. The Forest Service guys came over and said, "Look, can't you just leave? We don't mind you demonstrating outside, but we don't want you inside here." I said, "This is *my* birthday party; I'm not going anywhere."[1]

A successful prank is a nuanced and well-crafted event, executed with strategic planning and with anticipated results. A prank disrupts. It upsets. It turns heads and raises eyebrows. Some people smile, and some people scoff. Although dismissed as "child's play," pranks are actually complex performances of power and powerlessness.

Pranks operate on, in, and through power dynamics, inverting structures of status, authority, and convention. When combined with elements of parody and political wit, pranks can offer an entertaining act of social criticism. Political pranks are dramatic folk performances, subversive comedies, radical street theater. Also known as "*détournement*" or "culture jamming," political pranks draw on a long history of satire and parody in both performance and literature. As sociologists Hans Speier and Robert Jackall note, "along with persuasion and lies, advice and flattery, tokens of esteem and

bribery, banishment and violence, obedience and treachery, the joke belongs to the rich treasury of the instruments of politics."[2] Jesters, fools, and clowns have long used humor to question and ridicule authority; modern-day activists continue to find the practical joke a useful and amusing tactic.

The focus of this thesis is the use of pranks by political activists as a creative and public method to educate, entertain, and humiliate. Pranks are dynamic performances of mischief and dissent. Used symbolically to subvert authority and collapse hierarchy, pranks have become important tools for grassroots political movements. In this thesis, I examine how political pranks function and explain why radical activists – from the Situationists to the Biotic Baking Brigade, from Earth First! to the "Eugene Anarchists" – utilize pranks. With an emphasis on the activists' views of and goals for pranks, I explore the performance, philosophy, meaning, and repercussion of these political events. I argue that the performance of these "irrational" tactics of humor and play marks a critique of the conventional politics of "rationality" and "reason" that have brought about the very socio-economic conditions these activists deplore.

This thesis is divided into two parts. The first section, Chapters II and III, is theoretical and historical, providing an overview of the topic of pranks as political performances. Chapter II reviews previous scholarly literature on the subject of pranks and practical jokes and examines several theories and approaches from which this thesis draws; cultural, performance, and narrative theories are applied to pranks. Chapter III focuses on the theory and practices of anarchy and anarchism. Anarchism, I argue, has a particular relevance to the activists' political goals and philosophies, as well as to their conceptualization and enactment of cultural performances. This chapter examines how humor and performance are utilized and theorized by radical activists themselves. The influence of the Situationist International and the concept of "*détournement*" are also

explored. I argue, as do many political pranksters, that the situationist notions of "spectacle" and "*détournement*" are fundamental to understanding contemporary "revolutionary" performances.

The second part of the thesis – Chapters IV, V, and VI – contains "case studies" that examine specific pranks in literature and in enactments. Chapter IV discusses media and activism, analyzing how some activists conceive of pranks as "mind bombs," acts that "explode" to transform people's consciences. This chapter looks at the performances of Earth First! and the Yippies to show how radical activists utilize pranks to attract and subvert media attention. Chapter V examines the history and politics of pie-throwing. It highlights activists who sling pies to punish certain public personalities and to deliver particular political messages. This chapter documents the highly crafted symbolism activists instill in the performance of this type of prank as well as In the construction of subsequent communiqués. Chapter VI focuses on the recent phenomenon of "Eugene Anarchists" and specifically on a parodic political campaign they ran. This section reveals how humor and pranks can be utilized to subvert the hegemonic discourse on anarchism by challenging stereotypes of "terrorism." Chapter VII concludes with commentary on the efficacy and future of this type of political activism.

This thesis takes a multidisciplinary approach to pranks and pranksters, drawing on theory and methods from history, literature, folklore, and cultural studies. Although the pranks and pranksters I discuss have been documented by a variety of mainstream media sources, I have chosen to concentrate on the activists' own representations of their actions. I have conducted fieldwork with several political pranksters, although the interviews remained loosely structured, informal discussions, rather than strict question-and-answer sessions. I have also collected a variety of written material from pranksters –

flyers, stickers, posters, and emails – that display and explain their political motives (see Appendix A for a more thorough discussion of my methodology). This thesis combines ethnographies of personal narratives, political communiqués, and protest literature in the hopes of remaining faithful to the aims and opinions of political pranksters -- their ideology as well as their sense of humor.

Notes

[1] Mike Roselle, as quoted in V. Vale and Andrea Juno, ed., *Pranks!* (San Francisco: RE/Search, 1987) 126.

[2] Hans Speier and Robert Jackall, "Wit and Politics: An Essay on Laughter and Power," *The American Journal of Sociology* 103.5 (1998): 1353.

CHAPTER II

TOWARDS A (DISCIPLINED) THEORY OF PRANKS

A prank is a practical joke, a mischievous act, a trick, a hoax, a ruse. It is a humorous event, a form of play where only one of the two opposing sides realizes they are playing. Folklorist and anthropologist Richard Bauman defines pranks as

> enactments of playful deceit, in which one party or team (to be called trickster) intentionally manipulates features of a situation in such a way as to induce another person or persons (to be called victim or dupe) to have a false or misleading sense of what is going on and so to behave in a way that brings about discomfiture (confusion, embarrassment, etc) in the victim.[1]

Learned orally or through example, pranks are often repeated, yet they must continually defy expectation. Although the structure of the joke may remain the same, constant variation is necessary to maintain the elements of surprise, creativity, and humor.

Pranks function through ritualized inversion, subverting and sabotaging established power relations. Pranks operate by "undermining or ridiculing authority or the organizationally sanctioned hierarchy."[2] It is not surprising that pranks are most commonly associated with youth, as children's folklore experiments with power and powerlessness.[3] While adults are supposed to have matured beyond this type of mischievous behavior, pranks do continue past adolescence. According to journalists V. Vale and Andrea Juno,

> a prank connotes *fun, laughter, jest, satire, lampooning, making a fool of someone* -- all light-hearted activities. Thus do pranks camouflage the sting of deeper, more critical denotations, such as their direct challenge to all verbal and behavioral routines, and their undermining of the sovereign authority of words, language, visual images, and social conventions in general. Regardless of specific manifestation, a prank is always an evasion of reality. Pranks are the deadly enemy of reality. And "reality" -- its description and limitation -- has always been the supreme control trick used by a society to subdue the lust for freedom latent in its citizens.[4]

The genre of pranks includes a range of humorous, sneaky, and destructive acts, from children's practical jokes to subterfuge on a more elaborate scale. This thesis focuses on the latter, arguing that political activists utilize the pranks to challenge and disrupt power and prestige. This chapter examines scholarly literature on pranks and draws on performance and cultural studies to explore the radical or transgressive potential of political pranks.

<u>Literature Review</u>

Pranks are largely unexamined and certainly under-theorized by scholars. Other than juvenile and mean-spirited "How To" manuals, there is, to my knowledge, only one book devoted entirely to the aesthetics and artistry of pranks: *Pranks!* by V. Vale and Andrea Juno. Published in 1987 as part of the RE/Search series, this book contains interviews with many well-known pranksters and performance artists, including Yippie Abbie Hoffman, Earth First! co-founder Mike Roselle, *The Realist* publisher Paul Krassner, and Dead Kennedys' lead singer Jello Biafra. In the book's introduction, Vale and Juno begin to formulate the transformative power and revolutionary significance of pranks, stating that "the best pranks research and probe the boundaries of the occupied territory known as 'society' in an attempt to redirect that society toward a vision of life grounded not in dreadful necessity but rather continual poetic renewal."[5] Although the book is an excellent anthology of pranksters' recollections, the editors' journalistic style relies solely on conversation, sometimes at the expense of analysis. What it lacks in theory however, *Pranks!* makes up for in riotous storytelling.

There have been a handful of folkloric investigations of pranks, and these generally fall into three categories: children's/teenage folklore, occupational folklore, and holiday/celebration customs. For example, Julia Woodbridge Oxreider posits that

pranks played at girls' slumber parties are quests for identity and peer relationships.[6] As in most studies of logging culture, Barre Toelken considers practical jokes on the job as initiation rites for newcomers or "greenhorns."[7] In *Wobblies, Pile Butts, and Other Heroes: Laborlore Explorations,* Archie Green takes a historical and etymological approach to workplace pranks, examining acts of sabotage as rituals of resistance. Pranks are perhaps most often mentioned in relation to celebrations (weddings and birthdays, for example) and to holidays (such as Halloween and April Fool's Day).[8] In a chapter from *Folklore Matters* entitled "April Fool and April Fish," Alan Dundes suggests pranks are played on "individuals who are placed in some kind of new situation or status," such as high school graduates, newlyweds, or newcomers at summer camp.[9] By and large, academic investigations of pranks are few and far between; sometimes receiving only a cursory mention, most pranks are analyzed in journal- or chapter-length essays. While this thesis moves towards a more in-depth analysis of the performance and meaning of pranks, I focus here exclusively on *political* pranks.

Perhaps the lack of scholarly writing on pranks stems in part from the difficulty conducting a focused, contextual study on them. After all, there are only a few occasions, such as April Fool's Day, when "ritualized" pranks can be readily observed "in the field"; at other times, pranks are nearly impossible to predict or observe. Therefore ethnography must focus on the *aftermath* rather than the *event*, relying on stories of pranks rather than on performances. Analysis of pranks can occur on a number of levels, however, and can concentrate on the humor or on the social criticism, on the enactment or on its historicizing. Due to the complexity and creativity of pranks, this thesis draws on several theoretical approaches and disciplines, including performance, narrative, and subcultural studies.

<u>Incongruity and Aggression: Theories of Humor</u>

Although there is little written on pranks per se, the study of humor more broadly

has generated a substantial body of writing. One of the most important books in the

field is Sigmund Freud's 1905 *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious.* Although Freud

asserts that jokes provide an expression of the unconscious, unlike in his more well-known

work on dreams, he does not attempt to uncover the symbolism of jokes in this book.

Instead, he concentrates on the motives behind these expressive forms. Freud argues

that there are two types of jokes: abstract and tendentious. Abstract jokes have no

particular purpose and are the minority of those told. Most jokes are tendentious:

aggressive, hostile, blasphemous, obscene. According to folklorist Elliot Oring, Freud's

interpretation perceives jokes as "assaults against real individuals and groups in the social

world. They serve the emotions by allowing the expression of aggression safely 'masked'

as play." [10] In his book *Jokes and Their Relations,* Oring also cites sociologist Henri Bergson

who saw "laughter as an unconscious form of ridicule designed to humiliate and correct

others." [11]

Drawing on Bergson, Oring prefers to concentrate on the incongruity and

inappropriateness of jokes rather than on their aggressiveness. Oring detects incongruity

in both the logic and linguistics of a joke. That is, humor violates communication codes

with unanticipated resolutions and intertextual meanings. A joke utilizes ambiguous

language, words and phrases that can mean different things depending on their context

or combination. One laughs at the unforeseen turns-of-phrase and unexpected

meanings. I would further argue that the performance as well as the text of a joke can

be incongruous: targets of pranks can be unlikely or unsuspecting, and the absurdity of

that situation can be amusing.

Jokes, both verbal and practical, always have a social dimension. Humor is the creation of a subjective and often spontaneous process. One's personal point of view determines one's interpretation. Despite this open-endedness – this risk of others not "getting the joke" – pranks, like many types of jokes, can become political tactics. Saul Alinksy, in his notable activist handbook *Rules for Radicals,* claims that "ridicule is man's most potent weapon. It is almost impossible to counterattack ridicule. Also it infuriates the opposition, who then react to your advantage."[12] Even when outsiders don't "get it," humor can play a key role in activism, releasing tension and strengthening community.

Rituals and Rites of Passage: A Structural Analysis of Pranks

In his chapter "April Fool and April Fish," Alan Dundes makes one of the only attempts to theorize pranks at length, applying Arnold Van Gennep's "rites of passages" model to pranks. As stated earlier, Dundes sees pranks as symbolic acts that mark or assist in times of transition. He draws upon Van Gennep's argument that all rites of passage share the same structural stages: separation, transition, and incorporation into the world.[13] Applying this structure to pranks, Dundes suggests the duped individual is psychologically separated from others by not being "in" on the joke; then upon realization of the prank, the person becomes admitted into the group.

Although Dundes does not mention him in this chapter, some of Victor Turner's observation about rites of passage and the "ritual process" may also be applicable. Turner's work centers on the second stage in Van Gennep's model, transition or liminality, when the societal norms are suspended through ritual inversion. Turner however expands the concept beyond the intermediate stage of a rite of passage; he develops "an interpretation of the liminal or marginal phase as existing autonomously, an independent

and sometimes enduring category of people who are 'betwixt and between.'"[14]
According to Turner, the transitional stage is "full of potency and potentiality. It may also
be full of experiment and play. There may be a play of words, a play of symbols, a play
of metaphors."[15] Turner also argued that transition is marked not only by "liminality," but
by "communitas" and "ludic recombination." "Ludic recombination" consists of playful
reconstruction of cultural elements. "Communitas" is a special, albeit temporary,
community where conventional social hierarchies are leveled. Clearly, pranks contain
elements of these three markers. Pranks are undeniably playful, even when used in social
critique or subversion. Although political pranks may not necessarily be utilized, as
Dundes suggests, to initiate newcomers, they do foster "communitas" amongst activists
and audience members who share the laugh.

Although neither Van Gennep nor Turner applied their "rites of passage" models
to pranks, Dundes's use of structural analysis does point to an important disruptive and
transformative power in pranks.

Performing the Political/Political Performances: Theories of Performance

Relying largely on performance theories, my analysis of pranks differs from Freud's
psychoanalytic or Oring's textual approach to humor and from Dundes's structural
approach to practical jokes. Performance theory incorporates communication and
theater studies as well as socio-linguistics, providing a model for examining events as
enacted and embodied. Performance theory expands ethnographic investigations
beyond "text" and "context" towards holistic, event-centered perspectives. By drawing
on performance theory, I hope to establish a dynamic framework through which the
energy and anarchy of these pranks can be explored without losing the bodily,
contextual, and political cues they provide.

According to Bauman, performances have an "emergent" quality; that is they embody and enact identity.[16] Cultural performances are, then, expressive and symbolic processes that construct and articulate individual and group identities. Through their enactments, the participants have agency in the production of meaning.

Political performances – protests, street theater, "agit-prop" – have received increasing scholarly attention since the Sixties. In the past thirty years, theorists have begun to examine both the politics of performance and the performance of politics. Although, again, pranks have not been the focus of any one work, I will briefly examine several authors whose writing can enhance our understanding of the performance of political pranks.

In his article "Fighting in the Streets: Dramaturgies of Popular Protest, 1968-1989," theater studies scholar Baz Kershaw expands the analyses of performance theories to include protest events. Kershaw posits that as reflective and reflexive acts, protests wield a symbolic potential for *real* transformation – a "radical liminality" that moves beyond subversion and resistance.[17] According to Kershaw, the dramaturgy of protest is

> centrally about disclosure, both in terms of disrupting the spectacle
> of hegemony and in terms of opening up new forms of ideological
> exchange between civil society and the state, new social move-
> ments and institutional power. Whilst those exchanges are always
> to a greater or lesser degree prefigured by tradition, they are also
> more or less aimed at creating new spaces for radical discourse, in
> its widest sense. That is to say, the dramas of protest always aim for
> a radical liminality which draws authority into a new relation with
> the potential for change initiated *beyond its domain*.[18]

In other words, political performances of dissent and resistance, whether protests, pranks, wildcat strikes, or riots, can potentially enact and constitute new visions of freedom. The political sphere is not a hermetically-sealed space. Kershaw's article addresses the theatrics of protest in a useful manner for understanding political change (and changes

in the political) over the past thirty years. Kershaw's emphasis on the drama shows how important "performance" has become for activists, as for the political sphere in general.

In *Striking Performances/Performing Strikes*, speech communication scholar Kirk Fuoss argues that an analysis of cultural drama offers insight into larger social drama. Fuoss uses two case studies from the 1930s to examine how strikers promote their agenda through theater and performance, highlighting both the community and contestation expressed in and generated by these political performances. He argues that "cultural performances are directional, that they move the social formation in which they occur and of which they are a part in one of two directions: either toward a further entrenchment of the status quo values and relations of power, or toward a loosening of status quo values and a redistribution of status quo relations of power."[19] In the examples of striking union workers in Fuoss's research, as in the case of political pranks, performances can be progressive, or at the least, can move society in that direction.

Rhetorician Kevin DeLuca also analyzes contestation and confrontation in his article "Unruly Arguments: The Body Rhetoric of Earth First!, ACT UP, and Queer Nation." DeLuca asserts that the non-verbal – the body – can provide a powerful argumentative force. The physical acts and images of Earth First!, ACT UP, and Queer Nation activists create a visual performance, a bodily rhetoric that extends beyond "reason" and "words." DeLuca's article is an important contribution to the theories of performance and protest as it addresses the discursive, material body in contemporary political performances. His analysis of radical activists is significant, for their mode of political performance reflects their prioritization of lived, bodily experience over "rationality" and traditional political argumentation. The non-verbal and the body are important sites for the communication of pranksters' messages. The body can be a vehicle for or a target of a prank. For example, during Critical Mass bike rides, cyclists fill the street, peddling

slowly and blocking all lanes of traffic in order to highlight and condemn society's over-reliance on motorized transportation. Unlike more conventional tactics of, say, lobbying and letter-writing, these performances utilize bodies in the medium *and* the message.

Frequently the bodily performances of protests and pranks are festive, excessive, and rude. Russian theorist Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of "carnivalesque" is applicable to pranks as they are bawdy performances of irreverence and dissent. Bakhtin's work explores medieval festivals and religious feast days; he argues that carnival combines "the sacred with the profane, the lofty with the low, the great with the insignificant, the wise with the stupid."[20] Bakhtin recounts the oppositions and symbolic inversions abundant in the celebratory atmosphere: the laughter of carnival overcomes the seriousness of official culture, the grotesque and blasphemous bodies displace spirituality and dogmatism. I believe contemporary political protests and pranks capture this "carnivalesque," as my case studies show later, with their pies, puppetry, and pigs for president.

Theater scholar Richard Schechner goes as far as saying that "revolutions in their incipient period are carnivalesque."[21] However, several scholars have dismissed the subversiveness of the carnival and the carnivalesque, insisting they act only as an officially-sanctioned safety valves.[22] According to Michael Bernstein, "ruling conventions allow themselves to be mocked due to a full confidence in their own power to emerge still more entrenched the following morning."[23] However, I believe Bakhtin's conclusions are applicable to the performances in my research, for these political pranks are neither condoned, nor sponsored, nor tolerated by officialdom. As cultural studies scholar John Docker argues, the "carnivalesque remains an always dangerous supplement, challenging, destabilizing, pluralizing single notions of true culture, true reason, true broadcasting, true art."[24]

Telling Jokes, Constructing Identities: Narrative Theories

Political activism is about "doing" – protesting, teaching, organizing, monkeywrenching – but It is also about "talking" – chanting, negotiating, persuading, and perhaps most importantly telling stories. Narratives play a significant role in political activism, constructing and maintaining individual and community identities.[25] As Francesca Polletta explains in her article on narrative, identity, and protest,

> In telling the story of our becoming -- as an individual, a nation, a
> people -- we establish who we are. Narratives may be employed strate-
> gically to strengthen a collective identity but they also may precede
> and make possible the development of a coherent community, or nation,
> or collective actor.[26]

Activists' narratives are important vehicles to promote and legitimate a cause, to garner support, to evaluate previous actions, to recruit new members, and to sustain those already in the movement. Narratives provide a forum for mediating identities and strategies. These protest narratives are performances, but they are also *performative*, constituting political subjects, actors, and agents. "Speaking truth to power," these narratives configure events in such a way to re-present the past with a radical telos. As activists narrate their own prankster experiences, along with other legendary prank stories, they constitute and perform their transgressive political identities.

As mentioned earlier, the logistics of pranks make their performance less available to researchers than their aftermath and discussion. Fortunately, the narratives surrounding pranks can be as revealing as the events themselves. Bauman suggests these are actually "two complementary parts of the same expressive tradition."[27] Indeed, the tale of a prank can be as important as the initial action. As the prank narratives are repeated in activist circles, they take on a greater, even legendary significance. Those present at the levitation of the Pentagon in 1967, for example, insist

the U.S. military headquarters was lifted into the air – an achievement that demonstrated to the world both the fallibility and the culpability of the American armed forces.[28]

Of course, stories of pranks circulate outside the activist community as well, where the narrative and the interpretation may be quite different from activists' intent. As folklorist Archie Green observes, "the same. . . anecdote can bind a narrator and audience into a conspiracy of shared cause or dissolve a different audience into terror."[29] The media play an important role in crafting narratives and in shaping these prank performances for mass consumption. As I explore in more detail in Chapter IV, the media are far from objective, often framing political activism in negative ways.

Narratives are social acts that can be either subversive or hegemonic. As sociologists Patricia Ewick and Susan Silbey argue, narratives can conform to or counter the status quo. They assert that "narratives are likely to bear the marks of social inequalities, disparities of power, and ideological effects. However, at the same time that particular and personal narratives partake of and reproduce collective narratives, they also provide openings for creativity and invention in reshaping the social world."[30] The way in which a prank is narrated, then, can become crucial in determining its meaning and its impact.

Making Meaning, Resisting Hegemony: (Sub)Cultural Studies

Cultural Studies

At its broadest level, this thesis falls under the rubric of cultural studies, a relatively recent academic discipline that, generally speaking, theorizes culture as material, economic, and ideological practices of signification. Although "culture" can mean the way of life of people in a particular time, group, or place, it can also be defined as the actions and experiences in which a group makes meaning. For cultural theorists, this

production of meaning is a profoundly political process. Although the field of cultural studies takes many forms and approaches, I want to limit my discussion here to what John Storey labels "neo-Gramscian cultural studies."[31]

Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci developed the concept of "hegemony" to explain the absence of revolution in capitalist democracies. According to Gramsci, hegemony is the process by which the dominant class(es) in society elicit consent and support from subordinate groups, not by force but by "intellectual and moral leadership."[32] Gramsci argued, in part, that the struggle to overcome hegemony – whether with a direct assault or a lengthy fight – would be an Ideological, a *cultural* struggle.

When applied to cultural studies, the concept of hegemony is used to demonstrate the cultural relationship of classes, a relationship marked by "incorporation" and "resistance." In other words, dominant groups do not fully or completely Impose their values, ideals, and meanings onto others; culture is negotiated – some elements incorporated, some resisted. Cultural theorist John Fiske suggests that resistance to hegemony takes two forms, semiotic and social. The former pertains to cultural meanings and identities; the latter with socio-economic change. Fiske sees culture, popular culture to be precise, as the site of contestation.

Neo-Gramsclan cultural studies argues that people are active participants and as agents in the production of meaning. According to British cultural theorist Stuart Hall, this process is a struggle for "articulation," as different groups with different politics in different contexts "articulate" different meanings to the same cultural performance. Rather than suggesting that consumers of culture suffer from a "false consciousness" that keeps them imprisoned in capitalist relations, neo-Gramscians believe people are critical receivers and creators of culture. Political pranks, then, are not necessarily working to

eradicate "false consciousness" (although admittedly, some activists may still retain this rather outdated tenet of revolutionary vanguardism). Instead, pranks act to reinvigorate criticism, to challenge complacency, and to provoke thought. Pranks are counter-hegemonic acts that interrupt the top-down flow of ideology, revealing the machinations of the powerful and of the State.

By applying neo-Gramcian cultural studies to anarchist "culture," I am arguing that we must look at these humorous texts and practices in their specific contexts in order to ascertain their resistance to and incorporation of the dominant forces of society. In addition, I believe we must recognize that assessments of these cultural performances cannot be made with academic authority or finality. As Storey notes, "it is, ultimately, in 'production in use' that questions of meaning, pleasure, ideological effect, incorporation or resistance, can be (contingently) decided."[33]

Subcultural Studies

Although most commonly viewed as part of a political "movement," I wish to frame the prankster activists in this study as part of a "subculture." Subcultures are, as the word indicates, social subgroups distinct from the mainstream. Early cultural theorists from the Chicago School of sociology portrayed subcultures as disenfranchised or deviant subgroups (such as immigrants, gangsters, and jazz musicians).[34] In the Seventies, the Birmingham School suggested that subcultures were oppositional, even counter-hegemonic. These scholars argued that these subcultural groups, primarily youth, respond to and subvert the dominant culture in creative ways; this subcultural "style" includes dress, mannerisms, argot, customs, and beliefs.[35]

Subcultural theorist Dick Hebdige argues that subcultural "style" is a site of symbolic contention; it is a signifying practice whereby everyday objects and practices

are appropriated by "subordinate groups and made to carry secret meanings: meanings which express, in code, a form of resistance to the order which guarantees their continued subordination."[36] As "bricoleurs," members of subcultural groups rearrange and transform objects in order to generate new meanings. Drawing on the work of Julia Kristeva and Roland Barthes, Hebdige suggests that punk subcultural style in particular displays "*signifiance*," an unending "process of meaning-construction"[37] rather than a fixed or final interpretation.

While Hebdige's analysis of British subcultures highlights the symbolic and stylistic resistance of groups like the punks, the mods, and the teddy-boys, this thesis does not focus on such a clearly-delineated group. Moreover, the "style" of the radical activists examined here is perhaps less evident in their appearance than in their political beliefs and practices. Although amongst younger activists, there may be some similarities in dress (black clothing), body decoration (tattoos, piercings, dreadlocks), and lifestyle (vegan/vegetarian, un- or alternatively employed, cooperatively living arrangements), not all pranksters are identifiable by their attire. Prankster "style" is more an attitude than a "look." By and large, these activists are anti-corporate, anti-capitalist, anti-government, and anti-authoritarian. As anarchists, however, these political pranksters are united by no single organization; they act on or respond to no one issue. Rather, they are involved in many aspects of radical politics – environmentalism (particularly in the animal liberation movement and the ancient forest campaign), anti-militarism and nuclear disarmament, anti-police brutality and anti-death penalty, urban gardening, homeless and squatters' rights, pirate radio and alternative media. An amorphous subculture, prankster-activists are affiliated by their radical politics, their (loosely) shared values, and most importantly, their prankster tactics.

Notes

[1] Richard Bauman, *Story, Performance, and Event: Contextual Studies in Oral Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1986) 36.

[2] Robert Georges and Michael Owen Jones, *Folkloristics: An Introduction* (Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1995) 181.

[3] Jay Mechling, "Children's Folklore," *Folk Groups and Folklore Genres: An Introduction*, ed. Elliot Oring (Logan: Utah State UP, 1986) 91-120.

[4] V. Vale and Andrea Juno, ed. *Pranks!* (San Francisco: RE/Search, 1987) 4.

[5] Vale and Juno, *Pranks!* 5.

[6] Julia Woodbridge Oxreider, "The Slumber Party: Transition into Adolescence," *Tennessee Folklore Society Bulletin* 43 (1977): 128-134.

[7] Barre Toelken, *Dynamics of Folklore* (Logan: Utah State UP, 1996) 146.

[8] For examples of pranks in conjunction with holidays and celebrations, see Bill Ellis, "Halloween Pranks: 'Just a Little Inconvenience'," *Halloween and Other Festivals of Life and Death*, ed. Jack Santino (Knoxville: U of Tennessee P, 1994); Monika Morrison, "Wedding Night Pranks in Western New Brunswick," *Southern Folklore Quarterly* 38 (1974): 285-297.

[9] Alan Dundes, *Folklore Matters* (Knoxville: U of Tennessee P, 1989) 104.

[10] Elliot Oring, *Jokes and Their Relations* (Lexington: U of Kentucky P, 1992) 16.

[11] Oring, *Jokes and Their Relations* 1.

[12] Saul Alinsky, *Rules for Radicals: A Pragmatic Primer for Realistic Radicals* (New York: Vintage Books, 1971) 128.

[13] Arnold Van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage* (London: Routledge, 1960) vii.

[14] Barbara Myerhoff, "Rites of Passage," *Celebration: Studies in Festivity and Ritual*, ed. Victor Turner (Washington, DC: Smithsonian, 1982) 117.

[15] Victor Turner, "Frame, Flow and Reflection: Ritual and Drama as Public Liminality," *Performance in Postmodern Culture*, ed. Michel Benamou and Charles Caramello (Milwaukee: The Center for Twentieth Century Studies, 1977) 33.

[16] Richard Bauman, "Verbal Art as Performance," *American Anthropologist* 77 (1975): 302.

[17] Baz Kershaw, "Fighting in the Streets: Dramaturgies of Popular Protest, 1968-1989," *New Theatre Quarterly* 13.51 (1997): 275.

[18] Kershaw, "Fighting in the Streets" 274-275.

[19] Kirk Fuoss, *Striking Performances/Performing Strikes* (Jackson: U of Mississippi P, 1997) 93.

[20] Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1984) 122.

[21] Richard Schechner, *The Future of Ritual: Writings on Culture and Performance* (London: Routledge, 1993) 47.

[22] For an argument against the subversiveness of carnival, see Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1986).

[23] Michael Bernstein, "When the Carnival Turns Bitter: Preliminary Reflections upon the Abject Hero," *Bakhtin: Essays and Dialogues on His Work*, ed. Gary Saul Monson (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1986) 99.

[24] John Docker, *Postmodernism and Popular Culture: A Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994) 185.

[25] See Francesca Polletta, "'It was like a fever. . .': Narrative and Identity in Social Protest," *Social Problems* 45.2 (1998): 137-159; Scott A. Hunt and Robert D. Benford, "Identity Talk in the Peace and Justice Movement," *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 22.4 (1994): 488-517; Robert D. Benford, "'You Could Be the Hundredth Monkey': Collective Action Frames and Vocabularies of Motive Within the Nuclear Disarmament Movement," *The Sociological Quarterly* 34.2 (1993): 195-216.

[26] Polletta, "It was like a fever. . ." 139.

[27] Bauman, *Story, Performance, and Event* 35.

[28] Interview with Abbie Hoffman in Vale and Juno, *Pranks!* 65.

[29] Archie Green, *Wobblies, Pile Butts, and Other Heroes: Laborlore Explorations* (Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1993) 333.

[30] Patricia Ewick and Susan S. Silbey, "Subversive Stories and Hegemonic Tales: Toward a Sociology of Narrative." *Law and Society Review* 29.2 (1995): 222.

[31] For a full description of this approach, as well as an excellent overview of the field of cultural studies, see John Storey, *An Introduction to Cultural Theory and Popular Culture* (Athens: U of Georgia P, 1998) 13-15, 123-129.

[32] Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from Prison Notebooks*, trans. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey-Nowell-Smith (London: Lawrence, 1971) 57.

[33] Storey, *Introduction to Cultural Theory* 130.

[34] For an overview of the Chicago School's definition of subculture, see Albert K. Cohen, "A General Theory of Subcultures" from *Delinquent Boys* (New York: Free, 1955). excerpted in *The Subcultures Reader*, ed. Ken Geider and Sarah Thomson (London: Routledge, 1997) 44-54.

[35] For examples of the Birmingham School's conceptualization of "subculture," see Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (London: Methuen, 1979); Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson, ed., *Resistance through Rituals* (London: Routledge, 1993).

[36] Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* 18.

[37] Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* 118.

CHAPTER III

ANARCHY AND THE TRANSGRESSIVE POLITICS OF PRANKS

An artful practical joke can be considered a prank; a prank
that endures is a hoax; and a hoax that endures is reality.
– Reverend Al, Cacophony Society[1]

Whereas Chapter ii examined academic theories pertaining to cultural

performances and to pranks, this chapter concentrates on literature and ideas from

within the activist subculture, with particular attention paid to those cited by the political

pranksters themselves. Beginning with some background on anarchism and anarchist

tactics, this chapter proceeds to a more detailed investigation of "*détournement*,"

"culture jamming," and "TAZ's," practices closely tied to pranks.

Anarchism: A Brief Overview

"Anarchism," "anarchist," and "anarchy" may be among the most

misrepresented and misunderstood ideas in political theory. Generally, the words are

synonymous with "chaos," "violence," "lawlessness," and "terrorism." As nineteenth

century Italian anarchist Enrico Malatesta said, "since it was thought that government

was necessary and that without government, there could be only disorder and

confusion, it was natural and logical that anarchy, which means absence of

government, should sound like absence of order."[2] Anarchism originated in mid-

nineteenth century, theorized through the writings of Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, Mikhail

Bakunin and Peter Kropotkin. Crushed with the Paris Commune in 1871, suppressed by

the US government after the assassination of President McKinley in 1901, persecuted in

Russia after the Bolshevik Revolution, destroyed by Franco in the Spanish Civil War, and

dissolved with the end to Sixties student radicalism, anarchism has seen a recent resurgence amongst activists. Although repressed by the state and vilified by the media, anarchism continues to offer an important and vehement critique of society. As Jon Purkis and James Bowen suggest in their book *Twentieth Century Anarchism*, "it is not so much that anarchism offers blueprints for a liberated egalitarian and sustainable future, but that it poses difficult questions right now about power, the relationships of human beings to the rest of the world and about culture and Identity."[3] In order to fully understand pranks and prankster activists, it is necessary to review some anarchist theories and tactics.

Emma Goldman defined anarchism as "the philosophy of a new social order based on liberty unrestricted by man-made law, the theory that all forms of government rest on violence, and are therefore wrong and harmful, as well as unnecessary."[4] Anarchism is opposed to domination in all its forms; capitalism and nationalism were the targets of early anarchists, but contemporary anarchists include sexism, racism, homophobia, species-ism, and environmental destruction in the litany of oppressions they wish to end. While not all anarchists believe that humans are inherently good or wise, they do argue that we do not need institutions like the government, the police, private property, religion, or the workplace in order to keep us from hurting each other and harming ourselves. Unlike a Marxist revolution that would place the machinery of the state in the hands of the workers, an anarchist revolution would abolish the state. Although anarchists disagree on tactics – whether to rise up and overthrow the system or whether to turn their backs on it and form their own autonomous collectives, many anarchists remain committed to Kropotkin's notion of "mutual aid" – building an alternative community that provides for and assists each member in a non-coercive, non-exploitative manner.

A wide range of adjectives labels the different "brands" of anarchism: anarcho-syndicalism, anarcha-feminism, anarcho-Individualism, green anarchism, and primitivism to name a few. Although an In-depth analysis of their different perspectives is beyond the scope of this thesis, a more detailed examination of situationism, a form of twentieth-century anarchism developed In France, will be given later in this chapter.

Two elements of anarchist thought are particularly relevant to understanding the use of pranks by radical activists. First, anarchism, in addition to being anti-State and anti-government, is anti-hierarchical. "Hierarchy is the organizational structure that embodies authority," explains one anarchist website.[5] Opposition to hierarchy, then, is the underlying project of anarchism. Pranks, as addressed in the previous chapter, operate to subvert authority and flatten hierarchy, conveniently coinciding with the anarchist agenda. Second, some anarchists embrace "play" as an alternative mode of existence to "work."[6] Although clearly syndicalists and trade unionists do not hold this belief, some contemporary anarchists do see "play" as a key to re-imagining social relations. In this respect, pranks are a tactic that combines philosophy and fun, sabotage and silliness. According to one prankster, "While the issues we try to tackle are serious – clear-cutting redwoods and the global economy – there's something very valuable in getting people to laugh."[7] By pulling pranks, anarchists utilize a ritual that combines politics, play, subversion, and social criticism.

"Propaganda by the Deed" and Other Anarchist Tactics

In the nineteenth century, anarchist tactics were branded as "propaganda by the deed," a phrase that predated the contemporary label of "terrorism." While "terrorism" conjures images of violence and destruction, the phrase "propaganda by the deed" implies an act that both informs and promotes anarchy. "Propaganda by the

deed" recognizes the informational value of an insurrectionary act. As performances that serve to educate, enlighten, and perhaps even terrorize, pranks can be thought of as a new type of "propaganda by the deed." Although as historian Richard Sonn cautions, one should not "conflate the symbolic value of the deed with its instrumental role as catalyst of social revolution,"[8] anarchists have sought many means of effective action, both symbolic and substantive, without condemning those who may take this "propaganda" to the extreme.

Anarchist tactics include a number of different practices, some similar to those of other political movements. "Direct action" and "sabotage" have been tools for political change since well before the inception of anarchism but are closely associated with the political theory. Sabotage includes the damage of industrial equipment and property, and it also implies the withdrawal of efficiency by workers. "Direct action," a more general term, includes such actions as strikes and sabotage and refers to events that are intended to achieve an immediate political goal without mediation through the formal processes of the State. Pranks, i would argue, contain elements of both sabotage and direct action, as they sabotage appearances and undermine the "efficiency" of the status quo with immediate and confrontational political acts.

it should be noted of course, that while obviously not all pranks are political, not all anarchists and activists are pranksters. More importantly perhaps, even activists who do utilize pranks are involved in other aspects of their respective movements; humor and theater are only one part of their political activism. Pranks do not replace other forms of political struggle; as one activist notes, pranks are "just one tool in the large toolbox of resistance."[9]

Nonetheless, they are popular tools, ones that have seen increasing implementation since the Sixties. Through their pranks, activists can simultaneously assert

their radical ideology and their sense of humor, proudly embracing this tactic as "comical terrorism"[10] and "symbolic warfare."[11] As Vale and Juno write, "pranks challenge all aspects of the social contract that have ossified, and challenge the authority of appearances. ... They blur what we understand by definitions of art and politics."[12] Pranks are one facet of what has become better known as "culture jamming"[13] – a combination of media sabotage and "semiological guerilla warfare."[14] The "theory" and "tactics" behind culture jamming and political pranks can be traced to the Situationist International.

Détournement: Towards Revolutionary Diversions

Despite their rather grand and cosmopolitan name, the Situationist International were a small and short-lived anarchist group of mostly male, mostly European artists and theorists; less than seventy individuals claimed to be situationists during the group's brief existence from 1957 to 1972. Although they may have since drifted into obscurity, the SI played a crucial role in the French student uprisings of the late Sixties, particularly during the events of May 1968. The influence of situationism continues, recognizable in forms as disparate as punk rock and post-structuralism.[15] Although not frequently credited, situationist theories and techniques inform many elements of contemporary radical politics, particularly for those groups concerned with expressive and dramatic performances of resistance.

This section will examine one of the key ideas of the SI: *détournement*. The situationists argued that *détournement* could disrupt the power and oppression of the dominant culture, creating "situations" that liberated people from capitalism and from constraint. While not generating a total, societal revolution, *détournement* does function as a prank of sorts. It creates a temporary reversal or inversion, a provocative fracture in

the system, and most importantly perhaps, a vehicle for participation in rather than consumption of cultural performances.

Before I proceed with an analysis of *détournement*, It is necessary to provide some background information on other aspects of situationist theory and show the context in which *détournement* was conceived and in which it operates.

Situationist theory posits that individuals in society have moved from "being" to "having" to "appearing." In other words, modern conditions have exceeded Marx's analysis of production and labor; moreover, alienation has grown beyond Marcuse and Lefebvre's emphasis on consumption and leisure. We now live in a world of "spectacles," where all life is reduced to images and representations. We are alienated from all aspects of our surroundings – work and leisure, knowledge and relationships, culture and consciousness.

According to Guy Debord, main theorist of the SI and author of *Society of the Spectacle*,

> where the real world changes into simple images, the simple images become real beings and effective motivations of hypnotic behavior. The spectacle, as a tendency *to make one see* the world by means of various specialized mediations [it can no longer be grasped directly], naturally finds vision to be the privileged human sense which the sense of touch was for other epochs; the most abstract, the most mystifiable sense corresponds to the generalized abstraction of present-day society. But the spectacle is not identifiable with mere gazing, even combined with hearing. It is that which escapes the activity of men, that which escapes reconsideration and correction by their work. It is the opposite of dialogue. Wherever there is independent *representation,* the spectacle reconstitutes itself.[16]

In the spectacle, objects become images; expression is diluted into Information. People are mere spectators, passive observers of the spectacle around them. Lives are reduced to lifestyles, commodified and circumscribed roles. Participation and self-fulfillment are only mediated through consumption. "Choice" means Coke® or Pepsi®.

The spectacle, the situationists argued, was everywhere. Debord contended that the

> basically tautological character of the spectacle flows from the simple
> fact that its means are simultaneously its ends. It is the sun which never
> sets over the empire of modern passivity. It covers the entire surface of
> the world and bathes endlessly in its own glory.[17]

Faced with the paradoxical task of resisting and subverting the totalizing and universal spectacle, the situationists merged theory with practice – they proposed the creation of "situations," performances that disrupted the spectacle, liberating "words" from "work," embracing "play," and thereby transcending alienation.

One method for creating these subversive "situations" was the *dérive*, or drift. Modeled after the surrealist practice of "automatism," the situationists advocated rambling expeditions through the city, not guided by the designated routes of the spectacle, but instead led by the desires and direction of the unconscious. Debord and others created "maps" that depicted a re-envisioned urbanism, one privileging happiness over efficiency.

The other important method, and my focus here, is the *détournement*, translated from French as diversion or subversion. *Détournement* is the "theft" of pre-existing artistic productions and their integration into a new construction, one that serves the SI's radical political agenda: the revolution of everyday life, the realization of poetry and art. Images and texts are decontextualized, détourned, and then recontextualized; the displacement of cultural artifacts reverberates into both the old and the new contexts, destabilizing the primacy and stasis of images. *Détournement*, according to Greil Marcus, "was a politics of subversive quotation, of cutting the vocal cords of every empowered speaker, social symbols yanked through the looking glass, misappropriated words and pictures diverted into familiar scripts and blowing them up."[18] By utilizing texts

and images stolen from the spectacle, the SI hoped to foster an insurrection at the level of representation.

The jarring effects of this defamiliarization were revolutionary, according to the situationists. They argued that *détournement* offered a critique that went beyond mimicry or parody of the spectacle. They believed "an accumulation of détourned elements, far from aiming at arousing indignation or laughter by alluding to some original work, will express our indifference toward a meaningless and forgotten original and concern itself with rendering a certain sublimity."[19] Situationists – often quoting the nineteenth century French poet Comte de Lautréamont's maxim that "plagiarism is necessary; progress demands it" – took up texts, images, and theories and twisted them to suit their own revolutionary program.

The situationists are perhaps best known for their détourned cartoons – popular romance comics whose speech balloons were altered to espouse situationist theses (see Figure 1). Guy Debord was also famous for his détourned films. *Hurlements en faveur de Sade* (1952), for example, contains no images; it is comprised of a black screen and silence, with intermittent fragments of banal conversation, white lights, and lettrist poetry.

The influence of situationist praxis was particularly evident during the occupations of May 1968, for détourned performances and artifacts were prevalent in the streets of Paris. Graffiti and posters decorated the walls of the city, proclaiming situationist-inspired slogans like "Beneath the cobbles – the beach," "Run! The Old World is behind you!" and "Workers of all countries, enjoy!" (see Figure 2). The Odéon Theatre was raided and became the locus for the whole revolt: the insurrectionaries wore costumes; they were pirates, knights, and queens; they bore swords and shields and chainmail to defend the barricades. These dramatic but playful violations of expectation threatened the more conventional modes of resistance, those accepted by the spectacle.

Figure 1. Détourned cartoon.[20]

Figure 2. Image from Paris 1968.[21]

In "Methods of *Détournement*," Debord and fellow filmmaker Gill Wolman describe the "laws" of diversion and theorize its implementation and effect. In doing so, they distinguish "minor" and "deceptive" *détournements*. The former consists of a *détournement* of an insignificant item, one that draws all its meaning in its new context. The latter utilizes a culturally significant element, which develops a new meaning in its détourned context but that still reflects its former inhabitancy. Debord and Wolman argue that these distortions should remain simplified, so connections to and recollections of old contexts can remain. They also suggest that the greater the distance between the contexts of détourned elements, the greater the impact of their reconfiguration; the least expected object is the most effective. This *discrépance* between contexts provides a clash of images and meanings – a shock that disrupts the seamlessness of the spectacle.

A significant aspect in the situationist project of *détournement* is its collective and participatory character, echoing Lautréamont's call for "poetry made by all." In her article "Reusing Culture: The Import of *Détournement*," Astrid Vicas also credits the influence of the surrealist game of "exquisite corpse" on the situationist concept of *détournement*. This game consists of writing a word or phrase on a piece of paper, folding it down before passing it on to the next participant. Unrelated words are combined in a group process of authorship – a combined *dérive* or drift through poetic language. In this way, both "exquisite corpse" and *détournement* problematize conventional notions of "author" and "reader." By utilizing pre-existing artifacts, one participates in a creative project that undermines individual "talent" or "genius," along with the specialization of "artist." *Détournement* is accessible to all. As Greil Marcus explains in *Lipstick Traces*, "the only necessary tools were a few newspapers, a pair of

scissors, a jar of paste, a sense of loathing, a sense of humor, and the notion that to be against power was to be against the power of words."[22]

The situationists recognized that discourse, whether used in support of or in resistance to the spectacle, is inextricably linked to power. As Debord noted, "In spite of what the humorists think, words do not play, nor do they make love, as Breton thought, except in dreams. Words *work*, on behalf of the dominant organization of life. And yet. . . they embody forces that can upset the most careful calculations."[23] Although the forces of the spectacle reduce expression to information and bureaucratize meaning into banality, *détournement* provides a tactic to reinvigorate human communication with desire and subjectivity. By détourning words and by re-igniting passion, the SI argued that one could *realize* poetry and rediscover revolution.

Despite their proclamations and theories about the subversive potential of *détournement*, the SI struggled to resolve whether or not any radical technique could evade the recuperative powers of the spectacle. The situationists contended that all criticism had heretofore been absorbed, twisted, and eventually used to promote the existing structures of power. In Sadie Plant's words,

> the situationists argued that collapses of the marvelous into the mun-
> dane or the critical into the counterrevolution are never signs of na-
> tural destiny or apolitical degeneration. On the contrary, such shifts
> are effected in order to remove the explosive content from gestures
> and meanings which contest the capitalist order.[24]

Forces of opposition are "spectacularized" – manipulated and exaggerated by the media. Hence, all anarchists are bomb-throwers; Earth First! equals terrorism; Che Guevara posters hang next to rock stars' on teenagers' bedroom walls; and revolutionary slogans are used to sell beer. What cannot be incorporated or commodified by the spectacle is ignored.

The situationists had witnessed the radical elements of surrealism and dadaism be integrated into the dominant culture, drained of their critical spark and transformed into commodities – *The Persistence of Time* on a Swatch™ watch. So although their origins lay in the artistic avant-garde, the situationists eventually proclaimed that art could not be revolutionary. Already manifest in images, art, they argued, is the easiest cultural production for the spectacle to absorb. As an article in *Arts Magazine* notes with some contempt, the SI "took a step no literary or artistic avant-garde has taken before: it denied revolutionary value to cultural innovation."[25]

But are all aesthetics corrupt? Is all dissidence spectacular? Is *détournement* "always already" part of the spectacle?

While a postmodern reading of the Situationist International may dismiss the group for their impossible demands and inconsistencies, I do not wish to reject their project outright, nor do I wish to dwell on their theoretical myopia here. I will concede that *détournement* has not provided the catalyst or the conduct for social revolution; the totalizing theory of the SI falls apart under post-structuralist scrutiny. Yet activists with agendas similar to the situationists have continued to use *détournement*, unwilling to surrender to hopelessness or to "hyperreality," Baudrillard's spectacle-to-the-extreme.[26]

As Plant observes,

the most radical of gestures is indeed vulnerable to integration, and ex-
pressions of dissent are often deliberately fostered as political safety-
valves. But the situationists were convinced that none of this precludes
the possibility of evading, subverting, and interrupting the processes by
which effective criticism is rendered harmless.[27]

Détournement benefits from theft and surprise; it is not "always already" defined by the spectacle, although surely the spectacle lays in wait. As Raoul Vaneigem, situationist and author of *The Revolution of Everyday Life*, asserted,

people still try to use words and signs to perfect their aborted gestures.

> It is because they do that a poetic language exists: a language of lived experience which, for me, merges with radical theory, the theory which penetrates the masses and becomes a material force. Even which it is co-opted and turned against its original purpose, poetry always gets what it wants in the end. The 'Proletarians of all lands, unite' which produced the Stalinist State will one day realise the classless society. No poetic sign is ever completely turned by ideology.[28]

Poetry, détourned language, articulates the rhythms of the revolution the situationist sought.

For Julia Kristeva, the disruption offered by poetic language is analogous to political insurrection. In "Revolution in Poetic Language," she argues that mimesis and poetic language are transgressive, constructing and destabilizing meanings.

> "They are not critics of theology but rather the enemy within and without, recognizing both its necessity and its pretensions. In other words, poetic language and mimesis may appear as an argument complicitious with dogma . . . but they may also get in motion what dogma represses. In so doing, they no longer act as instinctual floodgates within the enclosure of the sacred and become instead protesters against its posturing. And thus, its complexity unfolded by its practices, the signifying process joins social revolution.[29]

Poetic language and détourned images exceed the limitations and restrictions of the spectacle. Its omnipresent and unitary façade is shattered; instead, fragmentation and multiplicity are accentuated.

Détournement disrupts, and in that moment of rupture, it recognizes its greatest power. The creation of temporary and transitory performances is the site of societal breach and insubordination. Although the spectacle quickly "spins" the outburst back into the fold, "the powerful spectacularization of dissent necessitates the repeated and considered resistance to its domination."[30] If *détournement* is seen as a process rather than a final artistic product, as an emergent culture rather than a determinate or fixed revolution, it can continue to offer a promising and provocative tactic, even in our postmodern age.

<u>Culture Jamming: "Semiological Guerilla Warfare"</u>

While the situationists' *détournement* may not be recognized by name, the practice continues to be employed in some respects by contemporary radical activists. Today, these diversions and subversions of spectacular society are better known as "culture jamming." "Jamming" is CB slang for the illegal disruption of radio transmissions. Culture jamming, then, is a disruption aimed at the cultural or informational transmissions of modern-day society. In a 1967 essay entitled "Towards a Semiological Guerilla Warfare," Italian writer Umberto Eco formulates a plan to counter the "narcotic passiveness" instilled by mass media. [31] According to Eco, this "battle" should take place not at the source of communication, but at the destination; creative and critical reception can shatter the singular and hegemonic message of the information society. In other words, fracture the broadcast; "jam" the transmissions.

The term "culture jamming" was coined in 1984 by the collage band Negativland to describe a variety of tactics that sabotage media and advertising: billboard alteration, pirate broadcasts, media hoaxes, hacking, "textual poaching," "adbusting," "subvertising," and other forms of audio, visual, economic, and performance "jams." According to journalist Naomi Klein, culture jams, specifically billboard "liberations," are

> counter-messages that hack into a corporation's own method of com-
> munication to send a message starkly at odds with the one that was
> intended. The process forces the company to foot the bill for its own
> subversion, either literally, because the company is the one that paid
> for the billboard, or figuratively, because anytime people mess with a
> logo, they are tapping into the vast resources spent to make the logo
> meaningful.[32]

Cigarette mascot "Joe Camel" is transformed into "Joe Chemo," wasting away of lung cancer in a hospital bed (see Figure 3). A black and white photograph characteristic of Calvin Klein ads reveals the "real" obsession, as a waif-like model leans over the toilet (see Figure 4).
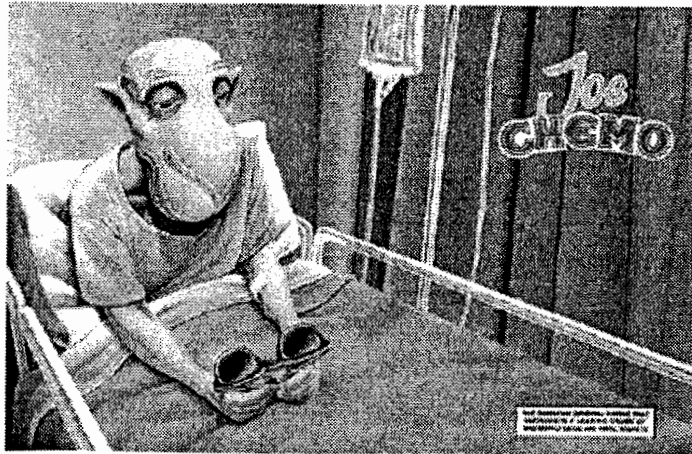
Figure 3. "Joe Chemo," from *Adbusters.*
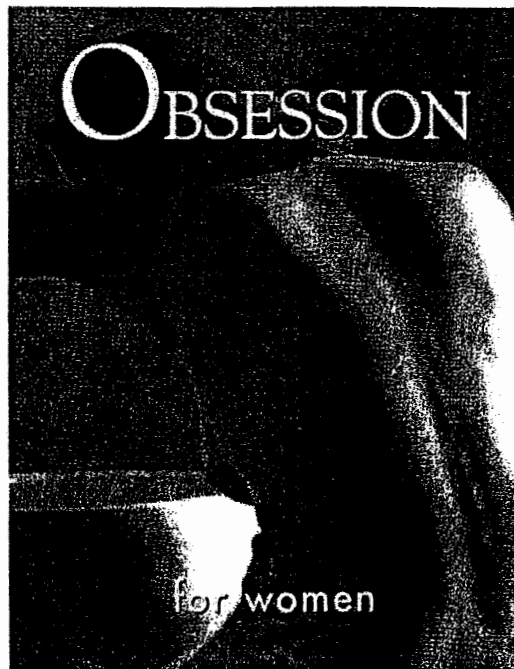
Figure 4. "Obsession for Women," from *Adbusters.*

Culture jamming can be a highly sophisticated endeavor, such as the glossy ads and images produced by the Media Foundation, a Vancouver, BC-based group that publishes the magazine *Adbusters* and uses "subvertising" to undermine well-known advertising images and slogans. Employing past and present advertising designers and using high-tech tools like computers and scanners, *Adbusters* create "ads" that closely resemble their targets, "borrowing visual legitimacy from advertising itself."[33] Of course, culture jamming also occurs on a more "low-tech" or grassroots level; with handmade stickers or a permanent marker, anyone can alter and *détourne* popular culture (see Figure 5).

As Mark Dery contends, "part artistic terrorists, part vernacular critics, culture jammers like Eco's 'communications guerillas,' introduce noise into the signal as it passes from transmitter to receiver, encouraging idiosyncratic, unintended interpretations."[34] Like *détournement*, culture jamming offers activists a tactic for disruption of the spectacle. Culture jams, in that case, are pranks, not against a single individual, but against our modern-day culture of commodities and corporations.

Figure 5. "Liberated" billboard.

Poetic Terrorism and Temporary Autonomous Zones

In his collection of essays and communiqués entitled *T.A.Z.: Temporary Autonomous Zone, Ontological Anarchy, Poetic Terrorism*, anarchist Hakim Bey calls for a theatrical resistance – ephemeral yet immediate – that is greatly indebted to situationist theory, but self-avowedly more radical. Bey advocates

> weird dancing in all-night computer-banking lobbies. Unauthorized
> pyrotechnic displays. Land-art, earthworks as bizarre alien artifacts
> strewn in State Parks. Burglarize houses but instead of stealing, leave
> Poetic-Terrorist objects. Kidnap someone and make them happy.
> Pick someone at random and convince them they're the heir to an
> enormous, useless and amazing fortune – say 5000 square miles of
> Antarctica, or an aging circus elephant, or an orphanage in Bombay,
> or a collection of alchemical mass. Later they will come to realize
> that for a few moments they believed in something extraordinary, and
> will perhaps be driven as a result to seek out some more intense mode
> of existence. ... The audience reaction or aesthetic-shock produced
> by PT ought to be at least as strong as the emotion of terror – powerful
> disgust, sexual arousal, superstitious awe, sudden intuitive breakthrough,
> dada-esque angst – no matter whether the PT is aimed at one person
> or many, no matter whether it is "signed" or anonymous, if it does not
> change someone's life (aside from the artist) it fails.[35]

Bey's prescription for "poetic terrorism," and later in his book, his call for "art sabotage" deliberately echoes the situationists' model of *détournement*. It necessitates drama, shock, and passion be inherent in the act; it demands an intense emotional response from onlookers. Like the situationists, Bey hopes that these actions instill the desire for further radical actions.

Although Bey admits his concept of the "temporary autonomous zone" or "T.A.Z." is less dogma or theory than rant or "poetic fancy," his essay on the subject does provide an interesting vision of an alternative, creative insurgency. Rejecting all "revolutions" as doomed to fail once a "new" State comes to power, Bey suggests liberation is found in insurgency itself and thus agitates for perpetual uprising. Hence, "temporary

autonomous zones" are the clandestine and ephemeral liberations – "of land, of time, or imagination."[36] Completely avoiding questions of social justice and conveniently sidestepping most anarchists' difficulty theorizing and organizing radical social change, Bey suggests autonomy can be found in moments of insurrection, not in the banality of the aftermath. While Bey's work may have serious flaws – what, for example distinguishes a T.A.Z. as a revolutionary act from, say, surfing the 'Net while at work? – it is influential amongst many contemporary anarchists. Bey's notion of realizing "temporary autonomous zones" through performances of "poetic terrorism," echo the concept of pranks creating short-lived fractures in the spectacle.

Theory and Praxis

With my discussion of situationism, culture jamming, and poetic terrorism I have tried to construct a theoretical context for the performance of anarchist pranks, one based on the arguments and influences of pranksters themselves. Combined with Chapter II, this section of my thesis has outlined some of the theoretical dimensions of pranks. The rest of thesis will focus on "praxis," the practice and performance of political pranks. It must be noted that this division between theory and practice is more a construction of this project than it is a representation of a similar dichotomy amongst prankster activists. Rather than solely theoretical justifications, many pranksters are inspired and influenced by the pranks of others. The acts of the Billboard Liberation Front, the Barbie Liberation Organization (see Figure 10), the Cacophony Society, the Guerilla Girls, and the Church of the Subgenius, and the writings of *The Onion* and of Robert Anton Wilson are only a few examples of clever and influential pranks and pranksters.

The next section of this thesis uses three "case studies" to examine particular pranksters more closely. Chapter IV analyzes the relationship between activism, pranks,

and the media, focusing on the performances of Earth First! and the Yippies. Chapter V examines the "Global Pastry Uprising," militant pie-throwers who have targeted corporate criminals and government officials worldwide. Chapter VI documents EAT, the Eugene Anarchists for Torrey mayoral campaign and their use of parody and pranks to promote an anarchist critique of electoral politics. Throughout these chapters, the practices of *détournement* and culture jamming will reoccur, as the activists theorize and pull their political pranks.

Notes

[1] cited by Gareth Branwyn, *Jamming the Media: A Citizen's Guide to Reclaiming the Tools of Communication* (San Francisco: Chronicle, 1997) 278.

[2] Enrico Malatesta, "The Word 'Anarchy'," excerpted in *What is Anarchy? An Introduction*, ed. Donald Rooum (1891; London: Freedom, 1992) 29.

[3] Jon Purkis and James Bowen, ed. *Twentieth Century Anarchism: Unorthodox Ideas for a New Millennium* (London: Cassell, 1997) 1.

[4] Emma Goldman, "Anarchism," *Anarchism and Other Essays* (London: Dover, 1969) 50.

[5] "What is Anarchism?" *An Anarchist FAQ.* http://www.infoshop.org/faq/secAcon.html.

[6] For more information on primitivism, see Fredy Perlman, *Against Leviathan, Against History! An Essay* (Detroit: Black and Red, 1983); John Zerzan, *Future Primitive and Other Essays* (New York: Autonomedia, 1994).

[7] Gregory Lewis, "Pie-pitch Recipe: Activism with Humor," *San Francisco Examiner* 9 November 1998.

[8] Richard Sonn, *Anarchism* (New York: Twayne, 1992) 52.

[9] Al Decker, "Letter from the BBB," 3 December 1998 a-infos@tao.ca (4 December 1998).

[10] Noël Godin, as quoted in Al Decker, "The Dialectics of Pie-Throwing," *Renegade* 2 February 1998: 3.

[11] Abbie Hoffman, cited in V. Vale and Andrea Juno, ed., *Pranks!* (San Francisco: RE/Search, 1987) 66.

[12] Vale and Juno, *Pranks!* 4-5.

[13] Mark Dery, *Culture Jamming, Hacking, Slashing and Sniping in the Empire of Signs* (Westfield: Open Magazine Pamphlet Series, 1993).

[14] Umberto Eco, "Towards a Semiological Guerilla Warfare," *Travels in Hyperreality* (New York: Harcourt, 1986).

[15] For the connections between situationist thought and punk rock, see Greil Marcus, *Lipstick Traces: A Secret History of the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1992). For an examination of the relationship between the SI and post-structuralism – and by far the best analysis of situationism – see Sadie Plant, *The Most Radical Gesture: The Situationist International in a Postmodern Age* (London: Routledge, 1992).

[16] Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle* (Detroit: Black and Red, 1983) thesis 18.

[17] Debord, *Society of the Spectacle* thesis 13.

[18] Marcus, *Lipstick Traces* 179.

[19] Guy Debord and Gil J Wolman, "Methods of *Détournement*," *Situationist International Anthology*, ed. Ken Knabb (1956; Berkeley: Bureau of Public Secrets, 1981) 9.

[20] René Viénet, *Enragés et Situationnistes dans le mouvement des occupations* (Paris: Gallimard, 1968) 178.

[21] Viénet, *Enragés et Situationnistes* 100.

[22] Marcus, *Lipstick Traces* 400.

[23] Plant, *The Most Radical Gesture* 87.

[24] Plant, *The Most Radical Gesture* 79.

[25] Myriam Maayan, "From Aesthetic to Political Vanguard: The Situationist International, 1957-1968," *Arts Magazine* 63.5 (1989): 52.

[26] Jean Baudrillard, who like most French post-structuralists was involved in the uprisings of 1968, draws on situationist conceptualization of spectacle. However, Baudrillard sees no space for resistance as there is no "real world" beneath the spectacle's veneer. See Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1994).

[27] Plant, *The Most Radical Gesture* 75.

[28] Raoul Vaneigem, *The Revolution of Everyday Life* (Seattle: Left Bank, 1994) 101.

[29] Julia Kristeva, "Revolution in Poetic Language," *The Portable Kristeva*, ed. Kelly Oliver (New York: Columbia UP, 1997) 49.

[30] Graham White, "Direct Action, Dramatic Action: Theatre and Situationist Theory," *New Theatre Quarterly* 9.36 (1993): 339.

[31] Umberto Eco, "Towards a Semiological Guerilla Warfare," *Travels in Hyperreality* (New York: Harcourt, 1986) 137.

[32] Naomi Klein, *No Logo* (New York: Picador, 1999) 281.

[33] Klein, *No Logo* 285.

[34] Mark Dery, *Culture Jamming, Hacking, Slashing and Sniping in the Empire of Signs* (Westfield: Open Magazine Pamphlet Series, 1993) 7.

[35] Hakim Bey, "Poetic Terrorism," *T.A.Z.* (Brooklyn: Autonomedia, 1991) 4-5.

[36] Bey, "Temporary Autonomous Zone" 101.

CHAPTER IV

"MIND BOMBS" AND MONKEYWRENCHING:

PRANKS AND THE MEDIA

<u>"The Whole World is Watching": Publicity and Pranks</u>

As Todd Gitlin explains in the introduction to his book *The Whole World is*

Watching: Mass Media in the Making and Unmaking of the New Left,

> since the advent of radio broadcasting half a century ago, social move-
> ments have organized, campaigned, and formed their social identities on
> a floodlit social terrain. The economic concentration of the media and
> their speed and efficiency in spreading news and telling stories have com-
> bined to produce a new situation for movements seeking to change the
> order of society.[1]

Indeed, the chant from the 1968 Democratic Convention in Chicago – "the whole world

is watching!" – marks the recognition amongst activists that the media was broadcasting

their image and their issues to millions of viewers. Many groups realized that performing

for the media could be a crucial (and even amusing) part of radical politics. The media

could provide activists with an opportunity to vocalize their grievances and promote

their causes.

As Gitlin's book on the New Left suggests, there can be negative consequences

and serious drawbacks in courting the media. Gitlin's book documents the role of the

media in the rise and fall of New Left activism, arguing that the media framed the

movement in ways that trivialized, polarized, marginalized, and disparaged the radicals

and their messages.[2] According to Gitlin,

> In the late twentieth century, political movements feel called upon to rely
> on large-scale communications in order to *matter*, to say who they are
> and what they intend to publics they want to sway; but in the process
> they become "newsworthy" only by submitting to the implicit rules of
> newsmaking, by conforming to journalistic notions of what a 'story" is,

what an "event" is, what a "protest" is.[3]

By defining and constructing political movements, the media not only single out certain individuals for celebrity status, but focus on extraordinary events, frequently neglecting to explain the relationship of these events to issues or ideology. Although often characterized as the "liberal press," the media is in fact an entrenched institution. As Ben Bagdikian and others have shown, most major news organizations are owned by multinational corporations. It should be no surprise then, that the media is particularly unsympathetic towards radicalism.[4]

However, while Gitlin claims people "have no voice in what the media make of what they say or do," I believe activists can crack through this ideological shell.[5] As Kevin DeLuca points out, "although. . .radical environmental groups inhabit a difficult space within the corporate-controlled, mass-mediated public sphere, it is not a hermetically sealed space. There are cracks and openings for resistance, alternative readings, aberrant sense-making."[6] Despite the negative framing of activism, observers can interpret news in any number of ways. Pranks and other political performances can be what DeLuca describes as "tactical image events"[7] and what Robert Hunter calls "mind bombs" -- acts that explode "in the public's consciousness to transform the way people view the world."[8] Although fully aware of the possible downside of soliciting media coverage, activists hope to be able to perform acts that will deliver their messages *regardless* of the media's presentation of "the news."

In *Jamming the Media: A Citizen's Guide to Reclaiming the Tools of Communication*, Gareth Branwyn suggests that pranks function as resistance. They are

> an antidote to the helplessness, anger, and frustration that comes
> with full critical awareness of the insidiousness of mainstream media.
> For those who feel hustled, brainwashed, talked down to, and mar-
> ginalized by mainstream media (and media seems to be synony-
> mous with culture these days), pranking is a way of fighting back
> through parody, humor, and absurdist gestures.[9]

This chapter examines the relationship of pranksters and the press, focusing on two movements that have embraced guerilla theater to dramatize their causes: the Yippies and Earth First! I argue that pranks have provided these activists with the means to dramatize their philosophies outside typical political means and the usual political rhetoric.

"Revolution for the Hell of It" – The Yippies

Although they were despised by the situationists for advocating "revolution for the hell of it," the Youth International Party – better known as the Yippies – are probably the most important and influential of the American political pranksters. Indeed, no examination of political pranks would be complete without a look at the Yippies, for they added a new level of drama and flair to the social upheaval of the Sixties. They radicalized "traditional" methods of political protest – moving away from the "march" to create a guerrilla or street theater, retreating from "serious" treatment of issues to adopt parody and nonsense. As Abbie Hoffman asserted,

> We are dynamiting brain cells. We are putting people through changes.
> The key to the puzzle lies in theater. We are theater in the streets: total
> and committed. We aim to involve people and use (unlike other move-
> ments locked in ideology) any weapon (prop) we can find. The aim is
> not to earn the respect, admiration, and love of everybody – it's to get
> people to do, to participate, whether positively or negatively. All is rele-
> vant, only "the play's the thing."[10]

The Yippies were constantly playing pranks, confronting and befuddling "the system" in creative and dramatic ways. Their best known pranks include levitating the Pentagon, nominating a pig for President, and throwing dollar bills out onto the floor of the New York Stock Exchange (causing utter pandemonium as traders scrambled for the money, momentarily shutting down the market, and compelling NYSE officials to install a plexiglass screen between the visitor observation booth and the floor).[11] When Yippie

"leader" Jerry Rubin was subpoenaed to appear before the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC), he could not guarantee that media would broadcast his words, but he *knew* they would at least take a picture of him. So Rubin appeared before HUAC in an American revolutionary costume and delivered his critique of the committee on a symbolic, rather than verbal level.

Thumbing their noses at the "straights," the Yippies tried to be as incomprehensible and outlandish as possible. As Rubin notes, "the secret to the yippie myth is that it's nonsense. Its basic informational statement is a blank piece of paper."[12] While the Yippies were certainly lacking in a rigorous theoretical base, they saw this as a strength, not a weakness. When subverting the dominant culture, they insisted that "confusion is mightier than the sword."[13]

Monkeywrenching and Other Earth First! Pranks

The Yippie spirit of "serious play" continues in the radical environment group Earth First! In fact, Earth First! co-founder Mike Roselle was an ex-Yippie. Earth Firstlers have honed political pranks, using them for environmental defense, rather than merely "for the hell of it." In addition to their Yippie lineage, Earth First! draws on the actions of Greenpeace. As Roselle remarks in *Pranks!,*

> Greenpeace was one organization we took a cue from – they knew how to do stunts or pranks that get the message out. Who's doing the whaling? The *Soviets*. The stage is set for this perfect drama on the high seas: a little boat in front of a whale and the big bad Russians are shooting harpoons at it. This image was something the news media loves. We felt there were lots ways the media could be used if you understood what they wanted.[14]

This type of direct action is both an act of symbolism and an act of sabotage; it is a performance to send a message, but it is also a performance to protect the whales.

Another inspiration for Earth First!'s performance of political pranks is *The Monkey Wrench Gang,* a novel by environmental author Edward Abbey. *The Monkey Wrench*

Gang relates a tale of adventure and mayhem in the deserts of the American Southwest. The Gang is a group of four individuals, disparate in their backgrounds and identities, but united by their desire to protect the wilderness and their willingness to use radical tactics to accomplish this. They sabotage vehicles, tools, and equipment used to plunder and destroy the environment. Their targets include billboards, construction sites, clear-cuts, and power-plants. The characters and their actions are "carnivalesque," bawdy, parodic performances that undermine social norms.

> They paused once again, near the north end of a meadow called Pleasant Valley, to edit and beautify an official US Forest Service Smokey Bear sign. The sign was a life-size simulacrum of the notorious ursine bore, complete with ranger hat, blue jeans and shovel, and it said what these signs always say, to wit, "Only YOU can prevent forest fires."
> Out with the paints again. They added a yellow mustache, which certainly improved Smokey's bland muzzle, and touched up his eyeballs with a hangover hue of red. He began to look like Robert Redford as the Sundance Kid. Bonnie unbuttoned Smokey's fly, pictorially speaking, and painted onto his crotch a limp pet-cock with hairy but shriveled balls. To Smokey's homily on fire prevention Hayduke attached an asterisk and footnote: "Smokey Bear is full of shit." (Most fires of course are caused by that vaporous hominoid in the sky, God; disguised, i.e., as lightning.)
> Very funny. However, in 1968, the United States Congress made it a Federal offense to desecrate, mutilate or otherwise improve any official representation of Smokey the Bear. Aware of this legislation, Bonnie bullied Hayduke into the jeep and out of there before he could carry out his urge to hang Smokey by the neck to any nearby tree. . . .[15]

Although fiction, Abbey admits the episodes in the novel were based on true occurrences: "Everything in it is real and actually happened. And it all began just one year from today." Abbey's predictions came true five years after *The Monkey Wrench Gang* was published. In 1980, the Earth First! was formed just as the Monkey Wrench Gang was: on a camping trip of people committed to the protection of the wilderness by any means necessary – "No Compromise in Defense of Mother Earth." Earth First! saw Glen Canyon Dam as the preeminent symbol of environmental destruction, and echoing the aims of the Monkey Wrench Gang, the dam was the target of their first prank. On the spring equinox, 1981 Earth First! unfurled a 300-foot piece of black plastic from the top

of the dam, symbolically "cracking" its face. Pictures of the "broken" dam filled

newspapers the next day, capturing environmentalists' sentiments about the dam's

deleterious effects on the region.[16]

The events in the novel *The Monkey Wrench Gang* intertwine with Earth First!'s

own "mythology," and the term "monkeywrenching" has become part of the

movement's lingo, describing their particular brand of environmental "protest."

According to co-founder Dave Foreman,

> It was time for a new joker in the deck. Something more than commen-
> ting on dreary environmental-impact statements and writing letters to
> members of Congress. Politics in the streets. Civil disobedience. Media
> stunts. Holding the villains up to ridicule. . . . All that would be required
> to join us, we decided, was a belief in Earth first.[17]

Like the Yipples, Earth First! utilizes guerilla theater and political pranks as highly

effective "publicity stunts," drawing attention to issues like pollution, rangeland

destruction, and deforestation. As media analyst Douglas Rushkoff notes, whereas some

activists utilize civil disobedience to do battle in the courts, Earth First! uses pranks to do

battle in the media.[18] Of course, not all monkeywrenching is done for cameras, nor in

broad daylight for that matter. But even the nighttime handiwork of mischievous ELFs

(the Earth Liberation Front), which is aimed more at destroying industrial equipment than

at creating photo-opportunities, draws publicity. By hanging banners from atop

skyscrapers and smoke-stacks, by dismantling machinery, by destroying genetically

engineered crops, and by burying themselves chin deep in logging roads, Earth First!, ELF,

and others have created performances that transcend and exceed conventional

politics.

Irrational Performances, Unreasonable Politics

As Kevin DeLuca asserts in *Image Politics*, it would be a mistake to reduce these dramatizations to mere "attention-getting devices."[19] "Although designed to flag media attention and generate publicity, image events are more than just a means of getting on television. They are crystallized philosophical fragments, mind bombs that work to expand the 'universe of thinkable thoughts'."[20] In other words, activists pull pranks and monkeywrench not only to raise awareness of their issues, but to frame their politics in such a way as to disrupt conventional, "rational" discourse. Furthermore, the "irrational" acts and rhetoric of these pranksters point, in turn, to the insanity of contemporary political, social, and economic relations. As one of the characters in *The Monkey Wrench Gang* states,

> "The wilderness once offered men a plausible way of life. . . . Now it
> functions as a psychiatric refuge. Soon there will be no wilderness." He
> sipped at his bourbon and ice. "Soon there will be no place to go. Then
> the madness becomes universal." Another thought. "And the universe
> goes mad."[21]

The sabotage enacted by the Monkey Wrench Gang and Earth First! can be contrasted to the environmental degradation enacted by the government and the corporations. Similarly, the playfulness of the Yippies, chanting incantations around the Pentagon or throwing money onto the Stock Exchange, counters the logic of capitalism and warfare. In the face of pollution, clearcuts, habitat destruction, and war, activists' performances posit that their response is justifiable and reasonable. As literary scholar Rebecca Raglon says of *The Monkey Wrench Gang*, "Abbey gives the vandalism of the gang a manic, wild humor, and by directing their creative violence against machines, he is able to expose the real violence of his society."[22] This conflict between "reasonable" and "unreasonable" responses to war and environmental destruction continues to be at the core of the pranksters' monkeywrenching tactics. Although condemned by those on the

Right and the Left, the political pranksters as embodied by Earth First!, the Monkey Wrench Gang, and the Yippies insist that their actions make sense.

Notes

1 Todd Gitlin, *The Whole World is Watching: Mass Media in the Making and Unmaking of the New Left* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1980) 1.

2 Gitlin, *The Whole World is Watching* 27-28.

3 Gitlin, *The Whole World is Watching* 3.

4 See Ben Bagdikian, *The Media Monopoly* (Boston: Beacon, 1980); Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* (New York: Pantheon, 1988).

5 Gitlin, *The Whole World is Watching* 3.

6 Kevin DeLuca, *Image Politics: The New Rhetoric of Environmental Activism* (New York: Guilford, 1999) 119.

7 DeLuca, *Image Politics* 3.

8 Greenpeace activist Robert Hunter, *The Storming of the Mind*, cited in DeLuca, *Image Politics* 1.

9 Gareth Branwyn, *Jamming the Media: A Citizen's Guide to Reclaiming the Tools of Communication* (San Francisco: Chronicle, 1997) 273.

10 Daniel Simon and Abbie Hoffman, ed. *The Best of Abbie Hoffman* (New York: Four Walls Eight Windows, 1989) 17.

11 For an account of this prank, see Jerry Rubin, *Do It! Scenarios of the Revolution* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1970).

12 Rubin, *Do It!* 83.

13 Simon and Hoffman, *The Best of Abbie Hoffman* 17.

14 Mike Roselle, in an interview with V. Vale in V. Vale and Andrea Juno, ed. *Pranks!* (RE/Search: San Francisco, 1987) 124.

15 Edward Abbey, *The Monkey Wrench Gang* (New York: Avon, 1975) 208.

16 For a more detailed account of the "cracking of Glen Canyon Dam," see Christopher Manes, *Green Rage* (Boston: Little, 1990) 3-8.

17 "For the members of Earth First! some things just aren't negotiable," *The Oregonian* 25 November 1984.

18 Douglas Rushkoff, *Media Virus! Hidden Agendas in Popular Culture* (New York: Ballantine, 1994) 264.

[19] DeLuca, *Image Politics* 17.

[20] DeLuca, *Image Politics* 6.

[21] Abbey, *The Monkey Wrench Gang* 60.

[22] Rebecca Raglon, "Surviving the Doom and Gloom: Edward Abbey's Desert Comedies," *Coyote in the Maze: Tracking Edward Abbey in a World of Words,* ed. Peter Quigley (Salt Lake City: U of Utah P, 1998) 180.

CHAPTER V

"SPEAKING PIE TO POWER": NARRATIVES FROM THE GLOBAL PASTRY UPRISING

> And the bigger the fall, the bigger the joke. It would be
> better fun to throw a custard pie at a bishop than at a curate.
> – George Orweil[1]

> Never doubt that a small, committed group of people with
> pies can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that
> ever has. – Subcommandante Tofutti[2]

On February 4, 1998, Microsoft chairperson Bill Gates was in Brussels, meeting with Belgian government officials and business people. As he climbed the steps to an office building, a group of activists known as the *Patisserie Brigade Internationale* pelted him with cream pies. Always on the heels of the corporate celebrity, the media were there to document the incident; footage of Gates, his face smeared with the yellowy filling, graced both newspapers and television. This prank was the work of Belgian artist/writer Noël Godin. Many in Belgium were already familiar with Godin's pie-throwing antics, as he has performed similar stunts against European politicians and celebrities for decades. With the Gates incident, pie-throwing was thrust into the spotlight worldwide. Though deliciously mischievous, Godin's actions are but a small "piece of the pie"; militant bakers everywhere have heeded a call to arms.

The "pie-in-the-face" prank has a lengthy history with manifestations in popular and folk culture. This chapter explores the history of pie-throwing as a political prank, with particular attention to the recent spate of "pie-litical" incidents. This chapter focuses on the carefully crafted symbolism in these pranks, evident in both the enactment and in the subsequent narratives and documentation. As discussed in Chapter II, I argue that the performance of a prank has an immediate but limited

audience; however, through the media and through activist networks, the impact and the story of a prank take on further layers of symbolism and meaning.

"The Pie is Cast" – The History of Pie-Throwing

From the pie-toss at the county fair to vaudeville, stage, and screen, shoving a pie in someone's face has been a common act of slapstick and subversion. As Mack Sennett, founder of the Keystone Cops proudly declared, "A pie in the face, provided the recipient does not anticipate it, has no equal in slapstick comedy. It can reduce dignity to nothing in seconds."[3] Contemporary prankster activists combine this traditional custom with *political* targets – and innovative press releases. Pies are retributive pranks, punishing corporate criminals, corrupt government officials, and others who represent injustice, inequality, and exploitation.

Pie-throwing became an expression of political discontent in the late Sixties and early Seventies with the Yippies. Aron Kay, known as "the Pieman," tossed pies at numerous politicians and public figures, including Phyllis Schaffly, William F. Buckley, Anita Bryant, G. Gordon Liddy, Daniel Patrick Moynihan, Andy Warhol, and William Shatner (see Figure 6). Kay retired in 1992 after pieing Randall Terry, head of the anti-abortion group "Operation Rescue." Today he maintains a website that contains photographs and descriptions of his acts, as well as updates on those pie pranks "perpetrated" by others.

Figure 6. Anti-feminist Phyllis Schaffly receives her "just desserts."

Political pie-throwing in Europe also has its origins in the Sixties. Noël Godin, the man responsible for pieing Bill Gates, was active in the student uprisings in Paris. "I was never cured of the fever of May 1968," he admits.[4] He continues to subscribe to the situationist practice of *détournement* and has been pieing politically since the Sixties. He targets those he who describes as "empty celebrities" – those with power and ego, but no humor.[5] In addition to Gates, these include novelist Marguerite Duras, film director Jean-Luc Goddard, and philosopher Bernard-Henri Levy. "Permit me to recommend the bomb threat," says Godin. "One little phone call, and it never fails. There are a thousand forms of subversion, all of them interesting. But few, in my opinion, can equal the convenience and immediacy of the cream pie."[6]

In 1997, six months before the Gates pieing received worldwide attention, the Biotic Baking Brigade struck their first target: Charles Hurwitz, CEO of Maxxam Corporation – parent company of Pacific Lumber, responsible for the clearcutting of the Headwaters Redwood Forest. Since then the BBB pied many public figures for a variety

of causes including anti-biotechnology, anti-global capitalism, and human and animal rights. Although most of the BBB pieings have occurred in the Bay Area, the Brigade now has "factions" throughout the country. They are adamant, however, that they are not a formal organization; they are "flan-archists." As spokesperson Agent Apple notes,

> The BBB is a movement rather than a group. We have no members, though there is an underground network of militant bakers who provide us with nothing but the best vegan and organic pies. The focus of the current pastry 'uprising' is to hold corporate crooks and their lackeys in government and the non-profit sector accountable. Our track record shows that unlike them, we don't just promise pie in the sky, we deliver.[7]

Although their vision of peace, justice, and biodiversity may seem far-fetched and "un-american" in a culture of profit and plunder, these activists see their pie-throwing as part of the venerable tradition of political pranking in the US. Indeed, political commentator Jim Hightower asserts, "The BBB's pies are the Boston Tea Party of our modern day, sending a serious message softly to the corporate oligarchy."[8]

Contemporary relations of global capitalism have necessitated a global response from political activists. Agent Apple point out, "as the Zapatistas have made clear, in a global economy, we all live in Chiapas. The Biotic Baking Brigade (BBB) builds on that connection: under neoliberalismo, we all can throw a pie in the face of economic fascism."[9] In many ways pies are a form of "visual esperanto," an act that translates across languages, borders, and nationalities. Pie-throwing has spread throughout the West; bands of "militant bakers" are at work in Canada, England, Holland, and Australia.

Listed in Table 1 are some of these groups' recent targets. Although not all these people are necessarily famous, they are *public* and more importantly, *symbolic* figures who embody the government and corporations. A pie thrown is, then, a direct attack upon a *body* of authority. Those targeted by the pranksters experience public humiliation, but the injury is to their pride, not their anatomy. While powerful institutions

and their figureheads may desire the appearance of inviolability, pies prove that in fact, no one is untouchable.

Repercussions for political pie-throwing seem to vary according to the sense of humor of the individual targeted. Sometimes activists are able to capitalize on the fact that throwing a pie is a joke. Since it is "all in jest," charges are not necessarily filed, and when they are, these pranksters are not severely punished. However, the three activists who pied San Francisco Mayor Willie Brown in 1998 were charged with felonies for conspiracy and assault. Dubbed "the Cherry Pie Three," they were convicted and sentenced to six months in prison. For their part, these pie-throwers claimed to have never intended to hurt anyone; nevertheless the prosecutors treated their act as a vicious attack on the mayor. In turn, the activists attempted to undermine the state's definition of violence, insisting that the real violent acts are crimes perpetrated by corporations and the State -- evicting poor people from their homes, police brutality, pepper-spraying unarmed citizens, clearcutting, polluting, and so on.

In a communiqué, the BBB state, "Don't forget to write pie-loving letters to the editor, so the press gets a little perspective on what constitutes a 'violent act'."[10] Indeed, the mainstream media have tried to vilify the pie throwers, often accusing them of silliness and frivolity. As one columnist writes, "Why would you want slapstick laughs around homelessness, the raping of the environment or corporate greed? That isn't funny."[11] The pie-slingers insist these critics have missed the punchline.

TABLE 1. Recent "Pie-litical" Targets – Names, Location, and Dates

Name	Location	Date
Charles Hurwitz, Maxxam CEO	Humboldt County, California	August 1997
Bill Gates, Microsoft chairman	Brussels, Belgium	February 1998
Milton Friedman, economist	San Francisco, California	October 1998
Robert Shapiro, Monsanto CEO	San Francisco, California	October 1998
Renato Ruggiero, World Trade Organization, Director	London, England	October 1998
Willie Brown, San Francisco mayor	San Francisco, California	November 1998
Oscar de la Renta, fashion designer	Portland, Oregon	November 1998
Gordon Rousser, Dean, College of Natural Resources, UC Berkeley	Berkeley, California	November 1998
Douglas Watson, Novartis CEO	Berkeley, California	November 1998
Larry Vanderhoof, UC Davis Chancellor	Berkeley, California	November 1998
Carl Pope, Sierra Club president	San Francisco, California	November 1998
Frits Bolkestein, Dutch right-wing politician	Leiden, The Netherlands	December 1998
Sir Richard Evans, Chairman British Aerospace	London, England	December 1998
Jim Torrey, Eugene mayor	Eugene, Oregon	December 1998
Gerrit Zaim, Dutch Finance Minister	Leiden, The Netherlands	January 1999
Carles CampuZano, Spanish politician	Spain	January 1999
John Pepper, Procter & Gamble, Chairman	Chicago, Illinois and Columbus, Ohio	February 1999
Kenneth T Derr, Chevron CEO	San Francisco, California	March 1999
Neal First, geneticist, University of Wisconsin	North Hampton, New Hampshire	March 1999
Miet Thielen, Belgian politician	Nijermegen, Belgium	March 1999
Roger Landry, LaPresse, President	Montreal, Quebec	March 1999
Charles Raines, Sierra Club staff member	Eugene, Oregon	March 1999
Jesse "The Body" Ventura, Minnesota Governor	Minneapolis, Minnesota	March 1999
Ujjal Dosanjh, British Columbia's Attorney General	Burnaby, British Columbia	March 1999
Reverend Fred Phelps	San Francisco, California	March 1999
Lord David Sainsbury	Swanssea, Wales	March 1999
Russel DeValois, UC Berkeley professor and vivisector	Berkeley, California	April 1999
Dennis Avery, "free market biotech advocate"	Grinnell, Iowa	April 1999
Carol Flynn, Minnesota State Senator	Minneapolis, Minnesota	April 1999
Stephane Dion, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs	Montreal, Quebec	May 1999
Patrick More, co-founder of Greenpeace	Santa Cruz, California	December 1999
Keith Campbell, geneticist and creator of Dolly, the cloned sheep	Brighton, England	January 2000
Joyce Groote, president of BIOTECanada	Montreal, Quebec	January 2000
Michel Camdessus, IMF Director	Bangkok, Thailand	February 2000
Chuck Foldenaur, president of US Atomics	Southern Australia	February 2000
Ann Widdecombe, British Shadow Home Secretary	Oxford, England	April 2000
Martina McClaughlin, Director of Bio-technology, UC Davis.	San Francisco, California	April 2000
Dan Glickman, US Secretary of Agriculture	Washington DC	May 2000
Jean Chretien, Prime Minister of Canada	Montreal, Quebec	August 2000

"If at First You Don't Succeed, Pie and Pie Again" – Post-Prank Discourse

Like Earth First! and the Yippies, political pie-throwers understand the potentials

and the problems of using pranks to gain attention and support via the media. As in

almost all political actions, the press and their "telling" of the joke play a key role in the

pie prank. Like other forms of political performance, pranks are directed at a specific

"victim" or target, but also at a broader audience. According to Barre Toelken, pranks

have several audiences - insiders who perform the trick, strangers who know little or

nothing, and bystanders who become initiated, becoming insiders themselves. Toelken

points to the importance of audiences as they strengthen the "esoteric sense of

heightened participation in a special group."[12] In other words, the performance of the

prank solidifies the insiders' identity and group cohesion. For some outsiders, the prank

can inform, educate, or convince; for others, of course, the prank can only embarrass,

repulse, or ridicule. In many ways, the mainstream press acts as the "outsider" audience

in the prank performance. "On behalf of the corporations which own them," writes

Agent Apple of the BBB,

> mainstream media outlets present a spectacle that bamboozles and
> distracts its viewers. To state the obvious, it is extremely difficult to get
> a dissenting message through the mass media filters and into the hearts
> and minds of the public. If we hold a rally in demonstration-jaded San
> Francisco, the media usually won't cover it. If we write letters to the
> editor, they don't get printed. However, the visual of a pie in the face
> makes a sizable chink in the media armour through which we can then
> discuss the reasons why a figure deserved to be pied. It allows us to
> communicate our message to a greater extent than traditional means
> currently allow.[13]

A member of the "Cherry Pie Three," echoes this, noting that protests and marches are so

commonplace that in order "to catch people's attention, it's got to be something bigger

and different. Which is the curse and the blessing of pie."[14]

However pie-throwers, like other pranksters, are often accused of merely acting for the cameras, and sometimes the protesters' actual message is lost beneath the media hoopla over the prank Itself. Some have lamented that the press is more interested in ascertaining the pie's flavor than pursuing the rationale for the act.

Despite the drawbacks, the media does offer activists a vehicle for spreading the word to others outside their movement. It also gives them a platform to include additional dialogue, narrative, and interpretation with their initial prank performance. For example, when one pie-thrower was convicted of harassment, disorderly conduct, and criminal mischief and ordered to formally apologize to her target, she seized the opportunity to append her joke: "Ali i can say is I am sorry. I'm sorry I missed when I hurled that pastry projectile, an all-American apple pie, In your direction . . . ."[15] She insured that the last laugh would be hers – not the judicial system's.

Despite the media coverage of many protests and political pranks, most of the communication about these events still goes on "underground." At this grassroots, in-group level, much discussion goes on orally, as word about actions is spread amongst friends. Due to the subversive nature of their political beliefs and due to the illegality of some of their activities, the activists are generally secretive and wary of outsiders, especially during the planning stages of a prank. Nonetheless, after a prank, there is usually much discussion and analysis both orally and in writing.

Manifestos and communiqués, once only handwritten, typed or xeroxed on flyers or in 'zines, are now published on web pages and spread via email. The Internet provides a medium for widespread dissemination of political information, and a certain level of anonymity online facilitates subversive discourse. Just as the Zapatista rebels in Mexico have utilized the Internet to broadcast their messages beyond Chiapas, the pie-throwers have taken advantage these new networks of communication, helping spread the

"tradition" of the pie-toss elsewhere. Indeed, much of the research for this chapter was accumulated from A-INFOS News Service, an international anarchist listserv, where Aron Kay, TAART, the BBB amongst others relate their activities and post their communiqués. No matter what format they take – digital, paper, or oral, humor and social criticism continue in the activists' narratives and literature.

For example, the communiqués frequently make a point of describing the types of pies, for the ingredients are chosen purposefully. The pies are often homemade, not store-bought. By using organic and vegan ingredients, the protesters align themselves with Nature, and in opposition to corporations and capitalism. Organic tofu cream pie had special significance for the pieing of Monsanto CEO Robert Shapiro, as his corporation produces genetically-engineered soybeans. Apple pie also has particular resonance as it symbolizes traditional American ideals. It provides a political critique not only of the actions of the person targeted but of what exactly these ideals entail and how they are attained.

The pie-throwers' communiqués also utilize a specialized language or argot that heightens the humor of their actions. For example, the Belgians invented terms like "entarteur" ("pie-thrower") and "glouplnesque" ("pie pranks") to describe their antics. The activists in Montreal call themselves "entartistes." Many of the pie-tossers also use abbreviations and acronyms to label themselves. These include the BBB-CIA (Biotic Baking Brigade - Central Iowa Anarchists), PIE (People Insurgent Everywhere), and TAART (Dutch for "pie"). One group, mimicking the Nobel-peace-prize medical organization, call themselves "Bakers without Borders."

The BBB has also adopted a "spy" lingo to describe themselves and their actions; there are secret agents, code-words, and undercover operations. Pie throwers include Agent Apple, Special Agent Cow-Pie, Special Agent Creamy-Genes, and

Subcommandante Tofutti. Most take names of well-known types of pie: Agent Cherry

Rhubarb, Agent Lemon Chiffon, Agent Pecan, Agent Key Lime. In "Operation: Double

Fudge," pieings occurred simultaneously on the UC Davis and UC Berkeley campuses. In

"Operation: Second Phelping," two activists, dressed in nuns' habits, pied Reverend Fred

Phelps with banana tofu pie – Phelps is the fundamentalist Christian minister who travels

around the country denouncing the sins of homosexuality at the funerals of gay men.

The opening lines of one pie-litical experience narrative read:

> Twas round midnight when I got my marching orders from the Biotic
> Baking Brigade (BBB), sent from the General HQ and secrets ovens
> located deep in the heart of Headwaters Forest. Maxxam CEO Charles
> Hurwitz was having a hush-hush. . . meeting the next day. My assignment
> was to penetrate the security surrounding the event, locate Hurwitz. . .
> and pie him.[16]

The rhetoric of espionage, although certainly tongue-in-cheek, reiterates the activists'

need for secrecy; it also mimics the very authorities who do monitor and infiltrate radical

political groups.

The pie-throwers' manifestos, communiqués, and press releases contain other

types of prankish and joking language. The authors frequently *détourne* famous

quotations and well-known proverbs, incorporating words and phrases associated with

baking and pies. These include:

"pie high"

"let slip the pies of war"

"another one bites the crust"

"pies fly while you're having fun"

"pie 'em all, and let God sort 'em out"

"if the people pie, the leaders will swallow"

"it's a good day to pie"

"we can lick the upper crust"

"it's better to pie on our feet than live on our knees"

"the pie's the limit"

"ask not for whom the pie throws – it throws for thee"

Agent Apple of the BBB is particularly fond of puns and word plays, often crying, "let justice be served," claiming that the rich will get their "just desserts" and "culinary comeuppance," or that they will eat "humble pie." Echoing the communiqués of the Zapatista spokesperson Subcommandante Marcos, Agent Apple often signs his letters "from somewhere in the mountains of Northwestern California, I remain faithfully yours" (Marcos signs his "from the mountains of the Mexican Southeast"). This use of wit is an additional word-play, one that draws on well-known revolutionary rhetoric to heighten the practical joke of pie-throwing. The use of humor in both narrative and performance make the BBB communiqués as much a joy to read as their pranks are a joy to witness.

Pie-throwing is an appealing type of prank for activists as it does have these multiple layers of meaning. Pie-throwing is a symbolic gesture, a way to publicly humiliate powerful members of society. By utilizing pranks and pies, political activists are able to undermine hierarchy, mock authority, and capture the attention of the media and public-at-large. The visual image of the pie-in-the-face marks a popular act of ridicule and a well-known symbol of irreverence – one that even disparaging press coverage can hardly undermine. The "global pastry uprising" has embarrassed many targets and perhaps more importantly, has drawn attention to many issues. Although few people may witness the actual pieings, the audience is widened by the media and by the activist's own communication networks. It is this secondary, or narrative level of the prank that reiterates and strengthens the joke. In the words of Agent Apple, "The technocrats who dominate industrial society may call us radical and unrealistic, but the dream of a bio-diverse future is one for which we will fight until the day we pie."[17]

Notes

[1] George Orwell, "Funny But Not Vulgar," *The Collected Essays: Journalism and Letters of George Orwell* (New York: Harcourt, 1968) 284.

[2] Agit-prop, "Call for solidarity with BBB," 29 March 1999, a-infos@tao.ca (March 30, 1999).

[3] Diane MacIntyre, "Keystone: Kops, the King, and Just Desserts," 1996, http://www.mdle.com/ClassicFilms/FeaturedStar/keystone.htm (3 September 2000).

[4] Robert Chalmers, "Let Them Eat Cake," *The Observer* 3 July 1995: 10.

[5] Henry Hughes, "Let's Pie the Polluting Lolly," *Harper's Magazine* May 1998: 20.

[6] Chalmers, "Let Them Eat Cake" 4.

[7] Al Decker, "BBB Pies Head of the Sierra Club," 15 November 1998, a-infos@tao.ca (16 November 1998).

[8] Agit Prop, "Cherry Pie 3 Follow-up," 27 February 1999, a-infos@tao.ca (28 February 1999).

[9] Agent Apple, "The Global Pastry Uprising," *The Ecologist* August-September 1999: 298.

[10] Al Decker, "Letter from the BBB," 3 December 1999, a-infos@tao.ca (4 December 1999).

[11] Al Decker, "Big Fat BBB New Years Greetings from Pie Throwers," 4 January 1999, a-infos@tao.ca (5 January 1999).

[12] Barre Toelken, *The Dynamics of Folklore* (Logan: Utah State UP, 1996) 146.

[13] Agent Apple, "A Treatise on the Global Pastry Uprising," Biotic Baking Brigade website, http://www.asis.com/~agit-prop/bbb/treatise.html (3 August 2000).

[14] Ana Maria Cox, "The Medium is the Meringue: Pie-Throwing Protesters Who Take Their Slapstick Seriously (Pie Throwing as Means of Protest)," *Mother Jones* March 1999: 42.

[15] Tricia Schwennesen, "Activist Guilty in Pie Incident." *The Register Guard* 24 February 2000: D1.

[16] Al Decker, "In Defense of Apple Pie," 1998, http://www.bud.com/98/07/tkles/24.aldeck.pie/ (28 May 1999).

[17] Biotic Baking Brigade, "Pastry Uprising against Genetix Continues in Montreal," 26 January 2000, a-infos@tao.ca (27 January 2000).

CHAPTER VI

SUBVERTING SPECTACULAR POLITICS: THE EUGENE

ANARCHISTS FOR TORREY (EAT) CAMPAIGN

In her article "The Inverted World of Spectacle: Social and Political Responses to Terrorism," Aida Hozic draws on situationist theory to argue that radical political groups are de-legitimized and demonized through their representation by the media. What she calls the "spectacularization of opposition" marginalizes all dissent while at the same time dramatizing certain acts as "terrorism" – "irrational violence with no political significance whatsoever."[1] While violent acts are easily recuperated and used to justify political repression, this chapter demonstrates that on the contrary, pranks can subvert the spectacle's representations of dissidence. This chapter focuses exclusively on one prank: the Eugene Anarchists for Torrey (EAT) campaign. Like most practical jokes, this prank operates at several levels, addressing and expressing internal and external concerns, meanings, and interpretations. By focusing on both the context and the performance of the EAT prank, this chapter argues that pranks shatter one-dimensional representations of dissent and resistance in order to undermine the "spectacularization of opposition."

Before I describe the Eugene Anarchists for Torrey campaign, however, it is necessary to provide some background on the infamous "Eugene Anarchists."[2]

Background: The "Eugene Anarchists"

Eugene, Oregon is a liberal college town of approximately 130,000 residents in the Willamette River Valley, two hours south of Portland. Eugene is a nexus of environmental and social justice activism, with remnants of the Sixties counterculture. It is home to the

Earth First! Journal, miles of bike paths, several ex-Merry Pranksters, and hundreds of displaced Deadheads. *Animal House* was filmed on the University of Oregon campus, and Seventies track legend Steve Prefontaine ran there. Eugene proudly celebrates multiculturalism and diversity, but Eugene is overwhelmingly white.[3] Ethnic minorities are quick to attest to a deep-seated racism that dates back a hundred years to Oregon's anti-Black immigration laws. At the same time as it whirls in tie-dyes and "tolerance," Eugene is a conservative town, with an economy still tied to timber interests while actively promoting new high-tech industries. Caught between these economies of boom and bust, salaries in the area are low, and a recent survey listed Eugene as the third least-affordable housing market in the country.[4] Although once known as a Democratic stronghold in a Republican state, lately the politics in Eugene have taken a more radical turn. Several important events in recent years have put a small group of "Eugene Anarchists" into conflict with local authorities and have thrust "Tree City USA" into the national spotlight.

On June 1, 1997, the city government approved the removal of forty heritage trees to make way for the construction of another downtown parking garage. Although there was no public announcement, protesters caught wind of the impending cut and arranged an impromptu Sunday morning demonstration. Several individuals climbed into the trees hoping to protect them. Police tried to pull them down, brutally pepper-spraying protesters' eyes and genitals as they clung precariously to the branches. The mayor watched from his car. The incident caused an uproar, and calls were made for a citizen-review panel to monitor police brutality.

On October 17, 1998, during a protest against sweatshop labor, the Nike outlet store was raided by a band of masked individuals, who proceeded to smash pumpkins, tip shelves, and throw shoe boxes into a nearby fountain. In response, police raided a

local home, holding a family at gunpoint and searching their house for seven hours. Alleging their teenage son was involved in the Nike "riot," the police seized books, video tapes, posters, sign-making materials, and a computer.

On June 18, 1999, local activists joined the call for an "international day of action." "Reclaim the Streets" parties were being held worldwide – in London, New York, Prague, San Francisco – to coincide with a G8 Summit in Germany. Originating in London, "Reclaim the Streets" actions bring together ravers and radical activists to block traffic, reclaim urban space, and create spontaneous carnivals in the midst of busy intersections. The Eugene event took place on the downtown plaza and included drumming, dancing, and parading. Many participants wore black ski masks. Anti-technology demonstrators smashed television sets and stereos with shouts of encouragement from onlookers. A few black-masked individuals, feeling emboldened, stopped cars and harassed motorists; some downtown businesses' windows were broken. Police appeared in riot gear and chased protesters into a nearby park, unleashing a barrage of pepper spray and tear gas. Fifteen people were arrested for rioting. L.A. resident Robert Thaxton, in town for the event, threw a rock at a police officer, grazing his shoulder; Thaxton was sentenced to eight years in prison for assault.

As these police-anarchist confrontations drew more and more media attention locally, regionally, and nationally, many cameras and microphones turned to John Zerzan, a local author who has published several books and articles on anti-technological anarchism, also known as "future-primitivism." Zerzan had made a name for himself by becoming a correspondent with the Unabomber Theodore Kaczynski, a connection the mainstream media never neglects to mention when they report on "Eugene Anarchists." A 'zine entitled *Black Clad Messenger*, "Radio Free Cascadia," a

pirate radio station, and *Cascadia Alive*, a community-access television show provided additional and alternative mouthpieces for the "Eugene Anarchists."

Although each of these events had local significance, the most Important for the "Eugene Anarchists" was undoubtedly the World Trade Organization protest In Seattle, Washington. From November 30 through December 2, 1999, the "millennium round" of WTO trade talks were protested and blockaded by activists from around the country and the world. On November 30, over 40,000 protesters, Including union members, students, and environmental activists, barricaded streets in downtown Seattle, in effect denying access to the convention center and shutting down the meeting. Although the truth of the charges against them is questionable, sufficed to say, the "Eugene Anarchists" received international media attention for their alleged role in the property destruction that accompanied the anti-WTO demonstration. For a brief time, Seattle officials tried to convince the public that the police's use of tear gas, pepper spray and concussion grenades was a necessary response to the "violence" from "Eugene Anarchists."[5] The television showed images of downtown Seattle flooded with tear gas and of hundreds of police In Darth Vadar-like riot gear. These representations of police power were matched with footage of someone in black smashing a Starbucks window. "Eugene anarchists were major players in the violence," claimed *The Seattle Times* the next day.[6]

Since December 1999, the media have become obsessed with the "Eugene Anarchists." Numerous articles have appeared in the local *Register-Guard* and *Eugene Weekly*, and coverage has extended to regional and national newspapers as well -- *The Oregonian*, *The L.A. Times*, *The Seattle Times*, *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*. Similarly, local and regional TV crews have sought the "Eugene Anarchists" out, as have national, mainstream media. "Eugene Anarchists" have been featured on *60 Minutes II* and on Art Bell's radio show. They've appeared in *SPIN Magazine*, *Rolling Stone*, and

Harper's. CNN wants to interview them, and rumor has it *Glamour Magazine* is writing an article about the women in the "movement."

In some respects, all the media coverage is "a joke" itself, for the press has greatly exaggerated and spectacularized the "Eugene Anarchists." *Rolling Stone*, for example, featured a Hunter S. Thompson-esque exposé, a crazy weekend in the "Eugene Anarchist" underworld, spiced with drugs, shoplifting, vandalism, and of course, rock-n-roll. The *SPIN* article puts the number of "Eugene Anarchists" at two hundred and describes them as the "Black Army Faction," conjuring images of Germany's Red Army Faction, a terrorist organization from the 1970s.[7] Although it is impossible to say for sure, there are probably no more than fifty "Black Blockers" – less than one percent of the population of Eugene. Nonetheless the "Eugene Anarchists" have caused a "moral panic," that age-old threat to society of youth-gone-wild and kids-turned-bad; this time, the fear was heightened as the anarchists were deemed "terrorists" in the community's midst.

The post-June 18th and post-Seattle hysteria over "Eugene Anarchists" elicited a response from the state, as well as the press. Embarrassed to be at the helm of the "anarchist capital of the world," Eugene mayor Jim Torrey was quick to apologize for "exporting anarchists."[8] Citing "anarchists" and "eco-terrorists" as the new threat to American security, FBI and police promised increased surveillance, infiltration, and repression.[9] Eugene police began detaining and "unmasking" individuals at rallies and protests.

Eugene activists (anarchist or not) returned home from the WTO protest in Seattle with mixed reactions to the event. Pleased with their success at shutting down the ministerial meeting and at gaining attention to the issues of "free trade" and "global capitalism," the activist community was split over the issue of property destruction and

troubled by media distortions of their town. These tensions were exacerbated as police,

both locally and in Seattle, vowed to crack down on "violent" protesters. Indeed,

several Eugene activists faced criminal charges for their actions at the protest, including

inciting a riot and violating the "No Protest Zone." Paranoia and fear were heightened

when it was revealed that Seattle police had used a carcinogenic nerve gas on

protesters.[10]

This was the climate in which two "Eugene Anarchist"-pranksters, Rotten Johnny

and Kooky Dow, decided to "lighten things up." [11]

The Prank

On December 17, 1999, the Eugene Anarchists for Torrey (EAT) campaign held a

press conference and rally on the steps of City Hall, announcing their active support for

the re-election of Eugene Mayor Jim Torrey. The small group of black-clad and (a few)

black-masked individuals was outnumbered by several Eugene police officers, a handful

of reporters, and a few curious onlookers.

Playing on the mayor's own pronouncements, flyers for the event exclaim, "Let's

keep Eugene an exporter of Anarchists. Re-elect Jim Torrey! A vote for Torrey is a vote

for inevitable anarchy!" The EAT press statement reads,

> A faction of the Eugene Anarchist scene has decided to endorse Jim
> Torrey as our candidate for next year's mayor race. People will wonder
> how an anti-authoritarian group could endorse any candidate for a
> government position. Well, we believe that Jim Torrey has been very
> influential in turning Eugene into a 'hotbed' of Anarchy. We look at
> his vital role in the June 1st Treecutting/Torture and his ability to get gross
> polluters and discriminating corporations like Hyundai to move to our
> town, as prime examples of his Conservative/Corporate agenda, thus
> creating the inevitable and beautiful Anarchist backlash. Although none
> of us are foolish enough to buy into the scam of Democracy, and of
> course do not plan on voting, we encourage others, who still believe, to
> at least vote for the greater of two evils. If not for pure comedy, at least
> to make It clear to all what type of Fascist system we live under.[12]

Asserting that "every good revolution needs a Torrey," the campaign puns the mayor's name, a homonym for a British conservative. Flyers for EAT provide the definition for "Tory" – "1: a member of a chiefly 18th Century British Party upholding the established church and traditional political structure 2: an American supporters of the British during the American Revolution 3: an extreme conservative." The campaign flyers also contain a photograph of the mayor at a pie-eating contest at the county fair, alluding to his symbolic pieing in December 1998 for his complicity and his complacency during the June First incident. Pieced together with scissors and glue, assorted texts, typefaces, and images, the D.I.Y. (Do-It-Yourself) look of the EAT 'zines and flyers undermines the glossy pictures and slick publications from the "official" Torrey campaign (see Figure 7). Camouflaged as parodic material, the EAT literature also contains more "serious" analyses and explanations of anarchist beliefs and tactics.

The EAT campaign has become an extended prank of sorts, lasting beyond a single, momentary joke, as the members of EAT have stayed "in character" to show their "support" at numerous engagements. On January 21, 2000, EAT met with the mayor; the room was filled with as many police and journalists as anarchists. Although the event was supposed to mark the beginning of a dialogue between the city and anarchists, Torrey refused to speak. Indefatigable, EAT asked the mayor to blink once for "Yes" and twice for "No." Thus, they secured Torrey's approval for the next meeting of the WTO to be held in Eugene, as well as for equal funding for police and anarchists – "to level the playing field in the class war." Before security officers escorted the mayor from the room, EAT serenaded him with their rendition of the Sex Pistols's "Anarchy in the UK":

> Torrey is the Antichrist,
> And I am an anarchist.
> I'm not gonna vote,
> But I want him to win.
> It's Eugene Anarchists for
> Jim Torrey!

'Cause I wanna eat
Jim Torrey!

Jim Torrey in Eugene,
Leader of the Anarchists,
Sympathizer for the Brits,
Shows the System for what it is.
'Cause I wanna eat
Jim Torrey!

Likes to eat a lot of pie,
Watch the trees and wetlands die,
Helps spread anarchy to all,
Proving that the State must fall!
'Cause I wanna eat
Jim Torrey!

Any vote for Jim Torrey
Is a vote for anarchy,
And for those who still don't get the joke
It's even better not to vote!
'Cause I wanna eat
Jim Torrey!

True to the decentralized nature of anarchism, others have taken up the EAT

mantle. The word "EAT" and a "circle-A" anarchy symbol were spraypainted on the side

of a neighborhood police station. Farther afield, anarchists in Olympia, Washington

formed OAT (Olympia Anarchists for Torrey), and Portland, Oregon anarchists created

PAT (Portland Anarchists for Torrey). "It appears there'll be a power struggle to see who

gets him. In fact, we're nominating him for the dictator of the Pacific Northwest," quips

Rotten.[13]

As the primary election grew near, EAT attended several mayoral debates.

Rotten asked candidates such probing questions as, "Would you support the name of our

city being changed to www.hyundai.com?"[14] On election night, a dozen EAT supporters

"crashed" the public party at the Lane County Fairgrounds, helping themselves to hors

d'oeuvres, dancing the conga, and cheering with encouragement as the results came

in. . . A landslide victory! In a post-election flyer, EAT proclaim that "Torrey received over

71 percent of the vote in the Eugene primary. Jim only expected 60 percent, so the extra 11 percent has been attributed to the hard work of the EAT campaign."[15] "We put a lot of work into this campaign," Rotten gushed to the local newspaper on election night. "We're really happy."[16]

EUGENE ANARCHISTS
for TORREY (EAT)
Press Conference and Rally to Support the Re-Election
of JimTorrey
City Hall Stairs (777 Pearl St)
Friday, December 17th at 5pm

LET'S KEEP EUGENE AN EXPORTER OF ANARCHISTS,
RE-ELECT JIM TORREY!
A VOTE FOR TORREY IS A VOTE FOR INEVITABLE ANARCHY!

EASY AS PIE

A faction of the Eugene Anarchist scene has decided to endorse Jim Torrey as our candidate for next year's mayoral race. People will wonder how an anti-authoritarian group could endorse any candidate for a government position. Well, we believe that Jim Torrey has been very influential in turning Eugene into a "hotbed" of Anarchy. We look at his vital role in the June 1st Treecutting/Torture and his ability to get gross polluters and discriminating corporations like Hyundai to move to our town, as prime examples of his Conservative/Corporate agenda, thus creating the inevitable and beautiful Anarchist backlash. Although none of us are foolish enough to buy into the scam of Democracy, and of course do not plan on voting, we encourage others, who still believe, to at least vote for the greater of two evils. If not for pure comedy, at least to make it clear to all what type of Fascist system we live under. Often more liberal candidates muddy the waters with reform tactics which offer no real solutions to our problems, while promoting a corporate agenda.

TORY \'tŏr-ē\ 1: a member of a chiefly 18th Century British Party upholding the established church and traditional political structure 2: an American supporter of the British during the American Revolution 3: an extreme conservative.
-Funk and Wagnalls Dictionary

'CAUSE EVERY GOOD REVOLUTION NEEDS A TORREY!

Sponsored by
EUGENE ANARCHISTS for TORREY (EAT)
And
The "THIRD FRIDAY of the MONTH" Series

Figure 7. EAT flyer, circa December 1999.

Getting the Joke

> Most people think the EAT campaign is merely a *joke* dis-
> guised as a *campaign*. It's actually a *campaign* disguised
> as a *joke*. – Eugene Anarchists for Torrey (EAT)[17]

Like all practical jokes and pranks, the EAT campaign requires an audience, for jokes are performed for one's self and for others. In this way, the prank has both esoteric and exoteric functions and interpretations. In other words, pranks perform for "outside" forces, subverting and undermining the status quo; they also serve a purpose for those "inside" the movement, sustaining and reinvigorating an activist community under attack by the media and the government.

There are several levels at which one can "get" this joke. Obviously, the EAT campaign is a stab at the mayor with a not-so-subtle reference to Torrey's corpulence. As with the pie-pranks, it is the body of authority, literally and symbolically, that is targeted. As the EAT flyers and communiqués reiterate, Jim Torrey has played a central role in cultivating the social, political, and economic atmosphere that has made Eugene a "hotbed of anarchy."

> Whether sitting safely in a limousine, presiding over the destruction of
> 'public property' at the infamous June First tree-cutting, pepper spray
> jamboree, or facilitating the arrival of racist, sexist, multinational cor-
> porations to abuse workers and poison our water, Jim has played a
> pivotal role in the growth of open opposition to authority![18]

Although the mayor eventually faced several opponents in his re-election bid, he was running unopposed when EAT was first formed. With over $20,000 in campaign contributions, Torrey's re-election was never really in doubt. By supporting the mayor's campaign, "Eugene Anarchists" twist the implications of Torrey's "inevitable" re-election. EAT's promise of a victory "by any means necessary" not only echoes Malcolm X's call for racial justice but alludes to the tactics of President Nixon's 1972 re-election campaign.

Likewise, EAT's call for "Four more years" repeats a slogan from President Reagan's 1984 reelection campaign.

While the EAT campaign obviously mocks the conservative politics of Jim Torrey, it also makes fun of liberals and left-wing politicians. Reiterating the anarchist condemnation of liberal politics that seek to reform rather than abolish the State, the EAT materials point out that "electing a more liberal candidate may have been a disasterous [sic] development, as it would have allowed local liberals to once again believe all the lies about how you can change the system by begging the powers-that-be for reforms."[19] Dismissing liberals as "whiners," the EAT campaign criticizes left-wing complicity with "the system."

EAT also pokes fun at the electoral process in general, as part of a larger anarchist critique of American politics and "democracy." One EAT flyer asks, "if it's humiliating to be ruled, how much more degrading is it to choose our masters?"[20] Anarchists oppose voting, often asserting that if voting could change things, "it would be illegal." Furthermore, the EAT campaign mocks the logic of choosing the "lesser of two evils," a decision American voters frequently bemoan. EAT thereby embraces voter disillusionment, characterizing it as a political act rather than inaction or apathy. As one communiqué notes,

> While we dream of a day when we have no masters, tyrants, bosses (or mayors) or their merciless defenders of wealth, . . . a day when we wake up on election morning and realize that absolutely nobody voted and our government is universally recognized as illegitimate, until then if we are still to be ruled by someone (or something), let him be the greater of the evils![21]

Moreover, by explicitly stating the dilemma of the "two evils" in their campaign literature and by throwing their weight behind the greater of the two, EAT argue that conservative politics and its accompanying police state lead to social upheaval and "inevitable anarchy."

Although EAT performs its joke for and on others – the media, the mayor, and mainstream Eugene for example, some elements are, of course, for "insiders." Humor has a particular internal resonance as it corresponds to the "Eugene Anarchists" espousal of "play" and rejection of "work." In this respect, EAT makes light of anarchism, not only by allying themselves (albeit jokingly) with an electoral campaign, but by utilizing pranks as opposed to more conventional praxis. By no means rejecting more militant direct action, EAT suggests that culture jamming can be a useful anarchist tactic. Labeling their particular brand of activism "anarcho-cynicism," members of the EAT campaign satirize the "serious" work of anarcho-syndicalism. "Like nihilism but a lot more fun," anarcho-cynicism implies that society's most dangerous vandals are really comedians. "People don't believe anarchists have a sense of humor," laments Kooky. "EAT shows they're wrong." "Things are pretty hopeless," says Rotten. "At least we make people laugh."[22]

Contrary to their reaction to the other coverage local anarchists have received, Rotten and Kooky express their pleasure with how the EAT campaign has unfolded in the media. They note with a certain satisfaction that EAT has confused the press. Unable to "spin" the story, journalists report EAT pranks blow-by-blow, word-for-word. For once, "Eugene Anarchists" have a chance to spout their rhetoric uninhibited – even though the delivery is as a punchline rather than a political oratory. While most interactions with the mainstream media get twisted to suit the dominant, corporate viewpoint, it appears in this case the press just does not "get it."

This seems to be the most powerful and important moment of the prank -- the inability for it to be rationalized, recuperated, co-opted, appropriated, and doctored by the media. At the beginning of this chapter, I attempted to chronicle a series of local events and media exposés that have lead to increased tensions and hostilities between police and anarchists. The EAT campaign throws a monkeywrench (pun definitely

intended) into this "spectacularization" of "Eugene Anarchists." While the media is furiously promoting the image of violent anarchists -- protesters who smash windows, spraypainting graffiti, and hurl rocks at police, the "Eugene Anarchists" have responded with a practical joke, retorting "where's your sense of humor?" EAT takes the popular image of anarchy (Figure 8) and inverts it (Figure 9), presenting it in a manner that runs counter to the conventional portrait of insurrection and is therefore difficult to commodify or distort. The prank interrupts the dominant narrative that portrays anarchists as angry, violent terrorists, responding instead with an image of a clown. The prank defuses the escalating tensions, challenging the single narrative that equates anarchy with chaos and destruction. Furthermore, it interrupts the headlines of "mayhem," utilizing the media to broadcast "mirth." As one anarchist's account of EAT's activities on election night states, "Security presence was surprisingly minimal, and no violent incidents were reported, proving that dispite [sic] our hooliganish media reputation, it's funner to ridicule the mayor than to punch him."[23]
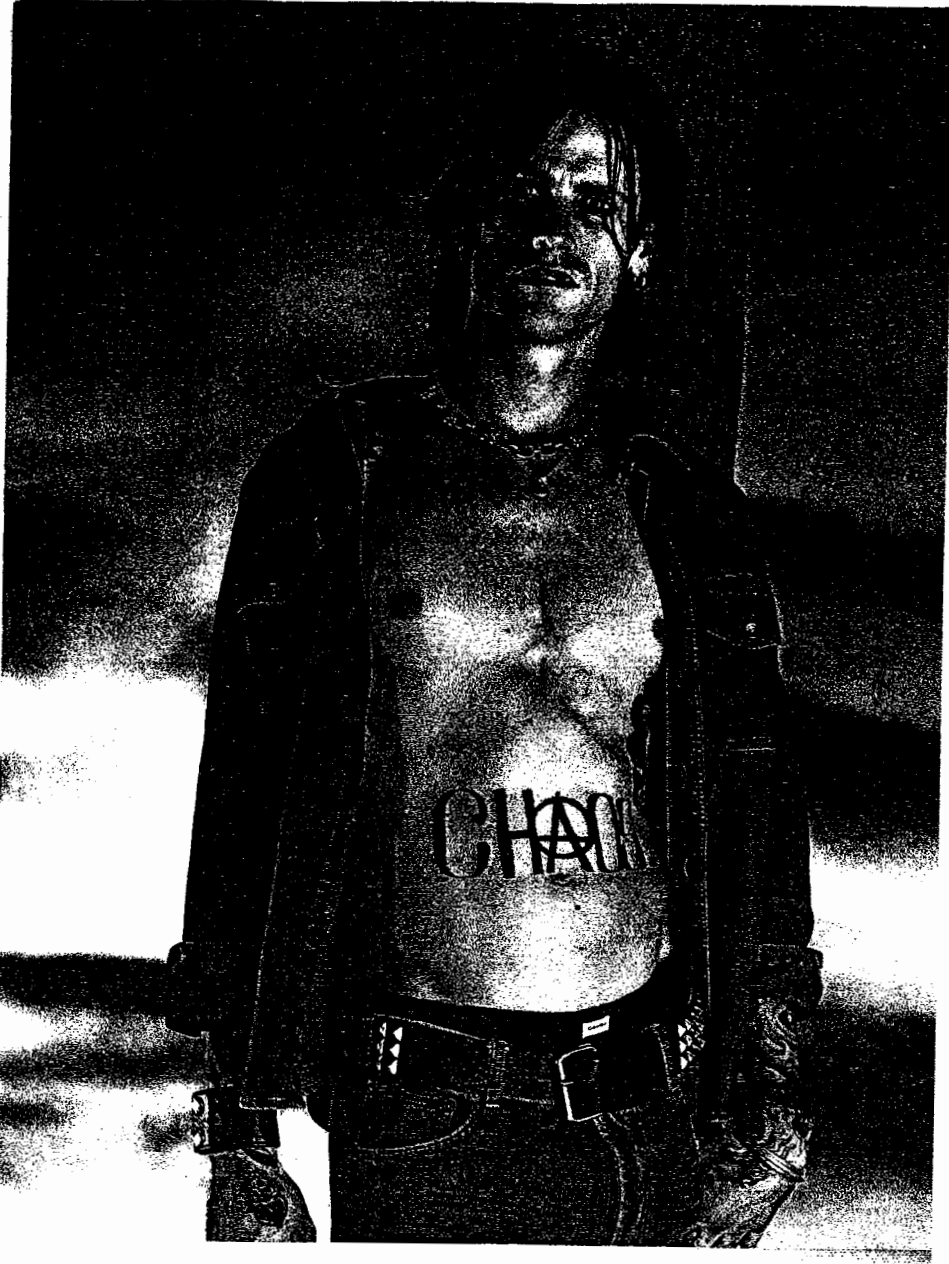
Figure 8. Calvin Klein advertisement from the issue *SPIN Magazine* (March 2000) that featured an article on the "Eugene Anarchists."
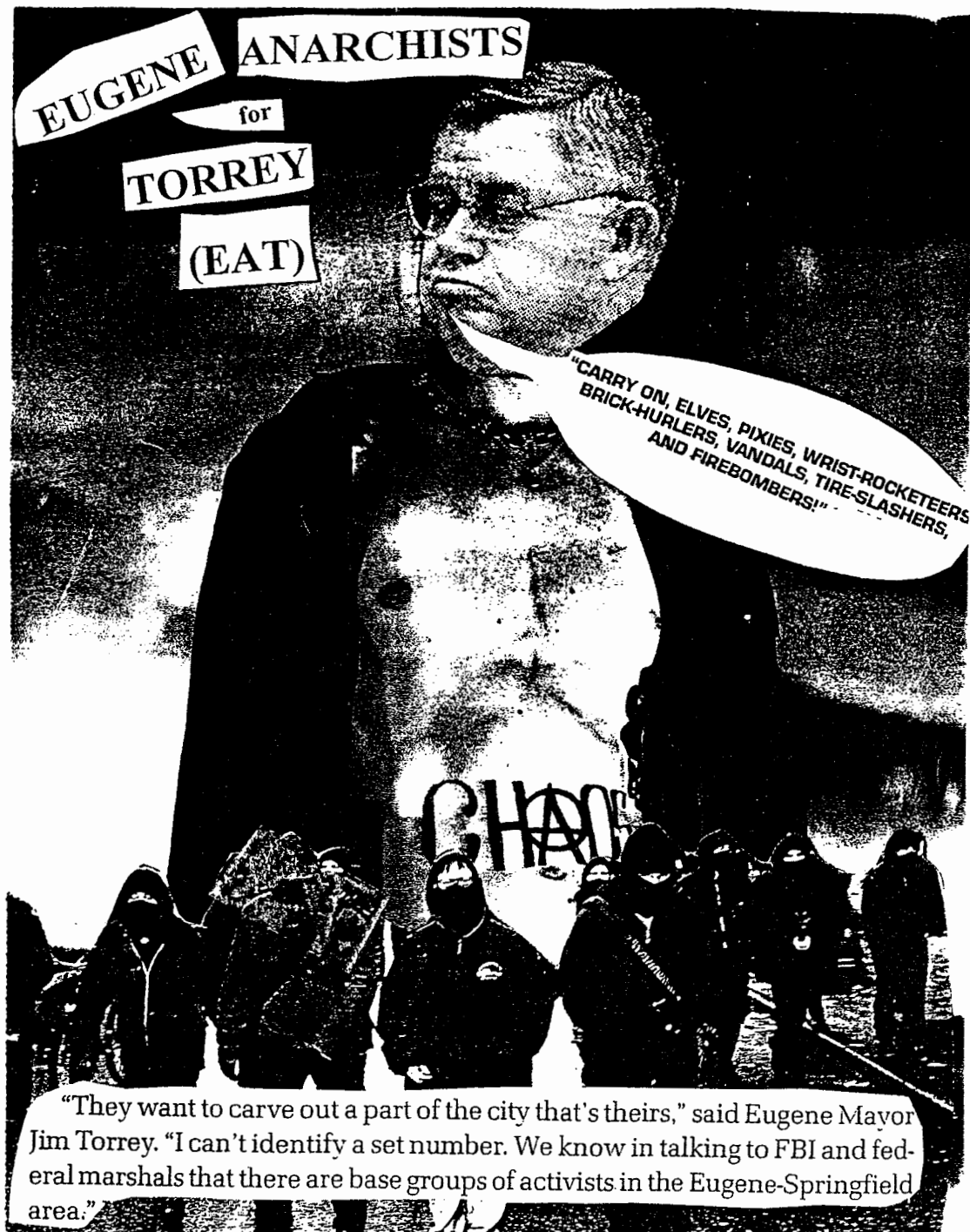
Figure 9. EAT flyer, détourned *SPIN* image.

This chapter has shown how humor can interrupt the dominant narrative that "spectacularizes" and stereotypes oppositional forces. As theater studies scholar Graham White suggests, "in order to resist the spectacularizing of political acts which are representable as irrational, oppositional groups must be continually striving to subvert the spectacle's own narratives, challenging dominant representations."[24] By performing pranks, activists utilize symbolic inversion, deflating egos and subverting hierarchy. The image of a mayor assured of re-election is destabilized when the most radical element of his community vows their support for his campaign. While EAT may be a mollification of local tensions in so far as it defuses the violence, it is by no means a conciliatory act. EAT does not mark resolution, coalition, or compromise between the mayor, the city government, police, and anarchists – it is a joke. The campaign does mark, however, an important point of departure from previous representations, giving a whole new meaning to the "Eugene Anarchists" – they're "a riot."

Notes

¹ Aida Hozic, "The Inverted World of Spectacle: Social and Political Reponses to Terrorism," *Terrorism and Modern Drama*, ed. John Orr and Dragan Klaíc (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1990) 73.

² Throughout this chapter, I have placed "Eugene Anarchists" In quotations, for I want to highlight what I see as the media's "construction" of this group. When they refer to "Eugene Anarchists," they are describing a activist demographic, If you will -- in their minds, mostly young and white males. This is who appears before the cameras; this is who is quoted in the papers. (And, incidentally, this is EAT.) Certainly there are other anarchists in Eugene, less apt perhaps to wear black masks or be interviewed by *Rolling Stone*. For this reason, I want to signal with quotations that this phenomenon Is as much as reflection of media manipulation as It is a "real," monolithic group or organization. While I am by no means denying the existence of a militant "Black Block" In Eugene, I want to mark that the spectacularized image does not fully represent anarchism in Eugene.

³ According to the "Consolidated Plan for 1995 Executive Summary," by the US Department of Housing and Urban Development, 93% of Eugene residents are Caucasian, 1.3% are Black, 2.7% are Hispanic, and 3.5% Asian.

⁴ Richard Seven, "Eugene: Where Alternate Realities Go to Live -- Loggers, Joggers, Organic Farmers, Tree-Sitters, Anarchists, Oh My!" *The Seattle Times* 12 March 2000: 14.

⁵ Alan Pittman, "New World Disorder," *Eugene Weekly* 9 December 1999: 9.

⁶ David Postman, "Group Rejects Others' Pleas of 'No Violence' – Black Clad Anarchists Target Cars, Windows," *The Seattle Times* 1 December 1999: A12.

⁷ RJ Smith, "Chaos Theories," *SPIN Magazine* March 2000: 114.

⁸ Associated Press, "Eugene Anarchists linked to riots," *The Oregonian* 3 December 1999.

⁹ Evan Wright, "Swamp's Last Day on Earth," *Rolling Stone* 30 March 2000: 45.

¹⁰ Dr. Kirk Murphy, "Neurotoxic Symptoms In Chemical Warfare Casualties At Seattle WTO Meeting," cpa@efn.org 7 December 1999.

¹¹ These are obviously not the activists' real names, although they are their "action names." I have struggled over the issue of anonymity and have discussed it several times with my main informants. As the media has continued to focus on the "Eugene Anarchists," the issue of anonymity has become, quite frankly, a moot point. Both these individuals are quite public with their prankster performances, and their "act" has been described in newspapers, magazine articles, and on TV. In some respects, both "Rotten Johnny" and "Kooky Dow" are "characters," personae worn for their demonstrations of social criticism and humor; and the last time I checked, neither wit nor dissent are illegal. Yet, I have come to the conclusion that to obscure their identity would be counter-productive to my goal of showing EAT's activities as contrary to the stereotypical "bomb-

throwing" anarchist. For more discussion on anonymity, see the methodology section in the Appendix.

[12] Eugene Anarchists for Torrey flyer, circa December, 1999.

[13] "Radical Political Theatre and Culture Jammin'." Eugene Active Existence workshop. Eugene, Oregon. 5 May 2000.

[14] Hyundai opened a computer-chip manufacturing plant on the outskirts of town in the mid-nineties, and Torrey was instrumental in wooing the company to the region. The city and county offered major tax breaks to Hyundai in order to entice them to town, despite protests from environmentalists that the corporation's voluminous use of water resources as well as their production of toxic chemicals would destroy the surrounding wetlands. Rotten's joke refers to the small Oregon town of Halfway that changed its name to www.half.com.

[15] EAT campaign flyer, circa September 2000.

[16] Greg Bolt, "Torrey takes race in landslide," *The Register Guard* 17 May 2000: C1.

[17] "EAT," *Cascadia Alive!,* Cable Access, Eugene, 2 February 2000.

[18] Eugene Anarchists for Torrey flyer, circa January 2000.

[19] Anonymous, "EPigD hiring +more EAE updates," 19 May 2000, email posted to Eugene Active Existence website, http://www.fruitiondesign.com/eae (14 June 2000).

[20] Eugene Anarchists for Torrey flyer, circa September 2000.

[21] Eugene Anarchists for Torrey flyer, circa January 2000.

[22] "Radical Political Theatre and Culture Jammin'." Eugene Active Existence workshop. Eugene. 5 May 2000.

[23] Anonymous, "EPigD hiring +more EAE updates," 19 May 2000, email posted to Eugene Active Existence website, http://www.fruitiondesign.com/eae (14 June 2000).

[24] Graham White, "Direct Action, Dramatic Action: Theatre and Situationist Theory," *New Theatre Quarterly* 9.26 (1993): 339.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

Using historical, literary, and ethnographic sources, this thesis has surveyed the

performance of political pranks by radical activists. I have argued that pranks coincide

with anarchist philosophies; pranks do not seek to gain power but disrupt it. Whether one

looks at structure or meaning, pranks are acts of mockery and insubordination. Pranks

allow us to have a laugh at the expense of someone else – in this case, the powerful and

elite. Pranks have become important tools for political activists, as the forces of

"spectacular" society compel ever more creative and outlandish modes of protest.

Using the examples of monkey-wrenchers, pie-throwers, and anarcho-cynicIsts, this thesis

has demonstrated how activists utilize pranks to humiliate and subvert authority, to

educate others, and to amuse themselves. Humor plays an important role in activism as

it can release tension and strengthen community. Humor can also disguise a biting

critique of politics and culture.

Anarchists, Pranksters, Tricksters, and Clowns

> Lest we forget at least an over-the-shoulder acknowledgment
> to the very first radical: from all our legends, mythology, and
> history (and who is to know where mythology leaves off and
> history begins – or which is which), the first radical known to
> man who rebelled against the establishment and did it so ef-
> fectively that he at least won his own kingdom – Lucifer.
> – Saul Alinsky[1]

Although this thesis has focused on contemporary activism, the history of

"pranksterism" is a lengthy one, with roots in mythology and legend as well as in politics

and popular culture. Although some discussions of pranksters and practical jokesters

classify them as separate and distinct from tricksters, I want to suggest that political pranksters do Indeed tap into traditions of tricksters and clowns.[2]

Tricksters and clowns are ubiquitous figures in folklore and literature throughout the world. Tricksters of myth appear In a variety of forms from animal (Monkey, Raven, Spider), to human (Odysseus), to god (Hermes, Loki, Legba). In the United States, tricksters are perhaps most commonly associated with the Native American figure of Coyote, but in fact, tricksters appear In many cultures. They can be characterized as border-crossers, shape-shifters, gluttons, wanderers, and thieves.[3] They are deceptive and disobedient; they do things backwards. As Lewis Hyde notes, trickster "embodies and enacts that large portion of our experience where good and evil are hopelessly intertwined. He represents the paradoxical category of sacred amorality."[4] Clowns and tricksters can also be social commentators, embarrassing those who break rules and mocking those In power. Tricksters frequently establish or reveal social taboos, appearing at moments where culture is founded, or where an old world transitions into a new one. According to *Clowns and Tricksters, An Encyclopedia of Tradition and Culture*, "Tricksters are at the same time obscene and powerful, jester and culture hero; their roles are never easily defined. They personify the ability to be both respected and condemned by society."[5]

I believe political pranksters draw on some of these traditional characteristics of tricksters and clowns to perform their particular brand of subversive humor and playful politics. As detailed in Chapter IV, the Irrational acts of political pranksters run counter to the norms of conventional, "rational" politics. By embracing this "hermetic" reason, they become (sub)cultural heroes that subvert classic (or Apollonian) virtue and strength. As agents for change, both tricksters and political pranksters operate on the cusp of

societal transformation. The destruction and creation of society that tricksters have always enabled now has an explicitly *political* purpose.

While traditional forms of clowns and carnivals operate to invert class and status, this dualistic reversal (where kings become peasants, and peasants become kings) is complicated by a world where power is more insidious. Nonetheless many theorists have embraced the trickster figure as a model for a postmodern politics of resistance and transgression.[6] Political pranksters, with their blasphemy, excess, and wild humor, also evoke this postmodern trickster.

Some Thoughts on the Efficacy of Pranks

Although a theoretical analysis of pranks can never capture their dynamism, this thesis has sought to demonstrate how pranks are compelling political performances. As someone who claims to both "get" the pranksters' jokes and share their vision of an autonomous, biodiverse world, I feel compelled to say a few words about the effectiveness of pranks as political weapons. As Richard Schechner cautions, however, "no performance is pure efficacy or pure entertainment."[7]

The effectiveness of a performance, as many scholars suggest, is a difficult matter to assess. Each audience member and participant gauges a performance based on their personal experiences, on their unique point of view, on their own sense of humor. Oftentimes, the media serves as a filter or gatekeeper for these actions and adds its own "spin" or commentary to performances. It dictates how the performances will be captured and portrayed and therefore has a hand in determining the effectiveness of a political action.

As communication studies scholar Cindy Kistenberg suggests in her book on AIDS activism,

> there is no definitive, essential way to talk about performance and social change. It is only when we look at specific performances, how they are received, circulated, debated, or ignored, that we can begin to under-stand whether or to what extent they reproduce or challenge existing systems of power or authority.[8]

If we look, then, at the reception of pranks by the "authorities," we can see that they are not "acceptable" forms of protest. Like the butts of most jokes, the targets usually don't laugh; and in these particular cases, those targeted are frequently in position to wield political and judicial power in response. Legal retribution allows the media frame the prank as a "crime story" where activists are presented as dangerous and deviant. Yet criminalization can backfire, furnishing pranksters with more material. When one faces felony assault charges for throwing a pie, for example, the tyranny (and humorlessness) of the State is exposed. "After all," says Agent Cherry Rhubarb Tart, "a pie is nothing more than butter, sugar, flour, and fruit for fuck's sake!" If one was to assess prank performances by the (over)reaction of the authorities, then, one could easily assert that pranks must in some way threaten the status quo. As Kirk Fuoss argues however, "efficacy cannot be established irrefutably under any circumstances, regardless of the method or perspective employed."[9]

The situationists believed most political tactics were ineffectual and argued that the spectacle quickly "recuperates" all forces of opposition. In other words, resistance – its rhetoric, its symbols, its "style" – is incorporated by the system, diluted and commodified. Although the image of "anarchism" may become fashionable (see Figure 8), these anarchists' pranks may be more difficult for mainstream society to absorb. Pranks are impromptu and require continual change and creativity in order to maintain the element of surprise. Even pie-throwing, with its origins in popular and folk culture, operates to humiliate and mock and is therefore a practice that mainstream politics is

unlikely to embrace. Because of their reliance on inversion of power, pranks contain a dynamic that would be unsettling if incorporated by the spectacle.

The question still remains, of course, as to whether or not the prankster actually changes things. Certainly the actions of tricksters, in both mythological and political forms, create instability, where taboos, norms, and cultures can come undone. Tricksters exist at the cusp of the destruction and creation of a new world, but they cannot always insure that their actions will create a "better" world. Political pranksters can also be seen as inciting others to action, evoking revolutionary fervor in others with trickster rhetoric, reason, and performances. To assume the role of trickster is to step outside the constraints of society, and in this case, to push the limits of political protest. These political pranksters stand poised to monkeywrench this world into a new one. Yet tricksters – mythical, legendary, and real – never fully control the outcome of their prankish behavior. Tricksters are models of transience; it is unclear what type of revolution they can or will bring about. The tricksters' unpredictability makes them powerful and dangerous political figures. The pranksters' unpredictability, likewise, make them unsettling and volatile actors.

The Last Laugh: An Endorsement

To document and discuss these political pranks is to deem them worthy of scholarly consideration and in some way, therefore, is to endorse their enactment. This may be seen as misguided and pedestrian by those who see pranks as anti-social or obscene at best, violent or criminal at worst. Although neither manual nor manifesto, this thesis does operate with the assumption that there is a punch line to these practical jokes; I make no apologies to readers who don't laugh.

Pranks, along with other forms of guerilla theater and culture jamming offer a vehicle for active participation in, rather than passive reception of contemporary culture. While the spectacle presents itself as "untouchable" in its displays of power and might, these radical theatrics allow a participatory ritual that cracks this façade. As Aida Hozic notes,

> spectacle increases the gap between the actor and audience, between the empowered and powerless. But as a form which pleases the audience, it also reduces conflict and social tension. Theatrical action, on the other hand, questions everything, reopens hidden conflicts and taboos, and attempts to mobilize, not satisfy, the audience.[10]

By utilizing a performance already popularly associated with ritualized inversion yet "harmless" laughter, political pranksters have discovered a valuable tool for mocking power and disrupting the spectacle.

Although pranks have been largely ignored by academics, their prevalence in literature, folklore and radical politics signal their importance. Although one can never assert with finality the efficacy of these political pranks, it is clear that the pranksters' explicit goal of undermining hierarchy make them provocative performances worthy of serious attention. Moreover, it seems that the current state of affairs – the pacifying force of the spectacle – demands a creative and transgressive response.

Pull a prank. Change the world.

Notes

[1] Saul Alinsky, *Rules for Radicals: A Practical Primer for Realistic Radicals* (New York: Vintage, 1971) ix.

[2] In his attempt to classify pranks as a particular genre of folklore, Richard Tallman explicitly states that tricksters and pranksters are not the same, as they draw on different individual and cultural traditions. See Richard S. Tallman, "A Generic Approach to the Practical Joke," *Southern Folklore Quarterly* 38 (1974): 259-274.

[3] For descriptions of the mythological trickster figure, see William Bright, *A Coyote Reader* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1993); Lewis Hyde, *Trickster Makes This World: Mischief, Myth, and Art* (New York: Farrar, 1998).

[4] Hyde, *Trickster Makes This World* 10.

[5] Kimberly Christen, ed. *Clowns and Tricksters: An Encyclopedia of Tradition and Culture* (Denver: ABC-CLIO, 1998) xii.

[6] For uses of "trickster" as a postmodern figure, see Donna Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century," *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991); Shane Phelan, "Coyote Politics: Trickster Tales and Feminist Futures," *Hypatia* 11.3 (1996): 130-159; Gerald Vizenor, "Trickster Discourse," *American Indian Quarterly* 14.3 (1990): 277-287.

[7] Richard Schechner, *Performance Theory* (New York: Routledge, 1988) 120.

[8] Cindy Kistenberg, *AIDS, Social Change, and Theater: Performance as Protest* (New York: Garland, 1995) 177.

[9] Kirk Fuoss, *Striking Performances/Performing Strikes* (Jackson: U of Mississippi P, 1997) 162.

[10] Aida Hozic, "The Inverted World of Spectacle: Social and Political Reponses to Terrorism," *Terrorism and Modern Drama,* ed. John Orr and Dragan Klaíc (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1990) 68.

APPENDIX A

METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Although I suppose any lengthy project like a Master's Thesis takes one on an intellectual journey of sorts, I feel that the road I traveled with this thesis is worth relating here. With a gesture that recognizes the need for scholars to locate themselves – ideologically and experientially – in their research, I wish to address some of my rationale for this project and justifications for my methodology.

In November 1998, I began subscribing to the A-INFOS news service, an international anarchist list-serve; I was interested in the daily emails due to my own political interests, the coverage of International Issues and events, and the notices for "calls to action." Even in the "liberal" town of Eugene, Oregon, information on radicalism is not always forthcoming. In the first few months of subscription, I received emails almost weekly on the acts of political pie-throwers around the world. Usually these notices were the only "news" I heard of the events. I was intrigued by the use of political pranks, and I methodically printed and saved each communiqué I received. In December of 1998, the pies struck home, so to speak: the mayor of Eugene was pied by two environmental activists. Although lambasted by the local daily newspaper, the story made its rounds through the activist community amidst giggles – and the satisfaction that a retributive blow had been struck against a man responsible for what many saw as the deterioration of the local community and local environment.

Although I wrote a paper on pie-throwing, I thought little more about pranks, performance, and politics until the following fall, when the activist community in the Pacific Northwest geared up for the WTO protest in Seattle. At a performance staged by "Art and Revolution" and the "Anti-WTO Roadshow," I witnessed firsthand the degree of

communication and mobilization offered by street theater. Perhaps more importantly, I saw my first CRAP (Cascadia Rising Anarchist Puppet) Theatre skit: "Pepper-Sprayed Peaceful Protester," a hilarious puppet re-enactment of the June First tree-cutting incident. At a puppet-making workshop held in conjunction with the "Anti-WTO Roadshow" later that afternoon, I chatted with the CRAP puppeteers, Rotten and Kooky, about design and humor – they were inspirational. And from that point on, my thesis began to take shape, with their brand of guerilla humor firmly in mind.

I experienced little to laugh about at the WTO protest in Seattle. Tear gas, rubber bullets, and martial law just aren't funny. Although I returned to Eugene triumphant with what protesters had achieved, I was horrified at the police use of force and disgusted by the media's and the government's (and even other activists') finger-pointing at "Eugene Anarchists" for the "violence." Like many people who felt uneasy about escalating tensions between police and protesters, I found the EAT campaign a refreshing release.

As with my archival of pie-litical communiqués, I began diligently collecting EAT materials: flyers, press releases, newspaper articles, emails. I had a moment of ethnographic angst in January 2000 after being told about the meeting between EAT and the mayor; I had tears streaming down my face from laughing so hard, but no tape recorder to capture the story.

In the spring of 2000, the "Eugene Anarchists" staged the "Seven Weeks of Revolt," an anarchist conference of sorts. Also known as "Eugene Active Existence," the event gave anarchists time to share their theories and tactics, gave me ample opportunity for fieldwork. I attended workshops on situationist theory and culture jamming, for example. The "Seven Weeks of Revolt" also gave local police the occasion to intimidate and arrest "terrorists" and "bomb-makers" and gave local press the material to cultivate more fear and misunderstanding. Again, tensions rose in the

community as the police and the press together stirred up panic in anticipation of a scheduled "historic re-enactment" of the June 18, 1999 "riot." While original plans were for a CRAP theater re-enactment, no one in power was prepared to "get the joke" or even wait for the punch-line (and admittedly, many anarchists probably hoped they wouldn't). The cycle of spectacular politics seemed to prevail as arrests, arson, and tear gas again framed the "Eugene Anarchists" as dangerous, violent threats to the community.

As I document in Chapter VI, the mainstream press has gushed over the "Eugene Anarchists," sending reporters from slick and hip magazines like *SPIN* and *Rolling Stone* on "dangerous missions" into the urban jungles of Eugene's Whittaker neighborhood, in order to write shallow, often derisive exposés on the local anarchist "scene." Many times during my research, I have felt "the story" corrupted and twisted, so I have tried to write something different here. My own political beliefs, my training as an ethnographer, and most importantly my friendship with many of these people prevent me from misrepresenting or dismissing their actions as frivolous or infantile or condemning their performances as violence or vandalism.

Although I want to remain faithful to the philosophies of my informants, this is after all, as Master's Thesis, a document that must circulate through an archaic institution and eventually receive a bureaucrat's initials, indicating I am worthy to be a Master of Arts – antithetical to an anarchist to be sure. The process of writing this thesis has indeed pulled me in two different directions – the academic versus the anarchist – so I have tried to wade carefully through these treacherous waters of ideology, theory, ethnography, and experience.

From the beginning of this project, I have intended to incorporate a feminist analysis of political pranks. As I have witnessed events unfold locally and as I have

gathered my materials to analyze, I have constantly been reminded of the male-domination that permeates radical politics (as It does, in fairness, of most aspects of our patriarchal culture). The situationists, the Yippies, (early) Earth First!, and EAT are all movements comprised overwhelmingly of men. As a feminist, I am troubled when the politics of radical social transformation are monopolized by what Robin Morgan calls the "politics of manhood."[1] At the same time however, I have been reluctant to typify political pranks as the stereotypical actions of adolescent males, thereby dismissing both anarchism and pranks as infantile and underdeveloped practices. Quite to the contrary, I believe that pranks can subvert the violent, terrorizing tactics that Morgan associates with masculinist revolutionary politics. Unfortunately, I doubt that some of my "case studies" make good examples of that. I do regret not trying harder to find female prankster informants. Several pie-throwers, for example, have been women (not to fall into an essentialist trap of associating women with only culinary praxis). So although this thesis gives much space to male pranksters, I do not believe that political pranks are necessarily a bastion of patriarchal politics.

With respect to what my Informants call "security culture" and what the university deems "ethical treatment of human subjects," there are several other methodological considerations I have taken Into account, for this thesis documents conceivably criminal activity by would-be revolutionaries and Insurgents. The safety of my Informants Is of utmost concern, so I have tried my best to protect them. As fears of police/FBI Infiltration are very real, I have exercised utmost caution with my fieldnotes. In fact, I have committed most Information to memory rather than to paper. Where there has been written record-keeping, I have Insured that no real names are mentioned. Initially saddened to not have tape-recorded EAT tales, I have since elected not to record any interviews. As mentioned in Chapter VI, I have struggled with the Issue of anonymity. As

the media have converged on Eugene, anonymity has become quite pointless. Several newspaper and magazine articles have revealed the names and identities of the "Eugene Anarchists." Similarly, arrested pie-throwers have been "unmasked" in public. Nonetheless, I have elected to use the "action names" of my informants, although several have consented to letting me use their given ones. Although certainly, the government already has files on us all, I do not wish to make any of this information easily available to those who aren't "in the know."

All this being said, it has not been my direct intent to hunt down "vandals," "terrorists," and "criminals"; on the contrary, I hope my work has debunked and undermined some of these stereotypes. I have not sought to elicit "confessions" and have tried to focus on pranks that have been publicly claimed or have already been "revealed" in the press. Although several other clever pranks have been pulled locally – the US flag removed from Skinner's Butter and replaced with a smiley-face flag, for example, and the front doors of several businesses, including Starbucks, bicycle-locked shut on May Day morning – I have neither researched nor analyzed these actions. While legality of pranks is an issue I have addressed in Chapter V, I have not wanted this to become the focus of my study.

Throughout this project, I have been interested in my informants' activism but also in their *analysis* of their actions. For this reason, I have tried to conduct a version of what folklorist Elaine Lawless calls "reciprocal ethnography,"[2] sharing my fieldwork and my interpretation and eventually even parts of my rough drafts with my informants. In this way, I hope to avoid the misrepresentations perpetrated by outsiders – by the mainstream media, but also by scholars. I want to reassure them I remain a fan, ever more so than a critic or theorist, of political pranks.

Notes

[1] Robin Morgan, *The Demon Lover: On the Sexuality of Terrorism*. (New York: Norton, 1989).

[2] Elaine Lawless, "'I was afraid someone like you . . . an outsider . . . would misunderstand.' Negotiating Interpretive Differences Between Ethnographers and Subjects," *Journal of American Folklore* 105 (1992): 302-314.

APPENDIX B

PRANK ART

We would hurl ourselves across the canvas of society like
streaks of splattered paint. – Abbie Hoffman[1]

Although this thesis has focused on well-known prankster-activists, it should be
reiterated that pranks are never solely the work of groups or movements and need not
be enacted on a level to attract the likes of CNN or *SPIN Magazine* or even one's local
newspaper. As the situationists asserted, resistance to the spectacle should be a
participatory project – "the revolution of everyday life." In that spirit, I have opted to
include some inspirational and instructive prank art. Figure 10 contains "art" from the
Barbie Liberation Organization and details how to "liberate" sexist dolls. By switching the
voice boxes in talking Barbie Dolls and GI Joes, these toys subvert the strict gendering of
children's toys: Barbie now hollers, "Vengeance is mine!" and Joe wonders, "Do these
shoes match my dress?" Figure 11 is a détourned parking ticket, for motorized vehicle
infractions that include contributing to global warming, traffic gridlock, and noise
pollution. Figure 12 includes a variety of stickers that *détourne* conventional product
warning labels.

OFFICIAL Barbie Liberation Organization **Barbie/G.I.★JOE HOME SURGERY INSTRUCTIONS**

You Will Need

Teen Talk Barbie Doll
12" talking G.I. Joe
soldering iron
electric solder
Epoxy (not fast drying)
2 sharp screwdrivers
1 coping or hack saw
12" electrical wire
hot glue (or similar)
switch (see step 12)

1. To open Barbie, insert a screwdriver firmly into the joint at the base of the spine. With a quick jerk, snap the screwdriver down toward the buttocks. Pry the backplate off, working up from the waist. Once the back is loosened, grab it with your fingers and snap it straight off with a firm yank. Do not twist. Remove head, arms, and legs. Gently loosen circuit board. Break off tab holding speaker in place. Remove speaker/circuit board.
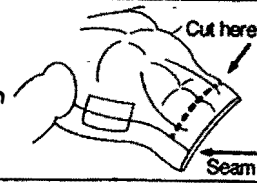
2. Using saw, sever battery contacts from rest of circuit board as shown. Battery contacts go back into doll.
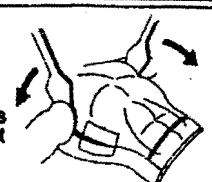
Cut at dotted line

3. To open G.I. Joe, remove batteries and pop off head. Using saw, make incision across abdomen from seam to seam. Be careful not to cut wires underneath.

Cut here *Seam*

4. Start prying front/back plates apart at neck and work down towards shoulders. Careful - neck is fragile. Once shoulders are split, insert screwdrivers into joints where arms meet torso. Pry torso apart from both arms simultaneously.
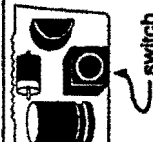
5. Cut bracket holding Joe's circuit board in place and loosen board, speaker, and switch.

6. Locate power wires (red & black) running from Joe to contacts on circuit board. Heat contacts with soldering iron. Remove wires from board but leave them attached to Joe. Solder two similar replacement wires onto circuit board.

power wires

7. Locate the switch on Barbie's circuit board. Heat the four solder points and remove. A solder-removing bulb may help.
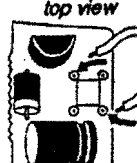
switch

8. When removing Joe's switch, make a note of where the switch wires meet the circuit board. Heat contacts and remove switch.
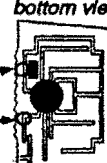
9. Wire Joe's power and switch to Barbie's circuit board as shown. Install board, speaker, and switch back into Joe. Hot glue works well to anchor everything in place. Speaker should be firmly glued to breastplate for maximum volume.

top view
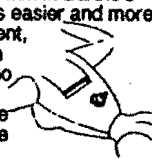Solder wires from Joe's switch to these points.

bottom view
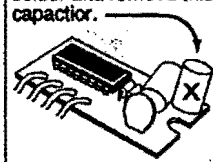Solder red power wire here
Solder black power wire here

10. **IMPORTANT:** When running the Barbie circuit board in Joe, use only three batteries. You may want to re-wire the battery contacts, or substitute something to take up the extra space. A filed-down conductive nail wrapped in tape works well as a pseudo-battery.

11. There are two options for re-installing Barbie's switch. The first (and more difficult) is to use a small, stiff, non-conductive scrap of circuit board, plastic or similar material. Mount the switch on the board, and sandwich it between the board and the button on Barbie's back. Glue the board to the posts on Barbie's back. If done carefully, Barbie need never know she's been under the knife.
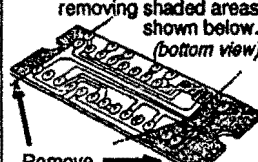
12. The second option is to use a small momentary contact switch. (Radio Shack Cat. No. 275-1571B) Mount it in place of the button in Barbie's back. It's easier and more permanent, although Barbie no longer looks like everyone else.

13. Unfortunately, Joe's circuit board will not fit properly into Barbie without modification. First, de-solder and remove this capacitor.
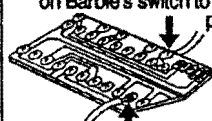
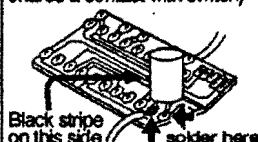14. Next, cut down board by removing shaded areas shown below. *(bottom view)*

Remove

15. Cut two 2" pieces of wire. Solder them from the contacts on Barbie's switch to these points.

16. Re-solder capacitor as shown. (Note: capacitor shares a contact with switch)

Black stripe on this side *solder here*

17. Cut any additional unused space off the board. Solder the two wires from step 6 to Barbie's battery contacts.

18. Fitting the board into Barbie is tricky. You may need to bend the capacitors or shave the posts in her chestplate. Before re-sealing Barbie or Joe, first make sure body parts fit together properly. Apply epoxy around rim of front and back plate. Quick-drying epoxy is not reccomended, as it leaves little room for error. First insert both neck sections into the head, insert the arms and legs, then clamp the doll together. To touch up any scars or mistakes, use plumber's epoxy putty and model paint.

BLO

Figure 10. Barbie Liberation Organization instructions.[2]

ES 00367930 4

Print all entries • Use ballpoint pen • Press hard

DEPARTMENT OF MOTOR VEHICLES

ES 00367930 4

VIOLATION NOTICE

DATE OF INFRACTION · TIME OF INFRACTION · LOCATION OF INFRACTION

VEHICLE MAKE · VEHICLE LICENSE NO. · METER NO.

STREET ADDRESS · CITY · PROV/STATE

VEHICLE INFRACTION

This form of transport incurs economic costs on the city which have not been included in the retail price. Your operation of this vehicle makes you personally liable for the following:

Climate change	Ozone depletion
Depletion of non-renewable resources	Environmental clean up costs
Time wasted in gridlock	Hindering bicycle and pedestrian activities
Noise pollution	Smog-related health problems

THE FOLLOWING WAS USED TO CALCULATE YOUR FINE:

Average cost of an automobile to society with social and environmental costs added	$43,000 *
Average cost of an automobile to consumer	$26,000
Your fine	$17,000

THIS CAN BE PAID IN THE FOLLOWING FORM:

A) By switching to another mode of transport such as public transit or bicycle, you stop draining the municipality of much needed public funds; in this case, your fine will be waived.

B) By financially supporting organizations which attempt to redress the economic damages your form of transport incurs; in this case, your fine will be waived.

IF YOU DISPUTE THIS FINE, THE TRIAL WILL BE HELD IN YOUR OWN CONSCIENCE

NOTE: FAILURE TO CHANGE OUR TRANSPORTATION HABITS MAY SUBJECT US ALL TO A GRIM FUTURE

* Source: here, 1993. Note: This figure does not include the long term costs of ozone depletion, climate change and other incidental environmental degradation.

ES 00367930 4

IMPORTANT: PLEASE READ CAREFULLY

Consider the man on horseback, and I have been a man on horseback for most of my life. Well, mostly he is a good man, but there is a change in him as soon as he mounts. Every man on horseback is an arrogant man, however gentle he may be on foot. The man in the automobile is one thousand times as dangerous. I tell you, it will engender absolute selfishness in mankind if the driving of automobiles becomes common. It will breed violence on a scale never seen before. It will mark the end of the family as we know it, the three or four generations living happily in one home. It will destroy the sense of neighborhood and the true sense of Nation. It will create giantized cankers of cities, false opulence of suburbs. ruinized countryside, and unhealthy conglomerations of specialized farming and manufacturing. It will make every man a tyrant.
— R.A.Lafferty

Mr.Lafferty's testimonial was written in the late nineteenth century. His views were considered alarmist and foolish in his day.

DO NOT WRITE BELOW THIS LINE

IF YOU DISPUTE THIS FINE, THE TRIAL WILL BE HELD IN YOUR OWN CONSCIENCE

Place under windshield wiper

Place on an offending vehicle

Figure 11. Détourned parking ticket.

Figure 12. Stickers.

Notes

[1] Abbie Hoffman, as quoted in Steven Durland, "Witness: The Guerilla Theater of Greenpeace," *Radical Street Performance: An International Anthology,* ed. Jan Cohen-Cruz (New York: Routledge, 1998) 68.

[2] For more information on the Barbie Liberation Organization, see the *Culture Jammers' Encyclopedia* at http://www.syntac.net/hoax. More information is also available online about a similar group, the Barbie Disinformation Organization. This group places détourned stickers on the outside of Barbie Doll boxes while they're still on shelves in stores. http://www.cs.cmu.edu/afs/cs/user/jthomas/SurReview/reviews-html/bdo.html.

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