

Title, *Trespassing Toward Relevance*

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You had heard about its arrival but never expected it to operate like this. Earlier in the month, you had received a flyer asking you to “Get the black out. Bring three to ten items that you associate with blackness to the Black Factory.” Now you stand there watching a white box truck pull up to the local YMCA and wonder what on earth this truck wants with your coffee grounds, dominos and Missy Elliot CDs. You watch the crew get out of the truck and unload a large table adorned with blenders, scissors and pulverizers onto the sidewalk. Then suddenly, a white parade balloon begins to inflate from the back of the truck. To your total surprise, the balloon takes the shape of a massive igloo where you can faintly see the workers setting up display booths. Instead of the Black Panther Willie Wonka you expected, the artist, William Pope L is friendly and normal as he talks and laugh with people as they begin to bring their items of “blackness” for pulverization or documentation. You nervously approach and hear Pope L say, “Well, the Black Factory is here to provide opportunity.”

The *Black Factory* epitomizes the land of work included in the exhibition *The Interventionists: Art in the Social Sphere*. The *Black Factory* is a truck that goes on tour, “Bringing the politics of difference where it is needed most.” At each stop, it offers a local community a set of tools for disrupting expectations. People contribute their items of blackness only to have them transformed into unlikely and unexpected objects: rubber duckies, prayer rugs, drinking water. The Black Factory experience is ambiguous, even confusing, but it delivers the one thing that it promotes: opportunity.

The Interventionists: Art in the Social-Sphere is a survey, in limited form, of tactical practices in contemporary visual culture beginning in the late 1980s. The timing of this exhibition is not without a sense of urgency; the entire world feels “unsettled” (to use a term of globalism theorist Saskia Sassen)¹ due in no small part to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. In such turbulent political times, artists operate as both a social conscience for the politics of today and a harbinger of the politics for tomorrow.

A cursory scan over the last ten years of American art may lead one to believe that “political art” has fallen out of fashion since artists like Barbara Kruger, Hans Haacke, Leon Golub and Jenny Holzer took center stage in the early 1980s. Fashionable or not, however, political art has continued, albeit off the art world screen, throughout the 1990s.² The most telling point of departure for this “off the radar” political art is its increasing emphasis on the tactics of intervention. Instead of representing politics (whether through language or through visual imagery), many political artists of the 1990s enter physically, that is they intervene, into the heart of the political situation itself. “Tactics” is the key term for discussing interventionist practices, and it will be examined at greater depth later in this essay. However, for now, let us think of the term tactic as a maneuver within a game, which for the interventionists is the real world. Their projects are made to operate within various systems of power using the techniques of art. Driving around the United States with a factory for grinding up expectations about race is just one example.

In an era shaped by the phenomenon known as globalism, the move toward tactics has been more warmly received outside the U.S. than in it. However, the dialogue about tactics amplified by the Internet and global exhibitions and conventions, has flowered across oceans and nations. Thus, this exhibition follows several worldwide tendencies that highlight this switch to tactics.

¹ From a lecture given at the Rethinking Marxism conference, UMASS, Amherst

² This is not to say that there haven't been informative and important exhibitions of political art in the 1990s. In 1994, the Boston ICA produced the exhibition, “Public Interventions” curated by Eleanor Heartney and then ICA director, Milena Kalovska. Mary Jane Jacob produced the critical exhibition, *Culture In Action* at the MCA Chicago.

Tactics can be thought of as a set of tools. Like a hammer, a glue gun, or a screwdriver, they are means for building and deconstructing a given situation. Interventionist tactics are informed both by art and (more importantly) by a broad range of lived visual, spatial and cultural experiences.³ They are a motley assemblage of methods for bringing political issues to an audience outside the art world's insular doors. They appeal to a viewer who is confronted by an increasingly privatized and controlled visual world. Humor, sleight of hand and high design are used to interrupt this confrontation and bring socially imperative issues to the very feet of their audiences.

If one had to make a generalization about the point of departure for the "political" art of the 1990s, it would be the unanimous refusal to use representation as a tactic. The images of violence and exploitation that so often, rightfully, move people to political action are conspicuously absent. Instead, laboratory experiments, perplexing archives, mobile homes and bags designed for shoplifting fill MASS MoCA's gallery spaces. That these things "present" as opposed to "represent" is not an accident. When the words "political art" are spoken, most people imagine a unilateral institutional critique, depressing refugee photographs, or possibly graphic statements somehow attacking the viewer for ignorant complicity. The lack of these methods does not imply that such issues are less important now, but rather that the methods for communicating these issues have changed. The symbolically charged image or overtly political text no longer feels adequate as a communicative device.

In understanding why this is the case, it is instructive to look at the increasing growth of visual culture over the last twenty years. Could it be that the commercial flooding of the visual landscape has inadvertently led to the visual exhaustion of its viewers? Such pivotal factors as the rise of the culture industry, the demise of the Soviet Union, and the increasing privatization of public visual and social space have dramatically transformed the cultural landscape of the 1990s.

The 90s: A Taco Revolution

"A taco revolution, I am there." – Taco Bell Chihuahua dog.

"The various analyses of "new social movements" have done a great service in insisting on the political importance of cultural movements against narrowly economic perspectives that minimize their significance. These analyses, however, are extremely limited themselves because, just like the perspectives they oppose, they perpetuate narrow understandings of the economic and the cultural. Most importantly, they fail to recognize the profound economic power of the cultural movements, or really the increasing indistinguishability of economic and cultural phenomena." -Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt, *Empire*.

"The sixties are more than merely the homeland of hip, they are a commercial template for our times, a historical prototype for the construction of cultural machines that transform alienation and despair into consent." – Thomas Frank, *Conquest of Cool*.

In 1992, Bill Clinton assumed the U.S. presidency to the rock and roll sounds of Fleetwood Mac. The baby boomers had gained ascendancy, and the horn of victory Clinton raised was a saxophone. The moment was prescient. Just three years earlier, the Berlin Wall fell and the "end of history," as Francis Fukuyama had so famously described it, was upon the world. The 1990s were a complex decade known for the rise of the dot-coms, the generational switch in power to the baby boomers, the end of the Cold War, and the end of revolutions. Yet, revolutions were occurring. They were marketing revolutions, as the most popular marketing campaign of the 1990s, the Che Guevarian clad Taco Bell Chihuahua so glamorously made known. The United States officially shifted toward an "information economy" with the often contested but frequently used term "globalism" as its dancing partner.

³ See Nicolas Mirzoeff's *Visual Culture Reader* (London and New York, Routledge, 1998)

Globalism and the culture industry combine to form a fertile ground for the growth of interventionist practices. The fact that “culture” became the primary industry of global capitalism was not lost on many of the artists across the globe. Theodore Adorno, the genuinely cynical member of the German Frankfurt School, saw this shift early on when he castigated the consumer-oriented turn in music in his 1938 essay, “On the Fetish-Character in Music and the Regression in Listening.” He dubbed the commercialization of culture “the culture industry,” a derogatory catchall term for everything from film to television to music to advertising to fashion to, of course, art. In short, the culture industry comprises most of the service industry markets we encounter everyday. Through the 1990s, the branding of culture took an especially strong step forward. As Naomi Klein writes in her insightful book, *No Logo*, “The effect, if not always the original intent, of advanced branding is to nudge the hosting culture into the background and make the brand the star. It is not to sponsor culture but to be the culture.”⁴

The fact that the visual and cultural apparatuses of the globe were honing in on the once rarified niche of artistic practice could only have dramatic affects on the terms in which artists saw themselves.

A signature element of this growth of the culture industry is the emphatic co-opting of all forms of America’s counter culture. The major powers in the US economy were now standing side by side with the likes of the beatniks, the ravers, the punks, the gangsters and the revolutionaries. The culture industry found resonance in promoting the likes of Jack Kerouac and Mahatma Ghandi for the Gap and Apple Computer respectively. Thus, when Stevie Nicks began singing, “Don’t Stop” to a captivated audience with Hillary and Bill clapping in the background, we saw a clue as to the tenor of the next decade. We were entering a period of rebels. The heroic alternative cultures of the 1960s (the easy rider, the beatnik, the lonestar, the hippy, the dragqueen, the revolutionary) were to become the poster children of the 1990s.

A particularly telling point occurred in December 1991 when underground band Nirvana reached number one on the pop charts. Alternative music had officially become mainstream. Black culture, feminist culture, and queer culture gradually followed. For the first time in music history, in October 2003, none of the artists on the top ten singles charts were white.⁵ The music industry embraced all points of view and happily represented the cornucopia of American difference.

It may appear that we are off course and have strayed too long in the realm of the music, television and advertising industry. But there are reasons for this. This switch in the role of cultural production radically affected the way in which cultural producers, including visual artists, saw their “content.” “In 1915, a person could go entire weeks without observing an ad. The average adult today sees some three thousand a day.”⁶ The dramatic increase in popular visual inundation coupled with the growing use of symbols of political action (like Che Guevarra or Bob Dylan) for commercial purposes, meant that artists needed to reconfigure their tactics to make themselves heard. How could any artist compete with visual machines like Nike, Gap, Starbucks, McDonalds, MTV, etc? Terms like “content provider” became common as anything resistant and edgy was used to sell an underlying not-so-hip consumerist agenda. If Che Guevarra could be turned into a marketing-Chihuahua for Taco Bell, no left-leaning political artist was safe. Counter culture was running out of steam.

At the same time, globalism became a household word. While arguably interconnectedness between nations had been increasing over the past century, the 1990s saw a rapid acceleration of these processes. The Treaty on European Union signed in Maastricht (1992), the creation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (1994), and the introduction of the Euro (1999) are

⁴ Naomi Klein, *No Logo*, (New York, Picador, 1999), p. 30.

⁵ Elizabeth Jackson, *The World Today*, Tuesday, 7 October, 2003.

⁶ James B Twitchel, “Plop, Plop, Fizz, Fizz,” *Signs of Life*, eds. Sonia Maasik and Jack Solomon. (3rd eds Boston: Bedford/ St. Martins, 2000) p. 202-221.

just a few notable examples. Accompanying these processes was the now familiar movement of factories to nations with cheaper labor pools, the increased hybridization and displacement of cultures and the unexpected boom of the global cities like New York City, Buenos Aires, Tokyo, Berlin, London to name a few.⁷ The sudden conclusion of the cold war elicited from leaders in the West a “full steam ahead” approach to neo-liberal economic models across the globe. And, in the art world specifically, the rise of biennials created the sense that art was being de-centered and this de-centered quality was big business.

Activists across the globe had to dramatically switch gears to react to the changing political climate. The effects of globalism were not without oppositional political responses as the Seattle protests in November 1999 against the World Trade Organization made clear. The Seattle protests marked a socially critical moment in progressive political history as the rallying cry was not against a specific government, but against the intangible and relatively abstract international finance organizations that so perfectly represented the shift toward an unchecked international power. Since that pivotal event in 1999, the global justice movement has tracked the movement of international finance: the International Monetary Fund meeting in Washington DC (2000), World Bank/IMF meeting, Prague (2000), G20 meeting in Quebec (2000), World Economic Forum, Davos, Switzerland (2001), FTAA Summit of the Americas, Quebec City (2001), EU Summit, Gothenburg, Sweden (2001), G8 Summit, Genoa, Italy (2001), World Economic Forum, New York City (2002), EU Summit, Barcelona (2002), WTO, Cancun, Mexico (2003) to name a few. Power and resistance have obviously gone global.

While cultural content was increasingly being co-opted by the cultural industry, physical urban space underwent a parallel co-opting. In the major American cities of New York, Los Angeles, and Chicago, as well as internationally, artists began to feel the effects of globalism in their neighborhoods. Gentrification became a buzzword to describe the efforts by many cities to remake their downtowns into inviting hot spots for global capital. Artists found their own housing habits complicit with renewal strategies for evicting lower income families in larger metropolitan areas. Rosalyn Deutsche writes in *Evictions: Art and Spatial Politics*, “When galleries and artists, assuming the role of the proverbial ‘shock troops’ of gentrification, moved into an inexpensive storefronts and apartments, they aided the mechanism by driving up rents and displacing residents.”⁸ While housing increasingly felt the brunt of expanded privatization, so to did the arts (see Gregory Sholette’s essay in this book). The space for non-commercially driven art, generally the haven for supporting and legitimating political art practice, rapidly decreased. As Brian Wallis, Chief Curator at the International Center for Photography in New York writes, “In recent years, the gradual withdrawal and relocation of NEA funds has created a sort of Darwinian ethos in the world of alternative spaces. Many of the smaller and more fragile spaces have ceased to operate or have become ‘virtual spaces.’ Those that have survived have become larger and more like those institutions they once challenged.”⁹ While political representation was being depoliticized, space, it seemed, was becoming radically politicized. This twist is the critical turn.¹⁰

The 60s malcontents speak

This is not to say that these conditions – the increasing banality of revolutionary images coupled with the increasing politicization urban space – arose out of the 1990s, but rather that they became all the more acute during this period. It is instructive to look at the writings of the Situationists (1957-1972), an avant-garde collective inspired by, if not past member of, Dada, CoBRA (acronym meaning: Copenhagen, Brussels, and Amsterdam) and the International Movement for an Imaginist Bauhaus who anticipated these very shifts. The Situationists included the Danish painter Asger Jorn (1914-1973), the Dutch urban designer Constant Nieuwenhuys

⁷ Saskia Sassen, *Globalization and its Discontents*, (New York: New Press, 1999)

⁸ Rosalyn Deutsche, *Evictions: Art and Spatial Politics*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts, MIT Press, 1998), p. 151.

⁹ Brian Wallis, “Public Funding and Alternative Spaces,” *Alternative Art in New York, 1965-1985*, ed. Julie Ault. (Minneapolis – London: University of Minnesota Press, 2002) p. 178.

¹⁰ For more information see the burgeoning field of critical geography spearheaded by the writings of David Harvey, Mike Davis, Edward Soja, Neil Smith and from the art writings Rosalyn Deutsche and Miwon Kwon.

(1920-), theorist Raoul Vaneigem (1934-), and worked with a slew of others including the eminent philosopher Henri Lefebvre (1901–1991) whom the group eventually disassociated itself (as it eventually did with Constant and Asger Jorn). In his highly informative work, *Society of the Spectacle*, Guy Debord (1932-1994), the most outspoken member of the Situationists, warned of the spectacle nature of late capitalist society. By spectacle (a key term for the Situationists), Debord meant the overtly visual and alienating aspect of late capital. While more orthodox Marxists of the period were haggling over the alienation caused by the rise of consumerism, the Situationists asserted that culture itself was fast becoming the ultimate commodity. Clothing, music, film, television and even walking were all forms of commodification. Their hysteria finds validity in the increasing privatization of culture, in the form of intellectual copyright, and in the shrinkage, policing, and control of public space. If culture was turning into a commodity, then the Situationists were determined to develop methods to confront and reverse this trend.

Their aspirations resulted in the development of two key tactics that can be seen in much of the work in this exhibition. The first is the *detourné*, which basically is the re-arranging of popular sign-systems in order to produce new meanings. For the Situationists, this took the form of re-inserting their own language into the thoughts bubbles of popular comics strips. In the comic strip here, the gentlemen is saying, "The very development from class society to the spectacular organization of non-life leads the revolutionary project to become *visibly* what it already was *essentially*." This form found new relevance in the 1990s when "culture jammers" and later magazines like AdBusters began rampantly re-articulating popular advertising to produce an underlying message such as the McDeath logo here.

The second tactic was the *derive*: a short meandering walk determined by one's desires. The *derivé* was designed to resist the work-and control-oriented design of Paris which had been put in place by Baron Haussmann in the 19th century. The *derivé* would reveal hints of what the Situationists called psychogeography, "The study of the precise effects of geographical setting, consciously managed or not, acting directly on the mood and behavior of the individual."¹¹ While at first such meanderings may seem fairly leisurely and not the least bit political, they propose the radical idea that ways of being in physical space (particularly in the cities) are political acts. The confluence of the *detourné* and the *derivé* manage to territorialize the visual. The spectacle is a territory. The city is a spectacle. Both tactics, *derivé* and *detourné*, take as a given their trespassing nature. They must cross into the territory of others, whether these are the advertisements of Nike or the orderly streets of Paris, to produce new meanings. This sensibility becomes visually apparent in the video performances of Alex Villar. In his 2001 project *Temporary Occupations*, Villar performs movements that resist the intended structuring of public space. He clammers up, hops over, crawls into and slides past fences and walls designed to prevent one from entering particular spaces in the city. These actions bring to light the manipulative nature of the built environment and how strongly it is developed around notions of public and private.

As we know, the political upheavals of the adolescent Baby Boomer generation (born between 1946 and 1964) were not simply occurring in the streets of Paris, but across the globe. In the United States, foremost "culture jammers" were the extraordinary yippies, Abbie Hoffman and Jerry Rubin, whose pranksterish antics foreshadow much of the interventionist work of the 1990s. One of their most enduring actions took place on August 24, 1967 when Hoffman led a group to the New York Stock Exchange and dropped dollar bills down to the traders below. The sudden appearance of money fluttering down from the sky caused eager traders to pile on top of each other as they all instinctually chased the money. As planned, the small event spread and grew across the mediated globe. As Jerry Rubin states, "You can't be a revolutionary today without a television set – it's as important as a gun! Every guerilla must know how to use the terrain of culture that he is trying to destroy!"¹² The Yippies understood the connection between the

¹¹ Definition found at www.angelfire.com/ar/corei/SI/SIsecc.htm

¹² Jerry Rubin, *Do It! Scenarios of the Revolution*, (New York: Ballantine Books, 1970), p. 108.

spectacle and political action and their influence can be seen in much of the work in the exhibition.

Abbie Hoffman and Jerry Rubin understood (probably more so than the Situationists who didn't have much of a sense of humor) the importance of mixing humor with drama in their actions. Their politics, while just as heartfelt and real as the Students for a Democratic Society, were tempered by an understanding of how they would be interpreted on a national media front. Humor was a tactic. Humor was a tool. Their actions were a manipulation of visual codes in a specific time and in a specific place that produced a critical result. In a sense artistic techniques were a resource for manipulating the situation of everyday life. The codes are re-designed whether they are in the streets, on a billboard, on one's body, or in a classroom.

Games, Tactics and Strategies

Jerry Rubin and Abbie Hoffman thought of life as a game and they played that game well. As stated earlier, their "tactics" gained meaning from their position within the game. To assure success, their clever and playful projects were designed for the media and for public consumption. They figured that if they could get the audience to laugh, then their politics were being conveyed.

When the linguistic philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889-1951) stated, "What we do is to bring words back from their metaphysical to their everyday use."¹³, he indicated that language is not about meaning, but about "use". For Wittgenstein, a word's use comes from how it is positioned in a "language game." The sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1930-2002) expanded this notion to interpret social systems (ranging from knitting clubs to art to Bedouin tribes) as games to maneuver within. To investigate this claim further, he radically turned sociology onto the field of sociology itself. That is, he was interested in discovering how sociology operated as a system of maneuvers designed to enhance the participants' power. Unsurprisingly, he discovered that academic papers, meetings, and books were more often than not used to expand the professor's position of power more than to actually expand the uses of sociological knowledge. This logic becomes apparent when we think of politicians that use rhetoric to gain public approval.

To bring this into an interventionist understanding, let us think of the real world as the game Monopoly. In this case, the interventionist plays on a board generally owned and operated by someone else. But her goal is not the accumulation of wealth, as it would be for a regular player. Rather, she wants to use the game to dismantle the game.

Michel De Certeau, in his book *The Practice of Everyday Life* made a useful distinction between "strategies" and "tactics." "I call strategy", he writes, "the calculation (or manipulation) of power relationships that become possible as soon as a subject with will and power (a business, an army, a city, a scientific institution) can be isolated." That is to say, a strategy is a plan made by those who have the power to predict and change the lived landscape. To go back to Monopoly, the player who owns Park Place tends to be able to control the flow of the game. On the other hand, a tactic "operates in isolated actions, blow by blow. It takes advantage of 'opportunities' and depends on them, being without any base where it could stockpile its winnings, build up its own position, and plan raids." "In short, the tactic is the art of the weak."¹⁴ Interventionists could have the wonderful opportunity to have as their tag line, "the art of the weak" as their projects do in fact come from a "trespassing" into the territory of a dominant system.

Critical Art Ensemble with Beatriz de Costa's *Free Range Grain* is a telling example. In *Free Range Grain*, the collective has transported a GMO (genetically modified organism) testing lab into the gallery space. With the research facility on-hand, they will test "organic" foods bought

¹³ Wittgenstein, Ludwig, *Philosophical Investigations*, p. 48

¹⁴ Michel De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley and Los Angeles, California and London: University of California Press, Ltd., 1988), p. 37.

from stores for GMOs. They anticipate that many of the foods labeled “organic” are in fact chalk-full of GMOs. This revelation is not meant as an exposé on inaccurate packaging of organic foods so much as an amateur science experiment that makes visible the extent to which industry has inserted itself into something as basic as the food chain.

For a number of years, Critical Art Ensemble has made the field of biotechnology their focus. Biotechnology is a system of knowledge that has particular rules and advantages for those who have control over it. The members of Critical Art Ensemble are amateur researchers operating in a system controlled by someone else. They are “intervening” in biotechnology. In doing so, they are trespassing into this field and as a tactic, reworking the premises of what the science should research. This is the point where the reworking of that language (whether visually, linguistically, or spatially) becomes quite political. When Critical Art Ensemble presents their own amateur research into the field of genetically modified foods, they do so in order to challenge the role of those individuals and systems determining the game of biotechnology. Their project provides a series of tools for rearranging this system. However, as Gregory Sholette states, “One should be cautious about how far reaching/how available these tools are and to what extent an art-based practice, and it still is in terms of venue by and large, can ‘re-arrange the system’ no matter how much it may wish to.”¹⁵

An interventionist’s tools/tactics are utilized in order to unhinge, rework, rectify, or reclaim various social systems. Just as the Situationists reworked the given language of a comic strip to critique the “bourgeois Marxists” and right-wing stalwarts of May ’68 Paris, so too does an interventionist dismantle a dominant language during the current period.

This exhibition moves between various tactics of intervention in order to illustrate a broad field of approaches, categorized into four sections: Reclaim the Streets, Nomads, Ready to Wear, and the Experimental University. As a caveat, almost every project in the exhibition could fit in more than one category. Generally, the combination of a series of tactics is used to produce a result. This categorization is only used as a means to ease a visitor’s entry into a different form of art making and viewing.

In fact, this is why the catalogue is designed like a user’s manual. This decision harkens back to the Russian Constructivist Vladimir Mayakovsky’s (1893-1930) book of poems designed by Lazar “El” Lissitzky (1890-1941) that had tabs allowing the “user/reader” to flip to each poem. It also incorporates the underlying emphasis of interventionist practice into the media of its presentation.

Reclaim the Streets

“Today, street action groups such as the Tute Bianche use spectacular forms of conflict and theatrical actions designed for filming, such as climbing up a huge crane and risking one’s own life to hang a banner.” –Encrico Ludovici, from the film *Disobbedienti* by Oliver Ressler and Dario Azzellini, 2002.

The streets have long represented the public sphere: a space where all citizens can participate democratically and freely. Most political artists operate with the desire to expand, test and operate in the public, and so the streets are in a sense a second home. The section “Reclaim the Streets” (RTS) is named after the radical form of protest begun in London in 1991. RTS originally was just an ordinary logging protest that re-arranged the rules of dissent by introducing djs, dancing, wild costumes and pleasure to radical politics in the streets. Influenced in large part by the incredible boom of rave culture in England, the combination of pageantry and civil disobedience has since become a signature characteristic of political participation in the 1990s. Art and radical politics

¹⁵ Gregory Sholette, Personal Interview, 11 Nov. 2003.

appeared to merge under the famous anarchist Emma Goldman's refrain, "If I can't dance, I don't want to be in your revolution."¹⁶

This pageantry takes on a remarkable performative quality in the sermons of the Reverend Billy. A disillusioned performance artist turned street activist, Bill Talen donned the disguise of a white haired, fanatical priest to preach his anti-consumerist gospel in the heart of capitalism: Disney Stores and Starbucks. Much like the Brazilian Augusto Boal's *Invisible Theater*, the Reverend Billy uses daily life, whether it is a corporate chain or public sidewalk, as his stage. He delivers diabolical sermons against the globalization, consumerism and the privatization of daily life. To quote Reverend Billy at length (because he is so funny),

"I am preaching here in the Disney Store today because I am a tourist myself. Like all New Yorkers I am allowing this apocalypse to take place. I know that Manhattan in fourteen months will be entirely within the hellishly expanded Disney Store. This is Manhattan as Suburban mall. This is a fatal disease known as Involuntary Entertainment."¹⁷

Since the year 2000, the Reverend Billy's spontaneous arrival at various global corporations has rapidly gained media attention and a cult following. His sermons at Starbucks have been so successful that the company developed a document for its employees letting them know the proper protocol to deal with any spontaneous Reverend Billy appearances in their store.

The urban environment has also been home to a variety of tactics of representation such as graffiti, wheat paste posters, stickers, and stencils. This Do It Yourself (DIY) aesthetics is often relegated to an "outsider" art of the art world since it depends on its physical and legal position. Or to speak plainly, these projects shine brightly when they are illegally placed on the walls of downtown areas. Their dependence on illegality makes the results of visual exhaustion evident, since they only become visible when placed in unsanctioned areas. It is as though we can see their position in the game. These tactics thrive on the antagonisms of public space and retain an allegiance to a more traditional form of resistant aesthetics that goes back to broadsheets, manifestos, political posters and leaflets. The God Bless Graffiti Coalition has assembled over 200 of these projects that range from the more didactic work of Claude Moller to the simply beautiful work of Swoon.

The street can be a forum for discussion or, in the case of the collective e-Xplo, a subject in itself. E-Xplo uses the bus tour, a more down-to-earth version of the Situationist *derivé*, to transform preconceived notion of the collective environment. As Rene Gabri says of their project, "We try to take familiar sites and open them up to new readings and possibilities. These sites range from the physical sites we explore to the discursive sites we inhabit, even the 'tour' itself becomes something to interrogate and question. Rather than an end point, the tour is really a tool for introducing questions, a familiar departing point for a set of overlapping journeys."¹⁸

In their project, *Roundabout - Love at Leisure: Help me Stranger* for the exhibition, e-Xplo's tour bus meanders between MASS MoCA and the Clark Art Institute. The passengers listen to a GPS-triggered soundtrack that abstractly narrates the sidestreets between the two cultural institutions. As one travels between these areas, the auditory environment encourages a contemplative form of viewing an abandoned factory, dormant cemetery and/or family's front yard. Geography becomes contested and interpretable. For a brief period, the means/ends commuter-inspired form

¹⁶ According to Alix Kates Shulman in "Dances with Feminists" *Women's Review of Books*, Vol. IX, no. 3, December 1991, Emma Goldman never actually said the above quote. This popular quote paraphrased a much longer quote from Emma Goldman's book *Living My Life*.

¹⁷ Bill Tallen quoted in Jason Grote's , "The God that people who do not believe in God believe in: taking a bust with Reverend Billy", in *Cultural Resistance Reader*, ed. Stephen Duncombe (London: Verso, 2002), p. 366.

¹⁸ Rene Gabri, Personal Interview, 18 Nov. 2003.

of travel is sidestepped for a reworking of the living landscape. The subject of the work is the world around us, and its interpretation is up for grabs.

At times, cultivating public participation becomes an interventionist project in and of itself as in the work of HaHa and their *Taxi Project, North Adams* (2004) produced with the help of MASS MoCA. HaHa collected submissions from North Adams residents and community groups relating to specific sites in their neighborhoods. The taxi then provided free rides for community members as well as displaying, with the assistance of flash animation on lcd screens atop the taxi, site-specific statements. HaHa encouraged North Adams to talk to itself.

Nomads

The Situationists may have walked the streets of Paris allowing their desire to reveal new hidden treasures buried in the urban environment, but today, many artists prefer to use a set of wheels. These interventionists are nomads traveling through the homeland to discover and support dissonant forms of existence. As described earlier, William Pope L.'s extraordinary *Black Factory* (2004) must serve as one of the most elaborate forms of the Situationist's *derivé* existing today. This tradition of vehicles and technologies must pay homage to one of its most important artists, Krzysztof Wodiczko.

For over thirty years, Polish born Wodiczko has expanded the Russian Constructivist's notion of utility and technology for the public good. As Wodiczko acknowledges himself, his work is a mix of Situationism and Constructivism with design. "Designers must work *in* the world rather than 'about' or upon it."¹⁹ His preferred term is "Interrogative design" which he has incorporated into his ongoing teaching at the Center for Advanced Visual Studies at MIT. (His essay from 1994 is included in this catalogue). With a shift away from representation and an emphasis on "use" in the social sphere, it should be no surprise that Wodiczko is one of the interventionist's seminal figures. By emphasizing use over representation, Wodiczko's projects reveal his inherent suspicions of capital and control. The projects tend to augment individual autonomy and make visible social oppression. As an émigré from Poland, Wodiczko tempers his political affinities with a suspicion of both communism and capitalism.

Wodiczko's *Homeless Vehicle Project*, 1988-89, is a critical point of departure for much interventionist political art of the 1990s. The design of the vehicle was inspired by the 1987 mandate by New York Mayor Ed Koch that all homeless people in New York must undergo psychiatric evaluations and if they failed, must be hospitalized. Wodiczko decided to focus on the issue of homelessness and used the shopping cart as a media. In conversations with homeless people, Wodiczko designed this project for multiple purposes. The *Homeless Vehicle* not only provided a user-friendly place for sleeping and can collection, but also provided visibility for the issue of homelessness. Wodiczko is under no illusions that he is incapable of acting as a social service agency. He sincerely believes this is the job of a properly functioning government. However, this project brings a dynamic visibility to the issue. "The oldest and most common reference to this kind of design is the bandage. A bandage covers and treats a wound while at the same time exposing its presence, signifying both the experience of pain and the hope of recovery."²⁰

Following the example of Wodiczko's *Homeless Vehicle*, many "mobile" projects have built upon and departed from Wodiczko's work. Michael Rakowitz, a student of Wodiczko's at CAVS, is the author of one such project called *Parasite*. *Parasite*, as the name implies, literally feeds off the urban environment. Using the existing HVAC air exhausts of buildings, the homeless shelter inflates. Rakowitz produced many *Parasite* projects in consultation with homeless individuals, and

¹⁹ Krzysztof Wodiczko, "Interrogative Design", *Critical Vehicles*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1999), p. 17.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

unlike Wodiczko's *Homeless Vehicle*, *Parasite* could be wrapped up into a small bundle and placed in one's pocket.

It is not far fetched to state that many of these "mobile" projects have affinities in displaced populations. The mobile nature of the work points, in function, to a nomadic populace who are, to some degree, parasites of the urban environment. Displacement is an increasingly common politicized position. Tools for mobility find increasing prescience in a world continually forced to stay on the move.

Looking through the lens of displacement and trans-nationality (or non-nationality), the abundance of tents in the exhibition comes into focus. The tent is mobile architecture that folds up and is easy for one person to carry. The tent provides a home for those trespassing or camping out in public space. It facilitates autonomy, and like a bandage, points to the need for autonomy for displaced populations. Perhaps no one, except Buckminster Fuller, has explored the possibilities of tents more than Dutch artist/designer Dré Wapenaar. Wapenaar has produced tents for reading newspapers, playing pianos, hanging off trees, and, in this exhibition, a tent for giving birth and for memorializing the dead. Tents have surely come a long way.

Ready to Wear

Trained as a fashion designer, Lucy Orta develops conceptual and functional projects that extend and perpetuate her socially concerned aesthetic. She produces nomadic architecture as well as nomadic clothing. In Orta's oeuvre, clothes become tools, and the body becomes activated. Among many of her radical fashion creations, she has developed architectural clothing lines that almost literalize tendencies hinted at in Wodiczko's *Homeless Vehicle*. Her *Refuge Wear* series (1992-1998), which she produced in response to the Gulf War, drew Orta her first international attention. The work is at its most distilled in the early piece *Habitent* (1992-93): a high design tent/jacket with whistle, lantern and transport bag. Here we see yet another example, of clothing making visible and moderately assisting the situation of global refugees. Her clothes are literally spaces of refuge.²¹ It is a fashion of resistance and survival.

Fashion also acts as camouflage. As the Center for Tactical Magic writes, "Disguise is the power to conceal, to hide away in the shadows of another's misperception. The appropriation of signifiers in the minds of onlookers, keyed in to their signal decoders along hacked bandwidths."²² Going "under cover" is not so much an entertaining game (although fun does play a part), it is a necessary tactic when trespassing onto the territory of others. Disguise is needed to blend into a different game. The Center for Tactical Magic has produced *The Ultimate Jacket* (2003). Influenced by various schools of concealment and espionage (private detective, magician, ninja), the center has produced a jacket as a means to augment one's ability to act in various situations. The jacket contains over 50 secret pockets and allows the interventionist to slip from the identity of a worker to the identity of a ninja.

The art of being undercover finds its greatest example in the incredible work of the collective, the Yes Men.

"Although their name contains the word 'Men,' it doesn't describe who they are, it describes what they do: they use any means necessary to agree their way into the fortified compounds of commerce, ask questions, and then smuggle out the stories of their undercover escapades to provide a public glimpse at the behind-the-scenes world of business."²³

²¹ subRosa's project, *Refugia*, investigates sites of refuge for women. The prominence in the exhibition of the term "refuge" correlates directly to larger social conditions such as the shrinkage of social services and the increasing displacement of global populations.

²² From the website, www.tacticalmagic.org

²³ From the Yes Men website, www.gatt.org

Their project stems from the strange opportunities made available when the group took control of the website www.gatt.org. The site copied the official site for the General Agreement of Trades and Tariffs with a few critical modifications. The collective has a history of producing these sites, such as their previous web creation www.gwbush.org. Using these domains as public terrain, the collective produced their version of the positions of these various political entities. While they expected some people to confuse their site with the official one, they did not expect the visitors to actually invite them to different speaking opportunities as representatives of these organizations. Yet, this is what happened.

In October 2000, the Yes Men found themselves in the confounding situation of agreeing to speak in Salzburg, Austria on behalf of the WTO at a conference of international trade lawyers. The group wrote that unfortunately the General Director of the WTO, Michael Moore, would be unable to attend but they would happily send a representative, Dr. Andreas Bichlbaum. Dr. Bichlbaum arrived with a security guard and cameraman and proceeded to give an audacious Powerpoint presentation on the need to streamline voting in the United States by selling votes on-line, and the need to ban siestas as an inefficient holiday. After the talk, the cameraman claimed Dr. Bichlbaum received a pie in the face by an angry anti-WTO protester. Since their first foray into speaking, the Yes Men have given several talks with increasing absurdity as representatives of the WTO. The gold leotard with a three-foot phallus on display here is the result of one of the Yes Men's most bizarre forays in Tampere, Finland. The group, represented this time by Hank Hardy Unruh, presented a lecture to a group of Finnish college students on the inefficiency of the Civil War. Slavery, Unruh argued, would have inevitably been replaced by the much cheaper economic solution of sweatshops. At the end of his lecture, Mr. Unruh's assistant ripped off the lecturer's clothes. Underneath his suit, Mr. Unruh wore a golden "Management Leisure Suit" which came equipped a large, inflating phallus. At the head of the phallus, Mr. Unruh explained to the astonished class, a satellite-fed monitor allowed the manager to control and punish workers across the globe while retaining the pleasing comfort needed for the managerial class.

The Experimental University

The range of interventionist tactics may at first appear to take a slight detour when it comes to the "research" projects in the Experimental University. Although the Experimental University is a dramatic departure from the more literal forms of intervention, it also points to a critical departure in thinking about what art is and how art can be used. In the Experimental University (Nicholas Mirzoeff's essay goes into this in detail), the artists intervene into a discursive space. That is to say, they are interrupting a particular field of study (whether this is urban studies, biotechnology, anthropology or ethnography) in order to present different critical perspectives. We can recognize these practices as "art-inspired" because they skillfully manipulate visual and spatial codes in order to produce criticality. As previously described, the work of Critical Art Ensemble with Beatriz de Costa makes this evident.

In their *Can You See Me Now?* (2004) project at MASS MoCA, the cyber-feminist collective subRosa produced research here in North Adams on spaces of refuge for women. This study took a number of forms including assistance from both an engineering and feminist studies class at Smith College. The collective set out to "Uncover and map the intersections of women's material and affective labor in cultures of production in North Adams and Ciudad Juarez, Mexico." Their interest in Ciudad relates to the fact that Sprague Electric, the capacitor manufacturing company that previously existed at the MASS MoCA site for 50 years and closed in 1986, moved its production there. Their installation includes a series of trap doors that reveal associations between the maps of North Adams and Ciudad as well as a series of kiosks placed at local places of refuge for women, including women's shelters, coffee shops and knitting clubs. This interweaving web moves between theoretical abstractions of globalization and distinct sites of production in the local community. Through utilizing techniques of art, the collective produces a dynamic pedagogical experience on the effects of globalization on women.

While subRosa might produce factual correlations, the Atlas Group presents imaginary findings. In their archival display titled *The Truth Will Be Known When The Last Witness Is Dead: Documents from the Fakhouri File at the Atlas Group Archive*, the experimental archivist organization Atlas Group presents documents from their archives. The Atlas Group investigates the contemporary landscape of Lebanon with particular focus on the history of the Lebanese Civil War (1975-1991) through the development of an *imaginary* archive. If the term imaginary research doesn't immediately make sense there is a good reason for this. The "imaginary" part of the Atlas Group research is that it is culled from their collective imaginations. That is to say, the facts are not necessarily "true," but then again, as the project implicitly asks, whose perspective is? This project, like many projects in the Experimental University, problematizes truth claims. Like the title says, *the truth will be known when the last witness is dead*. So what, then, does research look like if it doesn't particularly trust assertions of truth? The research is open-ended and lets viewers make up their own minds. In particular, when investigating the imagery and history of the Middle-East, the Atlas Group is careful to not repeat the use of neocolonial techniques. They do not assert. They do not define. Yet, this technique does not slip into the postmodern relativism that many rigorous scientists accuse cultural studies of. The research is grounded in the history of the Lebanese Civil War.

The research conducted in the Experimental University possesses an urgency that aligns it with more traditional activism than hobbyist research. Their seductive visual displays highlight a dramatically changing political landscape, whether in the lives of women, the technologies of race, the biotechnology of agrobusiness, or the politics of Arab visual representation. These interventionists manipulate the visual field to create a learning environment in which we, as viewers, participate. It is a form of pedagogy. It is in this regard that many museums could see the supposed line between art and science blur productively together.

Conclusion

"But these experiments can only take a transformative power in the open, evolving context of a social movement, outside the cliques and clienteles of the artistic game." – Brian Holmes, *Liar's Poker*²⁴

Yet, while tactics are a useful place to begin, they are not necessarily the best place to end. While it is true that many of these projects gain their resonance through a dance within the dominant systems, some of these projects prefer to think more strategically about changing these systems as well. As De Certeau defines it, tactics depends on a dominant system. For De Certeau, tactics constituted small subversions such as lazy work ethics and meandering walks through the city. He was not particularly interested in whether or not these tactics added up to anything actually revolutionary.

However, political artists are constantly concerned with, to use De Certeau's term, strategies. They want socially beneficial results. Frustrated with political irrelevance, many interventionists have catered their projects to fit in numerous spheres and to resonate across a wide-range of audiences. They operate in many different social games from the art world to the activist world to the biotechnology world. They understand their work means different things to different people. With this in mind we can sidestep the argument that these practices, in and of themselves, are not politically effective. Their connection to a robust array of audiences and methods, such as activists, publishers, or everyday people allows their specific project to come into light. The false dichotomy between activist (utilitarian) and artist (ambiguous) need not be such a devastating issue if we shift terms toward interventionists operating within a network of resistance. We can see in the documentary *Disobbedienti* (2002) by Oliver Ressler and Dario Azzellini that the tactics used by interventionists are popularly used in the growing global justice movement today. To say there is a connection between experimental interventionist practices and the collective protest

²⁴Brian Holmes, "Liar's Poker: Representation of Politics: Politics of Representation", Springerin (Vienna, Austria: January, 2003: <http://www.springerin.at/en/>)

actions today would be putting it lightly. Interventionist practices do not work in isolation and, in fact, are part of a greater struggle for freedom.

That is why New York-based art collective 16 Beaver has been included as both a signpost and metaphor for social connection. It would be difficult to consider what this constantly shifting collective does as “art”, yet their importance to this type of interventionist practice can not be emphasized enough. 16 Beaver is simply a reading group that has met every Monday since 1999. Over the course of five years, it has produced projects reacting to the war and has connected various intellectuals, artists and activists through their humble space with regular meeting times. This connectivity, and there are countless other examples of this, is crucial in blurring the distinctions between those that just produce art and those that produce politics.

To end on a sobering tone, it is important to emphasize the complete lack of consensus among interventionists. Practices among interventionists vary greatly, and these tensions should not be ironed out just because they are under one roof. Nor should this exhibition be misinterpreted as a “greatest hits” of interventionism. This assortment of artists/activists/reading groups/designers presented here point to new forms of resistance in the age of an increasingly privatized and visualized cultural sphere. They are methods for resistance integrally connected to larger social movements sweeping the planet. While it may be true that there are extraordinary differences of opinion regarding how social change can be brought about, most artists will agree that the current political climate is more dangerous than ever. Tactics for broadening social justice and public dialogue are not simply an artistic challenge, but one placed on everyone interested in democratic participation. The artists in the show are not telling us what to do, but are providing tools for us to engage these questions. In short, the interventionists provide, as William Pope L.’s Black Factory explicitly advertises: “opportunity”.