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Humor's Opponents: Artistic Activism and the Ludic Aesthetic

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global activism

Art and Conflict
in the 21st Century

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Chapter I

Activism and the Citizen

- 65 Robin Celikates, *Learning from the Streets: Civil Disobedience in Theory and Practice*
73 Bruno Latour, *War and Peace in an Age of Ecological Conflicts*
85 Ugo Mattei, *Institutionalizing the Commons: An Italian Primer*
100 Antonio Negri, *Living in a Time of Crisis*
111 Peter Sloterdijk, *Last Exit Indignation: On Neutralizing Civilians in Democracies*
119 Karl-Peter Sommermann, *The Right of Resistance: Approaches in Legal Philosophy*
129 Slavoj Žižek, *Don't Fall in Love with Yourself*
- Abusers 132 — Amnesty International 134 — Anonymous 136 — Atac 137 —
Olaf Bertram-Nothnagel, *lowercase d: Getting There* 138 — Nadir Bouhmouch 140 —
Noam Chomsky 142 — Hassan Darsi 144 — Muath Freij 146 — Sacha Goldman 148 —
Régis Debray, *Lead to Believe* 148 — Greenpeace 150 — Stéphane M. Grueso 152 —
Stéphane Hessel, *The Hope of Community* 154 — Jim Hubbard 156 — Human Rights
Watch 158 — Kein Mensch ist illegal 160 — Jan Jaap Kuiper and Kaja Sokolova 162 —
Lynn Lauterbach 164 — Let's Do It! World 166 — Museum of the Revolution 168 —
No TAV 170 — Protests against Stuttgart 21 172 — rabble 174 — Resist 176 —
Mykola Ridnyi 178 — Robin Wood 180 — Faten Rouissi 182 — Stop the Traffik 184 —
Tanya Sushenkova 186 — Terre des Hommes 188 — The Yes Men 190 —
Transparency International 192 — Malala Yousafzai 194 — Wango 196 —
The Damascus Bureau 197 — Yezzi 197

Chapter II

Public and Private Sphere

- 201 Can Altay, *A Public Presence versus Greed, Brutality, and Control: Gezi Park*
207 Korhan Güneş, *Liberating Public Spaces: Where to Start?*
211 Walter D. Mignolo, *Re-emerging, Decentering, and Deinking: Shifting the
Geographies of Sensing, Believing, and Knowing*
225 Dimitris Papadopoulos, Vassilis Tsianos, and Margarita Tsomou,
Athens: Metropolitan Blockade – Real Democracy
233 Slavoj Žižek, *Freedom in the Clouds*
- !Medienruppe Birnik 242 — #StopWatchingUs 246 — Paolo Cirio 248 —
Creative Commons 252 — Hedonist International 253 — Julia “Butterfly” Hill 254 —
Mikaela 256 — Surveillance Camera Players 258 — Thomson & Craighead 260 —
Troika 264 — Cyber Guerilla 266 — We Are the 99 Percent 267

Chapter III

How to Do Activism

- 271 Youness Belghazi and Hadeer Elmahdawy, "Arab Spring Is Not Over, but Continues in a Different Way."
 279 Sarah Maske, *Activist Women's Rights Groups: Demands and Methods*
 288 Rita Raley, *The Ordinary Arts of Political Activism*
 299 Martha Rosler, *The Artistic Mode of Revolution: From Gentrification to Occupation*
 315 Guido Strack, *Whistle-blowing as a Global Protest Movement and Its Relationship with the Law*
 325 Bo Zheng, *Nearby Facts to Trouble the Emperor: A Note from China*
 Zanny Begg 332 — John Beiler 334 — Compact 336 — Canvas 338 —
 Ralf Christensen 340 — Isabelle Fremieux and John Jordan 342 — Sasha Kurmaz 344 —
 Julia Leser and Clarissa Seidel 346 — Partizaning 348 — Oliver Ressler 352 —
 The Riahi Brothers, *Everyday Rebellion: A Cinema Documentary, a Web Platform, and a Smartphone Application* 360 — Sandra Schäfer 366 — Kreativer Straßenprotest 368 —
 Politics Outdoors 368 — Take the Square 369

Chapter IV

Tactical, Social, and Global Media

- 373 Graham Meikle, *Distributed Citizenship and Social Media*
 384 Marcus Michaelson, *Beyond the "Twitter Revolution": Digital Media and Political Change in Iran*
 396 Zixue Tai, *Finger Power and Smart Mob Politics: Social Activism and Mass Dissent in China in the Networked Era*
 Johanna Domke and Marouan Omara 408 — Electronic Disturbance Theater 410 —
 Sharon Hayes 412 — kanalB 414 — MootiroMaps 416 — Taryn Simon and
 Aaron Swartz 418 — Tweets from Tahrir 420 — UK Uncut 424 — Christoph Wächter
 and Mathias Jud, *Crossing the Bosphorus with Tin Cans: How Global Networking Compels Self-Criticism* 426 — "We are all Majid" 436 — #occupygezi 438 — 0. 438 —
 Actipedia 439 — Anonymous News Germany 439 — Martin Balluch 440 —
 Facebook 440 — Freedom of the Press Foundation 441 — Independent Media Center
 (Indymedia) 441 — International Encyclopedia of Revolution and Protest 442 —
 Iranian Riots 442 — Meetup 443 — Meta-Activism 443 — Solitary Watch 444 —
 Twitter 444 — WikiLeaks 445 — YouTube 445

Contents

global activism

Chapter V

"Activism" – Art and Activism

- 449 Sruti Bala and Veronika Zangi, *Humor's Opponents: Artistic Activism and the Ludic Aesthetic*
 455 Tatiana Bazzichelli, *Networked Disruption: Connecting Art, Hacktivism, and Business in Political Struggles*
 462 Dietrich Heissenbüttel, *Protest Everywhere?*
 483 Sarah Lewison and Dan S. Wang, *In the Back of the Beyond: "What Time Is It on the Clock of the World?"*
 493 André Mesquita, *Noises in the Concrete: Artistic Activism in São Paulo*
 511 Joulia Strauss, *Demonstrations Are Performances*
 515 Tatiana Volkova, *The Chronicles of Russian Activist Art*
 531 Ahmad Zakari, *How the Jordanian Music Scene Missed the Arab Spring*
 535 M. Ragıp Zik, *Raising Resistance: Reinterpreting Art within the Gezi Movement*
 Ammar Abo Bakr and Ganzeer, *Sweet Art War in Egypt: An Interview* 544 — G.M.B.
 Akash 552 — ArtLeaks 554 — Bombily 556 — Angela Bonadies and Juan José Olivarría,
La Torre de David 558 — Osman Bozkurt 564 — ChimPom 566 — Chto Delat? 568 —
 Colectivó Etcétera 570 — Enmedio 572 — Ramiy Essam 574 — Noah Fischer 576 —
 Floating Lab Collective 578 — Jakob Gautel and Jason Karándros 582 — Erdem Gündüz,
The Meaning of Freedom—Excerpts from an Interview with the Turkish Artist Erdem Gündüz 584 —
 Ed Hall 590 — Brian Haw and Mark Wallinger 592 — Isis Hartmann and Peter Weibel,
State Britain: Activist Art vs. Artistic Activism 592 — Niklas Hoffmann and Rebecca
 Meinig 598 — Alexey Iorsh 600 — Just Do It. 602 — Amadou Kane Sy 604 —
 Thomas Kilpper 606 — Kiss my Ba 610 — Mische Kuball 612 — Christopher
 LaMarca 614 — Mohammed Laoufi 616 — Viktoria Lomasko 618 — Renzo Martens 620 —
 Masasit Mati 622 — MediaImpact 624 — MindBomb 626 — Carlos Motta 628 —
 MTL 630 — Nitaasha Dhillon, Amin Husain, and Yates McKee, *#Occupy Walls: A Possible Story* 631 — Neozoon 640 — Christof Nüssli and Christoph Oeschger 642 —
 Jean-Gabriel Periot 644 — Platform 646 — Pussy Riot 648 — R.E.P. 650 — Itamar Rose
 and Yossi Atia 652 — Bahia Shehab 654 — SOSka group 656 — Joulia Strauss with
 Moritz Mattern 658 — Jackie Sumell, *The Best Activism Is Always Equal Parts Love and
 Equal Parts Anger* 660 — Teatro Valle Occupato 666 — Ugo Mattrei, *The Valle Theater
 Commons Foundation: How to Deploy the Law in Current and Future Struggles* 667 —
 Patricia K. Triki and Christine Bruckbauer 682 — Voina 684 — Alexander Volodarsky 686 —
 Aadam Wassef 688 — Peter Weibel 690 — Yomango 692

694 Appendix

720 Icons of Revolution

Humor research has developed a considerable body of highly differentiated theories on various phenomena, ranging from philosophical and anthropological reflections on humor and laughter to sociological, psychological, and linguistic classifications of humorous utterings. It is striking that the predominant theories, which are incongruity, superiority, and relief theories, reflect on humor in terms of its function.¹ Accordingly, humor serves complex purposes when it comes to cultural, social, or political conflicts, ranging from disciplining or discriminatory to subversive and disruptive functions.

It is easy to assume that humor has positive social effects. Yet research on humor in activist performance must also discuss how the darker, less easily admired aspects of humor, such as ridicule, embarrassment, or the grotesque, may actually constitute the social core and potential of humor. It is paradoxical in that it is social and antisocial; it is both universal and particular. Humor does not necessarily unite; it can also divide.

Mikhail Bakhtin carefully elaborated on the basically ambivalent character of humor in his study on carnival and the grotesque image.² Bakhtin sourced his observations primarily from literary texts. However, his conceptions of the carnival and the grotesque are not simply restricted to the realm of language and narrative, but are applicable to physical, often collective, public acts and events. Bakhtin's analysis of humor's many-faceted modes of address is pertinent to the understanding of the corporeal dimension of protest in contemporary artistic activism. Activism is often studied in terms of a distinction between activist subjects, their opponents, and the broader general public, whose sympathies and support are sought by either or both activists and their opponents.³ This could be compared to the classic units of theater theory; namely, the protagonist, antagonist, and spectator. However, in assessing examples of artistic activism, the deployment of humorous strategies reveals that the communication with the opponent, whether a higher authority, the ruling power, or a system of oppression, is far from a straightforward opposition. This essay charts some of the complex and ambivalent ways in which humor transforms how an opponent is conceived and addressed.

Sruti Bala and Veronika Zangl

Humor's Opponents:

Artistic Activism and the Ludic Aesthetic

1. For an overview of different theories of humor see: John Morreall, "Philosophy of Humor," in: *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Edward N. Zalta (ed.), 2013, available online at: <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2013/entries/humor/>, accessed 04/28/2014. For a focus on humor in social and political protest see: Marjolaine Barr and Dominik Rose (eds.), *Humour and Social Protest*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, New York (NY), 2007; and the special issue on political humor, *The European Journal of Humor Research*, vol. 1, no. 2, 2013, available online at: <http://www.peanjournalofhumour.org/index.php/ejhr/issue/view/Balra%20Humour%20show%20>, accessed 05/06/2014.

2. Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington (IN), 1984.

3. The 2014 Hong Kong protests were also known as the "Umbrella Revolution" as the protesters initially brought umbrellas to protect themselves against the use of tear gas.



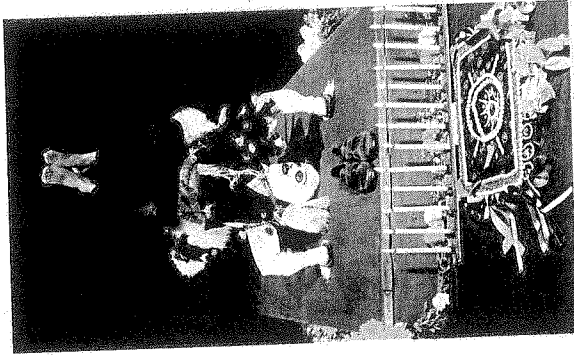
Comic Memory of Violent Conflict

In terms of cultural activism, a critical appraisal is provided in Begün Özden Firat and Aylin Kuray (eds), *Cultural Activism, Practices, Dilemmas, and Possibilities*, Intersecting Places, Sex and Race Series, 21, Rodopi, Amsterdam, New York (NY), 2010.

Humor and violent conflict seem to be a contradiction in terms. However, in the history of genocide, from National Socialist Germany to Russia to the Balkans and Rwanda, there are several instances of humorous treatments of personal experiences of violence and humiliation, in the form of novels, jokes, cartoons, personal memoirs, or theatrical performances. This is pertinent not only after the conflict, but also during the volatile conflict situation. So-called nonserious approaches can be understood as aesthetic strategies that are simultaneously potentially interventionist, without necessarily being explicitly called "activist."

The Peruvian theater collective Yuyachkani has worked for decades on difficult themes such as collective memories of the civil war in Peru, the erasure of indigenous voices in the national history, and the tensions between experimental art and folk traditions. The theater work of Yuyachkani cannot take over the task of the truth and reconciliation commission, though it seeks to complement this institutional process. "Yuyachkani" is a Quechua word, which can only be translated into English with the unwieldy phrase "I am thinking, I am remembering, I am your thought." One of the plays in their repertoire, adapted from Julio Ortega's novella *Adiós Ayacucho* [Farewell Ayacucho] (1986), features the story of an indigenous peasant leader, Alfonso Canépa, who disappeared – he was killed and dismembered during the violent civil war of the 1990s – and he then enters the form of an Andean masked dancer to search for the missing parts of his body and ensure himself a decent burial.⁴ The play is all the more poignant as Canépa comes across all kinds of hilarious obstacles along the way, encountering armed rebels

⁴ The play *Adiós Ayacucho* was adapted and directed by Miguel Rubio Zepeda and premiered in 1990. It is a solo performance by Augusto Casafraña, with musical accompaniment by Ana Correa.



Augusto Casafraña playing a disappeared peasant searching for the missing parts of his own body in *Adiós Ayacucho* by the Peruvian theater group Yuyachkani, June 2009, Magdalena del Mar, Lima, Peru

way in which the violent conflict in Peru is remembered and imagined.⁵ The play is not grotesque or macabre and does not reproduce on stage the horrors of the violence. It makes the audience laugh *wit* rather than *at* the figure on stage. The dead, disembodied Canépa is shown as a lively, gentle, bouncy figure; the futile journeys of thousands of peasants to Lima to seek justice for their lost kin are dignified through his own childlike adventure, aided by a friendly ancestral spirit.

The Andean ritual of performing a dance and displaying the clothes of a dead person in order to pacify his or her soul is cited with reference to the bodies of the disappeared of the civil war. This fictive ritual on stage becomes a form of collective remembering. Humor takes on a performative dimension here; that is, it is not simply a characteristic or a component of an experience, but is embodied, performed means through which this experience is constituted. It is ambivalent in its address: both in Ortega's play as well as in Yuyachkani's staging of *Adiós Ayacucho*, humor is not used as a means of blaming, shaming, or pointing the finger but reveals an unfinished and open-ended task of imaginative memory.

Ridiculing Cultural Memory

A second example comes from artistic activism on the streets rather than in the theater. The various actions of the Wiener Gruppe [Vienna Group], a Vienna-based constellation of experimental artists and activists in Austria's postwar years, often consisted of ironic, grotesque mimics of conservative cultural norms. One of their early actions was a "poetic demonstration" through the streets of Vienna in 1953, entitled *Une soirée aux amants fûnés*.⁶ The planned route of the procession encountered monuments of high culture (Goethe memorial, Vienna State Opera, St. Stephen's Cathedral), and landmarks of so-called low or popular culture (Prater, ghost train?). The playful, metonymic use of religious references, such as the format of a procession, white asters as typical All Souls' Day flowers, and incense, was juxtaposed with an ivy-adorned flute player, and the recital of poetic works by Charles Baudelaire, Edgar Allan Poe, Gérard de Nerval, Georg Trakl, and Ramón

Gómez de la Serna. In a way the Wiener Gruppe cited the romantic concept of the grotesque, which Bakhtin depicts as a disintegration of "the positive pole of grotesque realism,"⁷ namely, the principle of regeneration, its universal spirit and utopian perspective. However, by applying a dramaturgy of heterogeneity,⁸ or rather of dissonant constellations, the utopian moment is constructed as an aesthetic attitude reaching unmediated reality.⁹ Poetic gestures like mixing and blending languages by simultaneously using old-fashioned sounding German, English, French, and Spanish, the rejection of any unifying dramatic forms, and the provocation of audiences accustomed to being self-assured in their consumption of art, all served to ridicule the construction of cultural memory based on ideologized "high" culture. The actions and interventions of the Wiener Gruppe thus didn't necessarily invite the audience to identify or sympathize with the act, but rather sought to horrify and shock the onlookers.¹¹

⁵ Francine Albes, "Resisting Amnesia: Yuyachkani, Performance and the Postwar Reconciliation of Peru," in: *Theater Journal*, vol. 56, no. 3, October 2004, pp. 395–414, here p. 400–401.

⁶ See Gerhard Rühm (ed.), *Die Wiener Gruppe, 1945–1968*, Frankfurt am Main, Bayer, Köln, Wiener, Paris, Göttingen, 1985, p. 10.

⁷ The ghost train, also known as "Flussanbahn" [train of illusion] is part of the amusement park colloquially referred to as the "Wurstelprater."

⁸ Bakhtin 1984, p. 53.

⁹ Evelyn Deutsch-Schweiner, "Wirklichkeitsvermittlung", *Performative Provokationen – Arbeiten der Wiener Gruppe als Reaktion auf das starre kulturelle Klima der Nachkriegszeit*, lecture at the symposium *Tesserae Kunst*, Wiener Avantgarde nach 1945, Austrian Academy of Sciences, October 21–23, 2009, available online at www.vormoment.at/de/yuyachkani/wirklichkeitsvermittlung/04/29/2014.

¹⁰ See Oswald Wiener, "das literarische Ghetto" der Wiener Gruppe, in: Rühm 1985, pp. 401–418, here p. 402.

¹¹ In writing that the artistic strategies of the Wiener Gruppe already signaled a transgression from the aesthetic to the social sphere as early as the 1950s, see also: Deutsch-Schweiner 2009.

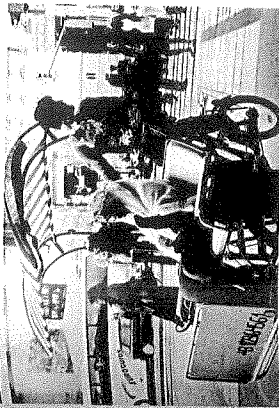
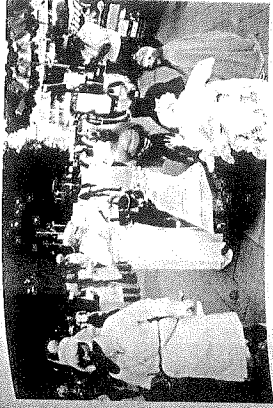
¹² Oswald Wiener, a member of the Wiener Gruppe, mentions, for instance, that the first and second literary cabaret deliberately showed for a "progressive desecration of the audience." Wiener 1985, p. 404, translated from the German.

The street intervention deliberately and consciously took into account that the audience would not be laughing with the performers. On the contrary, the audience was conceived and provocatively addressed as opponent.

Decades later, during the run-up to the Austrian elections in 2013, various civil society initiatives, such as Romano Svato, maiz, träschq, Marea Alta, and artist-activists such as Gin Müller, took part in the so-called WIENWOCHE [Viennese Week]: with a series of interventions in public space. The group maiz, an autonomous center by and for immigrants, once again adopted the format of a procession, namely, a cannibalistic procession entitled *Eating Europe!* or *Menschenfressende Gesellschaft* [Anthropophagous Society]. Humorous references were thus drawn both to Oswald de Andrade's *Manifesto Antropofago* [Manifest of Anthropophagy] (1928) from the Brazilian avant-garde movement in the early twentieth century as well as to the processions of the Wiener Gruppe in the very same city. The public intervention by Rebelodrom and maiz took place at the heart of culturally charged sites like the Karlskirche, Künstlerhaus, and Musikverein in Vienna. However, in contrast to *Une soirée aux amants hétérosexes*, the anthropophagous procession stressed the corporeal aspect of the grotesque, through a joyous celebration of queer body images, colonial and postcolonial stereotypes, and exaggerated embodiments of official representatives of church and politics. Yet the recital of a carnivalesque litany "We have come to gorge Austria, we have come to gorge Europe" by no means demonstrated a reference to Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of universalism and regeneration. The refrain "but we do not digest it" rather performed a satirical critique of Michel Bakhtin's dialectics of grotesque images. The target of critique was no longer a static and nationalized universal humanism as expressed in high art, but national identity politics in the face of globalized economic power structures. The anthropophagous procession applied a strategy of grotesque hyperrealism in order to oppose those global economic and political structures that reinforce inequality. Ironically, the hyperreal strategy of maiz and Rebelodrom, with its distinctive aesthetics of exaggeration and visceral corporeality, in fact reflected the grotesque features of the emerging globalized reality.

Refracting the Surveilling Gaze of the Public

The third example deals with an instance of an individual act of protest that eventually became an artwork. Hasan Elahi, a Bangladeshi-American media artist and scholar based in Washington, D.C., was detained at a U.S. airport in 2002 on suspicion of being a terrorist. He was told his whereabouts would be monitored for one year. So Elahi responded to this by inverting the surveillance of the state. He first started sending, or spamming if you like, the authorities with mails, photographs, and text messages about everything he did, every bus or flight he took, every restaurant he ate in, every toilet he visited. Gradually this *surveillance*, state surveillance reversed by the citizen as self-surveillance, unfolded into an ongoing art project titled *Tracking Transience*.¹³ In a given



Anti-activists from the collectives Rebelodrom and maiz in Vienna during an anthropophagous procession, announcing their desire to favour Europe: "Austria, we love you! We will never leave you!"

asymmetrical conflict situation, where the overwhelming mechanisms of state power intrude into the life of a citizen marked as ethnic minority or immigrant, it is the self-ironic gesture that serves as a lens to investigate not the innocence of the one being watched, but the monstrosity of the system of surveillance. The website and self-designed tracking software is consciously user-unfriendly and cluttered, thus ironically creating a kind of privacy through extreme visibility.¹⁴

The safety and privilege provided by positing the self-surveillance information as art may well not be granted to anyone under every circumstance, as it providently turned out to be for Elahi. His example also highlights questions of memory in relation to humor, wherein the conception of a conflict fundamentally affects and shapes the type of humor that emerges. Even less than a decade later, when the extent of global surveillance is becoming evident and the surveillance far from transient, the humor of Elahi's *Tracking Transience* almost borders on the nostalgic. In contrast to the data revealed by whistleblowers on the extent of surveillance machinery worldwide, Elahi's project is humorous for different reasons today than it initially was. *Tracking Transience* appears today not as a magnified, exaggerated version of state surveillance, but as a mere sample of its possibilities.

Humor in Artistic Activism: A Bond Between Memory and Imagination

The three examples discussed above reveal that research on humor in activist performance involves far more than studying different kinds of jokes or laughter alone, but rather examining a broader ludic aesthetic, ranging from gentle irony and satire to figurations of the grotesque and absurd, to risky interventions and self-critical overtone-tification. Each example reveals how the study of humor in artistic activism evades being captured in recurrent patterns or formulae. The ambivalence of humor as potentially transgressive on the one side, as well as upholding the status quo on the other, makes it difficult to draw out general assumptions. It cannot be claimed that humorous approaches are fundamentally different from more conventional formats of activism. Moreover, contemporary

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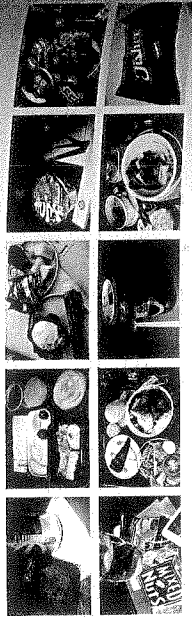
WIENWOCHE can be read both as an allusion to the prestigious Wiener Festwochen festival as well as to the campaign "Austria's youth gets to know its federal city" organized by the Federal Ministry of Education.

13

Hasan Elahi, *Tracking Transience*, available online at: <http://trackingtransience.net>, accessed 05/02/2014.

14

Hasan Elahi, "You Want to Track Me? Here You Go, F.B.I.," in: *The New York Times*, Op-Ed, October 29, 2011, p. 6.



artistic activism shows that demonstrations, sit-ins, lobbying, protest marches, petitions, making pamphlets, and speeches are being combined with seemingly newer formats of cultural activism, some of which are located in the realm of the arts. They are indebted to critical traditions in different cultural contexts and histories.

Memory plays an intriguing role in relation to humorous protest, its narratives, forms of embodiment, and circulation. There are two observations to be made here. First, it is striking that contemporary articulations of public protest explicitly and playfully draw references to older legacies of protest. Yuyachkani's use of Andean comic traditions and rituals in *Adios Ayacucho* draws a direct link between the memory of the civil war and the colonial history of Peru. The human gorging procession in Vienna cites with a wink the anthropophagy of Brazil's avant-garde movement of the early twentieth century, transported to the context of immigration in Europe. It can also be linked to the legacy of the processions of the Wiener Gruppe, who literally walked the same streets of the city fifty years earlier. Second, one can observe a



Images from media artist Hasan Elahi's Tracking Transience Project, which documents all the data he voluntarily supplied to the FBI, to help with monitoring his own whereabouts. Above: detail

playful shifting of narratives of memory, whether they are national or political memory narratives or aesthetic legacies and artistic predecessors. Elahi's messy, overflowing archive of his own whereabouts literally conjures a nightmarishly absurd vision of what the future might hold, whilst simultaneously challenging the representative organs of the system of surveillance to take a closer look at the system itself. The humorous intention of the poetic demonstration of the Wiener Gruppe may have required a few decades to be recognized as such, but possibly it was the actual embodied provocation on the streets that served as a trigger to the public imagination. Artistic activism in conflict settings not only challenges different layers of memory, but also bonds these layers to the present and the future. Humor makes this bond between memory and imagination evident.

What Is Networked Disruption?

Disruption occurs when a process of business innovation takes shape by displacing an earlier technology; it provokes a change of consolidated business values, whilst simultaneously generating new forms of business. Over the last decade, alongside the emergence of network economy, the critical framework of art and hacktivism has shifted from developing strategies of opposition to embarking on the art of disruption. With the development of social media and Web 2.0,¹ the concept of social networking became part of our daily life, and many corporations adopted the same vocabulary used by the activists and hackers in the 1990s, assimilating the rhetoric of openness, do-it-yourself, sharing, etc.

Tatiana Bazzichelli

Networked Disruption: Connecting Art, Hacktivism, and Business in Political Struggles

My hypothesis is that mutual interferences between art and hacktivism within the information economy have changed the meaning and contexts of political and technological criticism. Hackers and artists have been active agents in business innovation, while at the same time also undermining business. Artists and hackers use disruptive techniques of networking within the framework of information technology, opening up a critical perspective towards business to generate unpredictable feedback and unexpected reactions; business enterprises apply disruption as a form of innovation to create new markets and network values, which are often just as unpredictable.

If art, business, and its antagonism are nowadays intertwined, it is advisable to reinvent practices of criticism that go beyond the mere act of opposition. This paper takes up this challenge and discusses a new perspective of political activism and artistic creation based on the concept of "networked disruption," applying it both in theory and practice. The aim is to analyze hacker and artistic practices *through* business instead of in opposition to it, shedding light on the mutual interferences between networking participation and disruptive business innovation. Many activists usually prefer not to deal with the notion of "business," confining it to the domain of commercial market logic. However, the concept of business is much more complex than that, and it can be associated with the idea of "being busy" in the context of Protestant culture. Following this perspective, disruption becomes a two-way strategy in networking contexts, a practice to generate criticism, and a methodology to create business innovation.

See Tim O'Reilly, "What Is Web 2.0. Design Patterns and Business Models for the Next Generation of Software," September 30, 2005, available online at: <http://oreilly.com/web2/archive/what-is-web-20.html>, accessed 08/06/2014.

Authors' Biographies

Can Altay (*1975) is an artist and assistant professor in the Faculty of Architecture at Istanbul Bilgi University. He studies and investigates the functions, meaning, organization, and reconfiguration of public space. His "settings" facilitate critical reflection on urban phenomena and artistic activity. His work traverses sculpture, photography, and installation, and is staged and manifested in the spaces, exhibitions, and publications he produces. His public projects include: *Inner Space Station* (New York, 2013) *Distributed Partners' Gazette* (The Showroom, London, 2010), and *PARK: bir ihtimal* (Istanbul, 2010). Altay is the editor of *Ahali: An Anthology for Setting a Setting*, 2013 published by Bedford Press, London.

<http://can-altay.com>

Sruti Bala (*1973) is assistant professor at the Department of Theatre Studies, University of Amsterdam. Her research interests are in the fields of participatory art, theater and conflict, feminist theory, and pedagogy. Together with Veronika Zangl, she coordinates a research project on humorous approaches to art and activism in conflict at the Amsterdam School for Cultural Analysis (ASCA). Following her doctoral study on *The Performativity of Nonviolent Protest in South Asia (1918-1948)* (2009), her essays have appeared in the journals *Theatre Research International*, *Research in Drama Education, Peace & Change*, and the *Dutch Yearbook for Women's History*, as well as in anthologies in German and English. In 2014-2015 she is research fellow at the Free University of Berlin's International Research Centre. Interweaving Performance Cultures.

Tatiana Bazzichelli (*1974) is a curator and researcher. She is director of the Disruption Network Lab, an experimental curatorial project on art, hacktivism, and disruption. She was program curator at the transmediale festival in Berlin from 2011 to 2014, initiating the yearround reSource trans-mediale culture berlin project. She was postdoctoral researcher in the Centre for Digital Cultures at the Leuphana University of Lüneburg, Germany (2012-2014). In 2011, she received her PhD in information and media studies from the Faculty of Arts of Aarhus University in Denmark. In 2009 she was a visiting scholar at the Human-Sciences and Technologies Advanced Research Institute (H-STAR) of Stanford University in California. She is author of the books *Networked Disruption* (DARC Press, Aarhus University, 2013) and *Networking* (Costa & Nolan, 2006 / DARC Press, Aarhus University, 2008). Her last book, coedited with Geoff Cox, is *Disrupting Business* (Autonomedia, 2013). Active in the Italian hacker community since the 1990s, her networking project AHA: Activism-Hacking-Artivism won the honorary mention for digital communities at Ars Electronica in 2007. She was born in Rome and since 2003 she lives in Berlin.

www.disruptionlab.org

<http://networkingart.eu>

<http://disruptiv.biz>

Youness Belghazi is a filmmaker and human rights activist from Salé, Morocco, who graduated with a degree in sound production. He is one of the founders of the February 20 Movement and codirector and coproducer of several short films and documentaries, which deal particularly with the right

to freedom of expression, including the experimental documentary *LMask* (2012) and Nadir Boumouch's film *My Mother & Me* (2012), in which he also participated. Belghazi is a cofounder of Guerrilla Cinema, a group of resistance fighters, who seek to encourage the Moroccan people to question the ruling system. In Morocco it is prohibited to film without a license from the authorities. To independent film crews who want to pursue their passion, this permission is not granted and they are therefore forced to film illegally. If they are caught by the police, their equipment may be confiscated. The short documentary *Basta - The Film That Had Never Been Done* (2012), for example, was also shot illegally; it documents censorship and propaganda in Morocco and how challenging it is to shoot independent films. With his experiences, impressions, and reports of his own political commitment, Belghazi aims to offer an international audience a better understanding of the transformations taking place in Morocco.

Robin Celikates is associate professor of political and social philosophy at the University of Amsterdam, where he is also the vice director of the Amsterdam School for Cultural Analysis (ASCA) and a member of the Amsterdam Centre for Globalisation Studies (ACGS). He is the author of *Kritik als soziale Praxis* (Campus, 2009) and the coauthor of *Politische Philosophie* (Reclam, 2013) as well as coeditor of the journals *Krisis* and *Polar*.

Hadeer Elmahdawy is an Egyptian journalist and researcher, who took part in many events and some campaigns of the Egyptian revolution. She graduated from the Political Sciences Department of the Faculty of Economics and Political Science at Cairo University in 2006. She began working as a journalist in the same year, covering issues of health care, corruption, poverty, and political, social, and cultural aspects of Egyptian society. She also worked for almost two years as

a research assistant in various Egyptian research centers, and for almost three years in Egyptian independent theater. She now works as a freelance journalist for the Lebanese newspaper *Al-Safir*, and the German magazine and website *Correspondants*. She is currently writing her master's thesis on political culture and protests at the European Mediterranean Studies Program of Cairo University.

Korhan Gümüş (*1954) is an architect and urban planner. He was director of urban and architectural projects for the Istanbul 2010 European Capital of Culture Agency. As a cofounder of the Taksim Platform, he supports the democratic right of citizens to have a say in the design of the Taksim Square, and was one of the initiators of the protests in Gezi Park at the end of May 2013.

Dietrich Heissenbüttel (*1956) studied literature (Italian, English, French, and Francophone literature) and history of art. His PhD thesis was on medieval frescoes in southern Italy. Since 1996 he has been making radio programs on jazz and improvised music for FRS, an independent radio station in Stuttgart, Germany. He also works for various daily newspapers and specialist journals (including *springerin - Hefte für Gegenwartskunst, Neue Zeitschrift für Musik, KONTEXT Wochenzeitung*). His main subjects are globalization, contemporary art, new music, architecture, and transport policy. Heissenbüttel was the recipient of scholarships at the Bibliotheca Herziana in Rome and the Akademie Schloss Solitude in Stuttgart. From 2005 to 2006 he moderated an international composers' workshop, "Global Interplay," at the ISCM festival World New Music Days. He has taught at the University of Stuttgart's History of Art Institute since 2008. In 2010 he was cocurator of the exhibition, *Friedenshauptläufe / Theater of Peace* for the Neue Gesellschaft für bildende Kunst (nGbK) in Berlin. Dietrich Heissenbüttel has written numerous articles on the subject of art and conflict

Frankfurt am Main, Germany, which he directed until 1995. Between 1986 and 1995, he was in charge of the Ars Electronica in Linz as artistic director, and from 1993 to 1999 he commissioned the Austrian pavilions at the Venice Biennale. He was artistic director of the Seville Biennial (Blaes3), in 2008 and of the Fourth Moscow Biennale of Contemporary Art in 2011. From 1993 to 2011 he was chief curator of the Neue Galerie Graz, and since 1999, Peter Weibel is Chairman and CEO of the ZKM | Center for Art and Media Karlsruhe. He was granted honorary doctorates by the University of Art and Design Helsinki in 2007 and by the University of Pécs, Hungary, in 2013. In 2008, he was awarded with the French distinction Officier dans l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres. The following year he was appointed a full member of the Bavarian Academy of Fine Arts Munich, and he was awarded the European Kultur-Projektpreis of the European Foundation for Culture. In 2010, he was decorated with the Austrian Cross of Honour for Science and Art, First Class. In 2014, he received the Oskar Kokoschka Prize. From 2015 onwards, he is curator of the Lichtsicht 5 – Projection Biennale in Bad Rothenfeld.

Veronika Zangl (*1962) is assistant professor at the Department of Theatre Studies, University of Amsterdam. Her research interests encompass theater, poetics, and memory studies, specifically Holocaust studies. Together with Sru-ti Bala she coordinates a research project on humorous approaches to art and activism in conflict at the Amsterdam School of Cultural Analysis (ASCA). She has taught literature, theater, and cultural studies at the University of Vienna and the New Design University in St. Pölten, Austria, and is a member of the COST European research network on memory studies. Her publications include *Poetik nach dem Holocaust. Erinnerungen – Tatsachen – Geschichten* (Fink, 2009), and *Körperkonstruktionen und Geschlechtermetaphern:*

Zum Zusammenhang von Rhetorik und Embodiment, coauthored with Marlen Bidwell-Steiner (StudienVerlag, 2009).

Ahmad Zazari is an independent journalist and writer living in Amman, Jordan. He has published two books and the third is on its way. He has worked as a cultural correspondent for the Lebanese newspaper *Al-Akhar* and also as program coordinator for Freemuse foundation in the Middle East and North Africa to support freedom of expression in music. These experiences provided the foundation to set up and edit www.ma3azef.com, a website specializing in in-depth research articles and studies on music with the focus on the Arab world. Since its establishment in late 2012, Ma3azef.com has gained a great number of followers.

Bo Zheng grew up in Beijing. He has been making and writing about socially engaged art since 2003. He has worked with a wide range of communities, including the Queer Cultural Center in Beijing and Filipino domestic helpers in Hong Kong. His most recent project, *Plants Living in Shanghai*, combines a physical site with an open online course to explore historical, political, and cultural connections between plants and the city. His essays on Chinese socially engaged art have been published in journals and books. He teaches at the School of Creative Media, City University of Hong Kong, and is affiliated with the China Academy of Art in Hangzhou. He received his PhD in visual and cultural studies from the University of Rochester.

M. Ragıp Zik (*1981) holds a master's degree in cultural studies from Istanbul Bilgi University. He currently works at Columbia Global Centers in Turkey and occasionally serves at the Council of Europe as a trainer and expert. In the past, he worked for various civil society organizations in Turkey, Italy, and Greece. Zik is involved with a number of grassroots initiatives and takes part in international collaborations.

He is interested in minorities, linguistics, political art, historical dialog, and youth work.

Slavoj Žižek (*1949) received his Doctor of Arts in psychoanalysis from the University of Paris 8 in 1985 and was awarded a Doctor Causa Honoris from the National University of Cordoba, Argentina, in 2005. He was visiting professor at numerous universities: at the Department of Psychoanalysis, University of Paris 8 (1982–1983 and 1985–1986); at Columbia University, New York (1995); at Princeton University, New Jersey (1996); at the New School for Social Research, New York (1997); at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor (1998); at Georgetown University, Washington DC (1999); and at the Film Department of New York University (2002). From 2005 onwards he was codirector of the Institute for the Humanities, Birkbeck College, University of London. Žižek is the founder and president of the Society for Theoretical Psychoanalysis, Ljubljana, and editor of the book series "Short Circuits" (The MIT Press), "Wo es war" (Verso), and "[sic]" (Duke University Press). His major works are: *The Subjective Object of Ideology* (Verso, 1989), *Tarrying with the Negative. Kant, Hegel, and the Critique of Ideology* (Duke University Press, 1993), *The Plague of Fantasies* (Verso, 1997), *The Ticklish Subject. The Absent Centre of Political Ontology* (Verso, 1999), *The Fragile Absolute – or, why is the christian legacy worth fighting for?* (Verso, 2000), *The Puppet and the Dwarf: The Perverse Core of Christianity* (The MIT Press, 2003), *The Parallax View* (The MIT Press, 2006), *Less Than Nothing. Hegel and the Shadow of Dialectical Materialism* (Verso, 2012).