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# Boxing with shadows: contentious politics, culture jamming, and radical creativity in tactical innovation

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BOXING WITH SHADOWS:  
CONTENTIOUS POLITICS, CULTURE JAMMING,  
AND RADICAL CREATIVITY IN TACTICAL INNOVATION

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
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by  
David Matthew Iles, III  
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## **ABSTRACT**

Dominant theories of tactical innovation in contentious politics suggest that actors innovate in times of crisis or at the margins of familiar forms of action in order to achieve strategic advantage. I argue that these theories do not satisfactorily account for the tactical creativity of a form of contention called culture jamming. Instead, I employ a biographical theory of tactical innovation to explain their distinct repertoire of contention. This theory claims that tactics are partially explained as emanations of or congruent with the life experiences, identities, dispositions, and values of actors. Bourdieu's field theory allows me to identify a social context generative of an aesthetic disposition, the field of art. It is my contention that a politicized aesthetic disposition is responsible for the observed tactical creativity and innovation of culture jamming. Such a disposition allows for the perception of everyday life objects, discourses, and practices as aesthetic. These common, mundane, even ugly materials are then susceptible to tactical and strategic appropriation. Through an analysis of two culture jamming groups, Critical Art Ensemble and Ubermorgen, I empirically illustrate my application of the biographical theory of innovation.

# CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 THE QUESTION

A small group of young men and women sit in supermarket aisles and pray to the products before them. A crowd gathers around a man playing with a train in a public site before security threatens to arrest him. Two men copyright phone number tones. A man auctions his vote online, and Google advertising is harnessed to purchase Google stocks in a vicious cycle of auto-cannibalism. A cursory glance at this list of eccentric performances illustrates a glaring ignorance: what are they doing? These largely epiphenomenal or mundane and symbolic acts are protests, performances of resistance, acts that traverse a rich terrain of politics, art, economics, culture, and everyday life. They originate from a rich genealogy that stretches across the twentieth century; the Situationist International represents a point of pronounced and concentrated development in this history.<sup>1</sup> This group of politico-cultural activists, informed by the radicalism of Dadaism, Surrealism and other avant-garde movements, formalized a conception of resistance against consumer capitalism and its accoutrements. Situated primarily in the discursive and semiological, this practice of contention found dramatic mass expression in France in the events of May in 1968. Today, variations on the themes and practices of the Situationists have strong resonance in many social movements and other forms of contention.

Culture jammers are contemporary practitioners of this art of protest. For the purposes of this thesis, I offer an instrumental definition of culture jamming: an act intentionally composed of a variable constellation of art-protest-humor that seeks to alter, negate, or annul the meaning of an opposed object, action, or discourse. Although the remainder of this work attempts to fully flesh out the concept, I hope in my review of the history of and literature on culture jamming to

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<sup>1</sup> See Home (1988), Marcus (1990), and Plant (1992) for the Situationists.

elucidate satisfactorily my definition. Product sabotage, plagiarism, space reclamation, ad subversion, street theater, anarchic (dis)organizational forms, and other acts of mischief, creativity, and resistance constitute the culture jamming *repertoire of contention*. Developed by Charles Tilly, the concept of repertoires of contention implies a set of familiar forms of contention, of “limited ensembles of mutual claim-making routines available to particular pairs of identities” (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001, 138). The concept attempts to capture the constrained performance of contention, both culturally and structurally, for actors “rework known routines in response to current circumstances” (ibid.). This paper is concerned with the generation of new means of protest, of tactical innovations within the constraints of a repertoire.

The culture jamming repertoire briefly described above leads me to engage cautiously the current literature on contentious political behavior. The dominant explanations of the origins and dynamics of contentious tactics are largely inadequate for the task of explaining culture jamming tactical innovation. As I argue below, resource mobilization and political process theories largely conflate tactical innovation with tactical diffusion to the detriment of the former. In addition, their conception of agency is impoverished; it assumes a strategic rationality uninformed by the emotional, moral, ideological, and biographical dimensions of actors both collective and individual. As the name implies, culture jamming is far more amenable to approaches that take culture seriously. Under the influence of Bourdieu, Foucault, and others, these alternative approaches expand notions of politics, power, and resistance to include contention cognizant of, hostile to, or in defense of authority and power not necessarily constituted in the organs of government, but rather in the institutional, abstract, systemic, discursive, and/or governmental practices of power.



In *From Mobilization to Revolution*, Charles Tilly makes a suggestive analogy between art and protest; “collective action usually takes well-defined forms already familiar to the participants, in the same sense that most of an era’s art takes on a small number of established forms” (1978, 143). To the contrary, twentieth century art has exploded in the diversity of its form and content akin to an imagination revolution. Pierre Bourdieu, a contributor to the theory of innovation utilized in this thesis, describes a “*permanent revolution*” or “*periods of continuous rupture*” that characterize the more unstable cultural fields like art in the twentieth century (1993, 188, 225). One need only glance at Marcel Duchamp’s readymades, Jackson Pollock’s action paintings, John Cage’s chance music, Brion Gysin’s cut-up technique, and Allan Kaprow’s happenings to see the collapse of traditional barriers to experimental forms.

Renowned art theorist Arthur Danto weighs in on the state of contemporary art: “I have grown reconciled to the unlimited diversity of art....The art world is a model of a pluralistic society, in which all disfiguring barriers and boundaries have been thrown down” (2000, 430-431). If one corrects the angle on art presented by Tilly, then we approach the central contention of this paper. Roughly parallel to the explosion in artistic diversity since at least the Dada Revolution, some protest has likewise thrown off *to a degree* the ‘well-defined forms’ with the semblance of familiarity that apparently structure tactical possibilities. This throwing off of defined forms is, to be more accurate, an experimental and creatively inclined exploration of the possibilities of resistant practices, a reflexive agency. Protest in general is largely constrained as Tilly argues with the repertoire of contention; familiar forms like the strike and the demonstration remain prominent actions. As with the proliferation *and* coexistence of artistic forms today, however, contentious actors continue to generate innovative forms of protest, despite contemporary familiarity with the abundance of mainstream models of action offered in the repertoire. People

still paint, for example, while new forms of relational and media art forms proliferate. Culture jamming is idiosyncratic, creative, and experimental, especially when employed by groups like Critical Art Ensemble, Monochrom, or My Dads Strip Club, groups that Brett Rolfe (2005) calls “innovative hothouses.” The question, then, is how is one to explain culture jamming tactical innovation? To be succinct, my central claim in this work is that tactical innovation in culture jamming is best explained through a theory of tactical innovation that views tactics as emanations of activists’ dispositions and identities. As agents of the field of art, culture jammers are endowed with an aesthetic disposition that gives everyday life objects, actions, and discourses a potentiality for creative political appropriation.

The nature of this phenomenon raises the question of what interest is a study of culture jamming to contentious politics? Why should serious scholars devote any time to pranksters, lifestyle anarchists, and artists? First, culture jamming as I conceptualize it here is a fairly common form of contention. The highly decentralized nature of culture jamming organization, low costs (including repression), and its pleasurable practice contribute to its proliferation. Second, many culture jammers are emphatic participants in the evolving discourse on intellectual property rights. Groups like Negativland are proficient plagiarizers; as such, they have come under the wrath of those eager to assert their copyright. Third, culture jamming as a form of contention may or may not constitute a social movement, but it is perhaps better understood as a form of contention in itself, often utilized in conjunction with other means of protest and resistance by a diversity of movements. In Rolfe’s (ibid.) model of emerging online tactical innovations, for example, innovative hothouses generate tactics that mainstream social movements appropriate. Fourth, despite their nonviolent nature, culture jammers have not been immune to repression. Britain in particular has led the way in attempting to smash the efforts of

groups like Reclaim the Streets (for culture jamming streets for entire days) and notable local protests like Claremont Road. The 1994 Criminal Justice Act explicitly targets the alternative lifestyles and countercultures that house culture jammers and similar activists. Finally, studying culture jamming helps us to approach the questions of agency and culture in collective contentious behavior. The study of this form of contention can help scholars to better conceptualize, theorize and empirically grapple with the *problematic* of culture in a field still largely occupied by the structural approach. In a broader sense, culture jamming, like voting, lobbying, campaigning, rioting, and striking, is one of the many forms of political participation, expression, and even empowerment.

## **1.2 ORGANIZATION AND INTENTION**

The principal goal of this work is to provide an explanation of tactical innovation that accounts for culture jamming and other creative forms of protest. I argue that tactical innovation in culture jamming and similar forms of contention can be explained with an emphasis on creative agency through the biographical theory of tactical innovation. This ultimately requires an adequate conceptualization of the phenomenon under study, an extensive review of the relevant literature, a clear articulation of the biographical theory of innovation, and an empirical illustration of theory.

First, I provide a historical and conceptual account of culture jamming. Although the term and others that reference similar phenomena have traveled quite a bit, my conceptualization will depart to a degree from many mainstream understandings of culture jamming. My intention is to encompass and describe a great number of contentious phenomena typically ignored by the literature on protest under a concept that meaningfully respects their similarities and differences and provides a useful analytic construct for empirical and theoretical research.

Second, I review the literature on protest, the repertoire of contention, and theories of tactical innovation. I first situate this paper within a larger context of social movements and contentious politics research. Concerning the repertoire, I emphasize the interplay of agency, structure, and culture in the literature. As my conclusions will show, this paper ultimately concerns the validity of the concept of the repertoire. Through the review of tactical innovation or tactical choice theories, I seek to contrast and compare the most articulate and promising theories that in one way or another can contribute to explaining properties of contention found in culture jamming.

Third, and following James Jasper and Nick Crossley, this paper argues that what I term the biographical theory of tactical innovation is the most adept at explaining innovation in the culture jamming tactical repertoire. Supplemented by sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's theory of practice, this theory of innovation essentially argues that tactical choices and innovation are expressions of and contributions to the life experiences, identities, dispositions, and value orientations of actors. The habitus and its dispositions primarily derive from the positions of actors within social fields, determined by the distributions of resources among actors and the characteristics of the field. Some dispositions, however, are habitually reflexive, meaning they critically reflect on these conditions and their dispositions. Activists, artists, and academics are some of the roles disposed to high reflexivity. This habitual reflexivity, I claim, and the nature of the field of cultural production, which generates what Bourdieu calls the aesthetic disposition, helps to explain the quantitative and qualitative variation that distinguishes culture jamming and related protests from more mainstream forms of contention. Therefore, in an effort to provide a more satisfactory exploration of the biographical theory of tactical innovation, I review

Bourdieu's theory of practice. For this work in particular, I survey the artistic field and the aesthetic dispositions it cultivates.

Fourth, I empirically illustrate my application of the biographical theory of innovation with two case studies, the culture jamming groups Critical Art Ensemble and Übermorgen. Although not representative of culture jamming in general, they are examples of what Rolfe calls innovative hothouses, groups with technical and creative expertise that generate tactical innovations (2005, 72). Finally, I conclude with reflections on the possible implications of this work for the study of other areas of contention and the field of contentious politics in general.

## **1.3 CULTURE JAMMING**

### **1.3.1 History and Conceptualization**

Situationist theory and related critical and activist strains of thought from Mark Dery to the Critical Art Ensemble variously describe the postmodern world, the empire of signs, or spectacular society as characterized by a diffuse and disembodied power located, practiced, or mediated by contemporary culture and media. Situationist theorist Guy Debord's vision of asocial atomism and a totalitarian economy populated by individuals equipped only with their commercially fabricated desires and images is deeply influential in this respect. In the postmodern era, the state, other public institutions, in particular mass media, and most importantly the economy continually invade the private realms of everyday life (Habermas 1998). Commodification in this mature, late, or postindustrial capitalism reaches a hysterical and 'spectacular' insatiability. As Debord puts it, he lived in "the historical moment at which the commodity completes its colonization of social life" (1995, 29). The colonization of everyday life and the mediation of the social are corrosive of authenticity, critical thinking, self-reflexivity, and a host of other indicators of what the Situationists might refer to as the quality of life. This

colonialism makes every manifestation of the spectacle not only an agent of domination but also a target of resistance.

This understanding of contemporary society is broadly compatible with the emerging approach to social movements recently described by Armstrong and Bernstein (2008). Akin in many ways to Foucault's discourses, Melucci's cultural codes, and de Certeau's strategies, among others, the view of power, culture, and society espoused by many culture jammers regards power as diffuse, poly-vocal, and manifest in signs, language, symbols, and other sources of information. Power can be latent in billboards, video games, the organization of streets, labels for AIDS victims and homosexuals, comic books, tourist spots, a cop on the beat, a book on the shelf, and in the cameras at grocery stores. Each reproduces the congeries of dominations characteristic of the spectacle.

From the basic insights of power in society described above springs the Situationist resistance practice of *détournement*. *Détournement* has numerous meanings, from deflection, rerouting, distortion, hijacking, to turning something away from its usual course. As a tactic, it describes an "image, message, or artifact lifted out of its context to create a new meaning" (Klein 2000, 282), or a turning around and reclamation of lost meaning: a way of putting the stasis of the spectacle in motion (Plant 1992, 86). *Adbusters* founder Kalle Lasn describes it as a "rerouting [of] spectacular images, environments, ambiances, and events to reverse or subvert their meaning, thus reclaiming them" (1999, 103).<sup>2</sup> The apparent goal of this process is to seek out and unveil truth by a critique of power and to proliferate counter-hegemonic meaning, whether for instrumental, pedagogical, or expressive purposes. Culture jamming seeks to raise the power relationship in the object, situation, or discourse to the clarity of immediate criticism,

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<sup>2</sup> See Behnke (2003), Binay (2006), Bordwell (2002) Harold (2004), and Wettergren (2005) for the seminal culture jamming outfit *Adbusters*.

to shed light on latent power. As Vince Carducci puts it, culture jamming “is an investigation into the apparatus of representation in late modernity, as it relates to both images and discourses of the media and commodity systems, and the expression of political will” (2006, 116). The ultimate goal of the Situationists was the construction of situations, “the concrete construction of momentary ambiances of life and their transformation into a superior passional quality” (Debord 2007, 38). This strategy of constructing zones of authentic communication, culture, and existence has a number of contemporary approximations from the lifestyle anarchist Hakim Bey to the Critical Art Ensemble.

The practice of *détournement* is part of a spirited history of subcultural activism. Mark Dery (1993) describes a “historical continuum” of contention including *détournement* and other such disparate phenomena as the Russian *samizdat*, 1960’s underground journalism, parody religions, culture jamming, and many others. Cammaerts (2007) emphasizes the tactical continuity between culture jamming, Dadaism, Surrealism, Fluxus, the Situationists, and the Yippies. Tietchen (2001) traces the philosophical roots of culture jamming and “postmodern activism” to William S. Burroughs’ *Nova* trilogy and the *Electronic Revolution*. Philosopher and novelist Umberto Eco proposes “semiological guerrilla warfare,” the use of the “residual freedom” abundant in the ambiguity of mass communication to “control the message and its multiple possibilities of interpretation” (1986, 138, 140, 143). In his acute study of the group <sup>®</sup>MARK, Dennis Allen coins “viral activism” as a blanket term to describe “a style of activism that involves diffuse, multiple actions on a small scale, that evinces a certain adaptability to situations and circumstances, and that relies on the rapid dissemination of ideas and bits of information” (2003, 10). The German collective Autonome A.F.R.I.K.A. advocates “guerrilla communication,” the Critical Art Ensemble “tactical media,” and Ubermorgen “media

actionism.”<sup>3</sup> The monikers and neologisms are numerous and diverse, but each loosely approaches what I call culture jamming.

Three texts are generally ascribed a prominent role in the contemporary theorization and evaluation of culture jamming: Naomi Klein’s *No Logo*, Kelle Lasn’s *Culture Jam*, and Mark Dery’s seminal pamphlet *Culture Jamming*. Klein’s conception of culture jamming derives from the collage band, Negativland, whom many agree coined the term. She defines it as “the practice of parodying advertisements and hijacking billboards in order to drastically alter their messages” (2000, 280). This is close to a “mainstream” understanding of the concept. Classic examples of culture jammers that fit squarely in Klein’s definition are Negativland, *Adbusters*, and the Billboard Liberation Front, groups noteworthy for their explicit and often hilarious subversions of corporate advertising. Both Klein and Lasn (1999), the founder of the seminal culture jamming publication *Adbusters*, approach culture jamming through the theoretical filter of the Situationists. Lasn is keener on an expansive definition of culture jamming that encompasses his advocacy of “meme warfare.”<sup>4</sup> Like Lasn, Dery’s (1993) conception is highly flexible, consisting of nearly any project or performance that welds art, protest, and humor. It includes a wide array of activities, from counter-surveillance (*sousveillance*)<sup>5</sup> to illegal computer hacking to adbusting. I adopt a Derian conception of culture jamming, hereafter defined as an act intentionally composed of a variable constellation of art-protest-humor that seeks to alter, negate, or annul the meaning of an opposed object, practice, or discourse. Therefore, my definition is

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<sup>3</sup> Autonomie A.F.R.I.K.A. describes guerrilla communication thus: “[I]t is direct action in the space of social communication. But different from other militant positions (stone meets shop window), it doesn’t aim to destroy the codes and signs of power and control, but to distort and disfigure their meanings as a means of counteracting the omnipotent prattling of power. Communication guerrillas do not intend to occupy, interrupt or destroy the dominant channels of communication, but to *detourn* and subvert the messages transported” (emphasis added, 1999, 310).

<sup>4</sup> According to Lasn, a meme is a “unit of information (a catchphrase, a concept, a tune, a notion of fashion, philosophy, or politics) that leaps from brain to brain to brain.” He ascribes to them potency in changing minds, altering behavior, and catalyzing collective mindshifts and cultural transformation (1999, 123).

<sup>5</sup> A term coined by Steve Mann (2002).



broader, and it encompasses more phenomena than that generally used by students and practitioners of culture jamming, with the prominent exception of Dery.

The inclusion of “variable constellation” in my definition of culture jamming is significant. Whether distinguishing particular protest actions or entire group repertoires, the triad of art-protest-humor is not fixed in any quantitative constellation. Some acts or groups may eschew or downplay one of the factors. For example, sousveillance or counter-surveillance is not in any typical sense comedic, but rather seeks to subvert the power relationship inherent in surveillance by suggesting theatrically and ironically that those watching us should be the ones under scrutiny. More problematic is the inclusion of art in the triad, for art is today a fundamentally contested concept. Instead, designations of any of the three factors require an understanding of the agents involved in the action and the context within which such actions are practiced. Despite the difficulty in attaining conceptual precision, I utilize this definition as an instrumental one.

### **1.3.2 Claims, Organization, and Strategy**

As a practice of resistance, culture jamming often explicitly assumes a viral conception of the enemy, or object of claims. For many, the object(s) of claims is consumer culture, capitalism, technical rational institutions or discourses, or some other manifestation of what Debord calls the spectacle, Melucci refers to as apparatuses, or Foucault terms discourses. To illuminate further, I confer to activist group ®<sup>TM</sup>ARK:

In approaching the problem of opposing corporate power, we immediately had to acknowledge that corporate power is different, essentially and perceptually, from the government power against which there is such a long and varied tradition of resistance. Corporate power is alien and faceless, a disembodied, unlocalized, inhuman force that constantly thrusts itself upon us, but has only a multitude of seemingly dissociated aims and no position we can count on, or against which we can fight. Its horror can't even be named--"kafkaesque" may be close, but neither it nor "orwellian" will really do, because in Kafka and Orwell the nightmare forces ostensibly emanate from a malevolent or amoral government, not from countless disembodied entities that, like

wraiths in a video game, can never conceivably be destroyed all at once by any weapon, ideological or physical (2000).

Corporate power has no center, “no brain,” is “tenacious,” and “responds to attack by mutation” (ibid.). As Dery suggests, engaging the enemy, the “intrusive, instrumental technoculture whose operant mode is the manufacture of consent through the manipulation of symbols,” the “phantasmagoric capitalism that produces intangible commodities,” is like boxing with shadows (1993). Many or all of these characterizations are essentially pervasive among groups described here as culture jammers. The object of claims is often constructed as a purveyor of instrumental rationality and a producer of culture, whether it is a dominant class, apparatuses, discourses, or institutions.

Like their objects of claims, culture jamming claims are radically heterogeneous and difficult to conceptualize. Culture jamming can be separately and/or simultaneously concerned with claims either instrumental or expressive. For example, some actions target the perceived injustices perpetrated by concrete actors, as in anti-sweatshop campaigns and the Yes Men’s attack on Dow Chemical, or, like many movements that came to life post-1968, they may be concerned with the politicization of the individual subject. The authentic and/or the individual with its affective and expressive needs and dimensions are, under the weight of the object of claims, manipulated and/or in-authenticated. Lasn, for example, is particularly concerned with this dimension of domination, for, as he explains, “Culture jamming is, at root, just a metaphor for stopping the flow of the spectacle long enough to adjust your set” (1999, 107). Other notable claims include withdrawal from the dominant power relationships, typically by liberating space and/or creating alternative community and media, and pedagogical efforts that seek to expose power to others.

Tilly recently developed a typology of claims: identity, standing, and program. *Identity* claims “assert the presence of a substantial collective actor”; *standing* claims “say that we Xs not only exist, but occupy a certain position within the regime”; and *program* claims “call for their objects to take an action, adopt a policy, or otherwise commit themselves to a change” (2006, 32). The claim-making of culture jamming sits uneasily into this typology. I have already discussed program claims. Identity for culture jammers is not simply an act of assertion; it is also an act of sabotage, subversion, art, or parody: strategic, aesthetic, and/or emotive (see Polletta and Jaspers 2001). As the culture jamming Mattes (2007) brothers suggest, “The most radical action you can do is to subvert yourself.”<sup>6</sup> Standing claims for culture jammers are in many cases not proclamations of position within regimes, but assertions of temporary distance or autonomy from regimes or other perceived foes.

Like many new social movements, culture jammers are consciously organized to provide a looser, more participatory, anarchic alternative to the hierarchies of the economic and political world. Throughout this paper, I use the term *(dis)organization* to describe the ‘organizational structure’ of culture jamming as a totality of activist relations and actions, or the social movement industry, as resource mobilization theory would have it. (Dis)organization refers to the characteristic anti-hierarchization, anti-bureaucratization, participatory hyper-democratic decision and action models, small group memberships, individual initiatives, diffuse communications and networks, and spontaneity of culture jamming. Culture jamming [dis]organization resembles what Gerlach and Hine (1970) describe as a “decentralized,

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<sup>6</sup> See Allen (2003) for a discussion of the post-identity politics of what he calls viral activism. See Autonomie A.F.R.I.K.A. (1997) for a theoretical work on multiple-use names. As Hans Bernhard of Ubermorgen states, “During project-phases we play different roles and use a series of aliases, sometimes we even swap aliases with other entities... With such identity changes, we position ourselves as doctors, businesspeople, retired military personnel or teenagers” (Ubermorgen 2006).

segmented, and reticulated” model of organization.<sup>7</sup> It also exhibits frequent meso-mobilization (Gerhards and Rucht 1992; Tarrow 1998, 135).<sup>8</sup> Culture jammers are typically small units of artists. Artist collectives like the Critical Art Ensemble, the Cacophony Society, Guerrilla Girls, to name a few, are self-described cultural activists.

The construction of the mutable nature of consumer culture and corporate power explicitly entails that what is revolutionary, critical, and/or authentic today, i.e. often explicitly non-economic or non-commercial, is rendered potentially harmless or extinguished in the banality of the commodity tomorrow. In the jargon of the Situationists, *détournement* is under unceasing pressure from the ability of the spectacle or economy to recuperate the detoured object. *Recuperation*, the counterpoint to *détournement*, is the process whereby the spectacle “take[s] up and use[s] [the vocabulary of revolutionary discourse] to support the existing networks of power” (Plant 1992, 76).<sup>9</sup> Naomi Klein, before proceeding through a significant list of corporate recuperations, proclaims that “culture jamming...has great sales potential” (2000, 297). Recuperations throughout the twentieth century are abundant: Dada, the commodification of ‘revolution,’ punk rock, hip-hop, and even forms of culture jamming itself. Generically, this model of *détournement* and recuperation mirrors McAdam’s dynamic model of tactical

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<sup>7</sup> “By decentralization, Gerlach and Hine meant the lack of a single leadership and the absence of a card-carrying membership. By segmentation, they meant the movement ‘is composed of a great variety of localized groups or cells which are essentially independent, but which can combine to form larger configurations or divide to form smaller units.’ And by reticulation, they referred to a weblike connective structure ‘in which the cells, or nodes, are tied together, not through any central point, but rather through intersecting sets of personal relationships and other intergroup linkages’” (Tarrow 1998, 129).

<sup>8</sup> The examples are legion. The groups My Dads Strip Club, the Vacuum Cleaner, and Reverend Billy and the Church of Stop Shopping, to name a few, often engage in joint action and share resources and members. The Billboard Liberation Front’s Milton Rand Kalman in a radio interview describes the exchange of resources between his group and the culture jamming group California Department of Corrections (Kalman 2006). @TMARK is unusual in that it funds culture jamming projects, including such venerated acts as Voteauction, Reamweaver, gatt.org, FloodNet, and the Barbie/G.I. Joe shopdrop.

<sup>9</sup> For a fuller discussion of *recuperation*, *détournement*, and their dynamic significance to the Situationists and other groups see Plant (1992).

interaction (1983). Culture jamming is active in this constructed zone of contention, continually under the strategic imperative of innovation in order to remain a viable form of resistance.

®<sup>TM</sup>ARK's account of power helps to incorporate the radical creativity of corporations into our understanding of culture jamming. Without the ubiquity of creativity, aestheticism, and the ability to mutate and adapt associated with corporations and advertising, a great vein of culture jamming innovation would evaporate. As one half of culture jamming duo Ubermorgen, lizvix, explains, their prominent action *Google Will Eat Itself (GWEI)* is a product of its time, a unique result of a unique concatenation of phenomena, in particular the growth of Google as a corporate search engine and its innovative advertising techniques (GWEI 2006). The economic imperative for corporations to remain viable competitors in the market today requires a degree of creativity and innovation parallel to that espoused by culture jammers. Culture jamming is essentially the counter-innovative use of, to use the Situationist term, "spectacular" innovation. Other facets of postmodernism, late capitalism, or whatever concept one may use to attempt to capture the complexity of contemporary Western societies, such as the omnipotence of the public sector, and the incredible surge in technological innovation, especially media, also contribute to the proliferation of targets of protest, the nature of claims, and the possibilities for tactical innovations. All of these factors increasingly penetrate the everyday lives of individuals and groups, thereby generating the possibilities for constructing grievances.

## CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 CONTENTIOUS POLITICS

The study of social movements and contentious politics in general progressed substantially over the final quarter of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first. This progress comes on the heels of theoretical plurality. Highly variable approaches have nearly always characterized the field, yet I suggest that several trends of theoretical development and rupture emerge discernible with necessary but hopefully minimal violence to the heterogeneity of scholarship. I seek to review briefly these trends and their contributions. Most importantly, I situate my study of innovation in culture jamming within the broader context of contentious politics research.

The study of contention initially was dominated by several variations on what I term here structural strain or anomic theories (Kornhauser 1959; Gurr 1970; Smelser 1963; Turner and Killian 1987). Following McAdam (1999), who posits that every theory of collective action presupposes a broader theory of society and power, these heterogeneous approaches generally assume a pluralist model of the distribution of power. In this model, resources and access to the system are widely distributed; there are no threatening concentrations of power and political leaders are responsive. Because the model assumes simple rational action on the part of individuals and groups, action outside of the system, such as a social movement, is, by implication, characterized by irrationality: anger, confusion, depression, anxiety, etc. Nearly all of these theories argue for a strict relationship between structural change and protest; collective grievances or psychological distortions are generated when objective social conditions change and collective beliefs, values, and habits are no longer consonant with these objective structures.

Although it concerns itself with important questions about grievances and structural change, these theories generally see social movements as irrational reactive psychological phenomena.

Beginning in the 1970's, this classical model came under concerted attack. Mancur Olson's (1965) work on collective action provided a strong corrective to the motivational assumptions of that model; under the influence of economic models of action, Olson conceived of actors as individual self-interested rational utility maximizers. From this collective action perspective (Chong 1991; Hardin 1982; Lichbach 1995), the problem of collective action arises in the pursuit of 'public goods'--goods that benefit even those uninvolved in their acquisition. Rational actors have little to no incentive to participate in acquisition, as they function under the assumption that others will work for them, the so-called 'free-rider' problem. Despite the cogency of his argument, collective action theory has been subject to criticisms regarding its strictly utilitarian presuppositions and its lack of both a theory of preference origins and more generally the larger social and cultural context of contention.

Frustrated by the lack of empirical evidence supporting structural strain models and its psychological emphasis, scholars began work under a broad research agenda with two variants: resource mobilization and political process models. On the heels of Olson's breakthrough, these new approaches took differing degrees of liberty with Olson's approach, the former concerned with organizational dynamics and entrepreneurial initiative, while the latter eschews Olsonian individualism altogether and instead assumes collective rationality. Resource mobilization theory (Davis et al 2005; Gamson 1990; Oberschall 1973; Zald and McCarthy 1973; 1987a) presupposes an elitist model of power, whereby elites control large resource pools and the masses, typically the challengers, possess few resources. Grievances are assumed sufficiently constant across social groups to warrant collective action. However, groups must first organize

and obtain resources in the context of other groups vying for resources, the conditions conducive to which are the primary concern for analysis. Society provides the infrastructure through which actors acquire and utilize resources. The totality of actors in society, whether they are challengers, authorities, or sympathetic or unsympathetic third parties, contributes to the trajectory of movements through repression, facilitation, and indifference. Mobilizing for goal attainment on the part of groups generally requires the aid of elites; therefore, leadership, organization, and entrepreneurship became significant topics of concern. Resource mobilizations concern for strategic rationality, the wider society and its resources, and the importance of organization have proven to be durable emphases.

At times conflated with resource mobilization, with which it shares a number of concerns, in particular rational assumptions, the importance of indigenous organization, and resources, political process models of contention (Jenkins and Perrow 1977; McAdam 1999; Tarrow 1998; Tilly 1978; Tilly, Tilly, and Tilly 1975) are distinct on a number of counts. Unlike resource mobilization, political process models generally employ variations on Marxist models of power distribution. In these models, the unequal though subtle distribution of power is determined by the location of groups in the system; factories cannot function without labor or capital, for example. Relations are characterized by unequal but mutual dependence; elites retain large resource pools as in elitist theory, but challengers can utilize the leverage inherent in their position. In addition, the political process approach emphasizes three general factors that determine conditions conducive to social movement activity: (1) the political opportunity structure, or the changing constraints of the political environment like party alignment and repression, (2) the strength of pre-contention organization in the aggrieved population, known as mobilizing structures, and (3) cultural framings, the strategic use of meaning. Generally, the



emphasis on ‘political’ movements means process scholars emphasize the state as the target of contention. Currently the dominant North American approach to contentious politics, it is nevertheless susceptible to criticism, in particular regarding its inattention to movements not specifically oriented towards the state, the lack of clarity regarding what a political opportunity structure is and how important it is in the development of collective action, and its de-emphasis of culture and meaning.

In critical contention with resource mobilization, political process, and dominant continental Marxist works on social movements, several European scholars in the new social movements (NSM) tradition drew attention to the question of grievances and motivations within a wider examination of change and domination in society (Habermas 1981; Melucci 1989; 1996; Offe 1985; Tourraine 1981). NSM theorists view the development of capitalism in the second half of the twentieth century as generative of new structural conditions and forms of grievances, domination, and identities, which in turn led to the mobilization of new social movements like the peace, nuclear freeze, and environmental movements and the development of new tactical repertoires. Against the political reductionism of political process models, which in its zeal to supersede structural strain theory regards movements that seek ‘political’ or policy goals to be the only area of serious concern, NSM theory views culture, meaning, and identity as sources of conflict in themselves.

Models of the distribution of power in society that run counter to Marxist, pluralist, and elitist conceptions common in the contentious politics literature undergird a number of NSM analyses. Derived from scholars like Foucault, Bourdieu, Deleuze, de Certeau, and many others, these models posit that power is diffuse, de-localized, viral, or poly-centric, practiced in social relationships, discourses, and organized by diverse institutions like the family, corporations,

church, the state, media, prison, the clinic, or any number of others. In light of some of the criticisms of NSM approaches, such as their de-emphasis of politics, emerging approaches, though highly diverse, have begun to aggregate around a number of features, typically in opposition to the political process model (Armstrong and Bernstein 2008; Crossley 2002a; Gamson 1989; Jasper 1997). These approaches generally insist on the cultural character of structure, utilize robust models of agency that situate rational strategic action within contexts of ideology, culture, meaning, and identity, and insist on broader definitions of politics and resistance.

All of the approaches presented contribute to the study of social movements. For this paper, as in the field in general, some have been more useful than others have, so I will briefly enumerate some of my broader appropriations and departures. Though Olson's (1965) work on collective action is a powerful critique of the assumptions regarding individual interests in contention, by his own scope conditions his analysis is inapplicable to the present study of culture jamming; culture jammers act in very small groups, which do not typically suffer from the effects of the free-rider problem.<sup>10</sup> In addition, the low costs and pleasure characteristic of culture jamming annuls the utility of analyses like Lichbach (1995). As he states, "The CA model is...less effective at explaining participation in situations of negligible costs than in high cost situations" (ibid., 39; 1996, ch. 7). Furthermore, the parsimonious economy of the rational choice model may be useful in more structured contexts, but its rigor may prove a liability in the study of conditions of radical uncertainty such as are found in social movements and other contentious phenomena. This critique is easily leveled at the appropriation of strategic rationality models by resource mobilization and political process theorists (Ganz 2004, 192-193).

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<sup>10</sup> Olson's theory does not refer to the organization but the constituency, or group in his language, of the potential organization. It is difficult to determine the constituency of culture jamming organizations in any meaningful sense of the term.

Finally, as the section on culture jamming claims argues above, the concept of public goods only partially captures culture jamming claims. The conception of strategic rationality employed in this paper draws primarily from Bourdieu. It diverges significantly from the game theoretic assumptions common in the resource mobilization and political process models by situating it within conditionally derived cognitive structures, dissolving the rational/irrational dichotomy by incorporating so-called non-cognitive or non-rational processes like emotions, and situating agents within relatively autonomous social contexts with their own rules, norms, and sanctions.

Because culture jamming claims are not ‘political’ in the sense of targeting governmental institutions or policies or creating major disruptions, though with exceptions, the political process models concern with the political opportunity structure is minimally helpful in explaining culture jamming. At the most, it highlights the significance of factors such as the presence of civil liberties, partisan and public support for neo-liberal policies, and the overwhelming repressive capacities of the contemporary Western state. Although these are certainly important for establishing the general structural conditions for the emergence and nature of symbolic protest, which I review below, culture jamming contention, when it is not described as framing,<sup>11</sup> remains beyond the scope conditions of most political process models. The resource mobilization approach, though its sense of contention is broader than political process models, offers little here; culture jamming requires minimal resources and organization.

From some of the NSM and more recent approaches, I draw broad definitions of politics, power, and resistance. Like Gamson (1989), whose work on the AIDS activist group ACT UP necessitated the incorporation of Michel Foucault and his work on the microphysics of power and normalization, and following other theorists like Bourdieu and Melucci, I view power as

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<sup>11</sup> See Steinberg (1995; 1998; 1999a; 1999b) for an explanation of why the framing perspective is not appropriate for analyzing social movement discourse, or discursive conflict, as culture jamming can be largely understood.

diffuse and poly-centric, viral and fractal. Hence, it follows that the object of claims may be governmental as well as institutional, systemic, discursive, or abstract, for example, capitalism, patriarchy, consumerism, and statism. This is consistent with the rhetoric and practice of culture jamming described above and similar forms of protest like British DIY and the group ACT UP.

Following recent approaches that take seriously culture, I argue that the socially and culturally derived perceptual competencies of particular actors are a key determinant in the generation and attribution of grievances, strategies, and action. The relationship between claimants and objects of claims in culture jamming, for example, is not an *a priori*, but one constructed by culture jammers. The interpretation of this relationship, of the actors in contention, necessarily produces or suggests problematics, choices, motivations, and categorizes enemies and friends. As James Jasper states, “we have *created* villains” (emphasis added, 1997, 10). In addition, I situate the development of culture jamming in a broader context of social change that, like many NSM theorists, suggests a general shift in the developed world towards more expressive, non-violent, individualistic modes of contention, though not to the extinction of more ‘political,’ instrumental, or professional modes of contention.

The collective action, resource mobilization, and political process traditions have greatly contributed to the study of the tactics and organizational forms of activists. Tilly’s concept of a repertoire of contention, which I review below, is a powerful metaphor for the structural constraints on methods of protest. Likewise, recent work on the new social movements and emerging paradigms has contributed to a more robust understanding of agency. In particular, the significance of identity for tactical choice found in this literature greatly informs my own efforts here. As this paper is concerned with the tactical innovation of culture jamming, I review the literature on the repertoire of contention and tactical innovation below.

## 2.2 REPERTOIRES OF CONTENTION

Charles Tilly's concept of a repertoire of contention has drawn increasing attention as a useful device for analyzing and organizing conceptually the diversity in forms of contentious behavior.<sup>12</sup> Since its initial elaboration in a 1977 article, the focus of most conceptualizations has been the totality of available forms of contention in a given society at a given time, recently described as "the ways that people act together in pursuit of shared interests" (Tilly 1995b, 41) and "ensembles of mutual claim-making routines available to particular pairs of identities" (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001, 138). These definitions and others stress the limitedness of available forms, the multiplicity of actors, the relational aspect of contention, and the importance of expressed grievances or claims. The more general features of repertoires are their cultural and structural nature; they are conceived as cultural creations with structural constraints, for "at any particular point in history... [people] learn only a rather small number of alternative ways to act collectively" (Tilly 1995a, 26). Repertoires are composed of familiar, comfortable, feasible, and efficacious means of contention, means at once constrained but performed.

Broadly speaking, repertoires reflect the nature of the regime they are performed in (Tilly 2006). More specifically, at any given time in a population, protest is circumscribed within mundane, spatial, normative, historical, agonistic, and cognitive constraints (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001; Tarrow 1998; Tilly 1978; 1986; 1995a; 1995b; 2006). Contention is often embedded within the mundane rhythms and physical contours of everyday existence (cf. Auyero 2003; Piven and Cloward 1979: 18; Roy 1994). Daily routines, habits, spatial environments, and social cleavages constitute the rhythms and internal organization of everyday life as in, for

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<sup>12</sup>See Auyero 2004; Beissinger 1998; Biggs 2003; Buzzel 2006; Chabot 2001; Chabot and Duyvendak 2002; Crossley 2002b; Ennis 1987; Hayes 2006; Johnston and Mueller 2001; McCammon 2003; Mueller 1999; Munro 2005; O'Brien and Lianjiang 2006; Plows, Wall, and Doherty 2004; Rucht 1990; Szabó 1996; Tarrow 1998; Taylor 1998; Traugott 1995b.

example, occupational roles and the geography of work, home, and leisure. Although political process theorists like Tilly are reluctant to grant cultural norms causal significance, it seems clear that the general normative order is itself a constriction of action. A society's sense of what is right or appropriate, pertaining to violence, obscenity, familial or other norms can contribute to the governance of contentious behavior. The accumulated experience of prior collective action contained in speech, personal biography, texts, and customs provides tested models for possible action in the present and future. Two prominent examples include France's history of revolutions and the non-violence of the American civil rights movement. The prevailing patterns of repression in a society, typically practiced by the state but by no means exclusively, contribute to the feasibility of certain actions. Rucht (1990), for example, argues that non-violent expressive tactical repertoires are more common today because the state apparatus of Western democracy is overwhelmingly effective at suppressing violence. All of these factors contribute to the structuring of the choices available to actors in contention. General change in the repertoire is a result of change in these factors. Changes in these constraints are a result of broader processes like state-building and the development of capitalism.

The theatrical metaphor is instructive in attempting to reconcile structure and agency. McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly refer to "adopting scripts" in their discussion of repertoires, "ritual," and the limits to feasibility and intelligibility (2001, 138, 49). The analogy serves to illustrate the "learned character of the performance and the limits of that learning, yet allows for variation and even continuous change from one performance to the next...[It] typically leaves plenty of room for improvisation, innovation, and unexpected endings" (Tilly 1986, 307). Themes like drama, symbolism, innovation, bargaining, deliberation, and learning are common throughout work on the repertoire. An implicit assumption of moral economy informs much of this work.

Cognitive skills and shared understandings acquired within the constraints of the repertoire are essential for actors to act and make sense of their action and the action of others.

One noteworthy distinction in the literature can be found in Marc Steinberg's work on discursive repertoires (1995; 1998; 1999a; 1999b). Like James Scott's (1985; 1990) research on hidden transcripts, his work clearly identifies a great deal of symbolic, linguistic, and semiotic contestation as fundamentally contentious. For Steinberg, discursive repertoires are repertoires of discourse in which actors contest hegemonic and counter-hegemonic values, ideals, and symbols through speech or other acts of discourse. These repertoires of contentious discourse reinforce instrumental repertoires, or repertoires of contentious action. They are also relational in that actors construct them in dialogue. Steinberg's contribution stems from his reappraisal of frame theory. For frame theorists, he argues, "language has an implied, self-evident fixity" (1998, 850). He suggests viewing discourse as a resource is flawed, for it is interactive and unstable, and it instead should be viewed as a "terrain of conflict," a statement that resonates with the rhetoric of culture jamming (*ibid.*, 853). Like Tilly's conception of change in the repertoire, Steinberg views change in discursive repertoires as glacial and at the edge of established linguistic forms (1999a, 747). This concern with reportorial change, with tactical innovation, I take up below.

## **2.3 TACTICAL INNOVATION**

### **2.3.1 Innovation and Diffusion**

The question of innovation within the repertoire of contention, of what leads to the creation of new, novel, or unfamiliar tactics within the constraints of rituals, routines, and scripts, has garnered relatively little attention. The issue is complicated by the distinction between tactical innovation and tactical diffusion. I hope to address decisively this difficulty before

proceeding, as it may help to clarify the relationships between differing theories that seek to account for tactical innovation. McAdam et al define innovative contention as “action that incorporates claims, selects objects of claims, includes collective self-representations, and/or adopts means that are either unprecedented or forbidden within the regime in question” (2001, 49). I find this definition generally acceptable if one excludes the stipulation of “forbidden” means. Again, the criterion makes sense if one takes into account the generality of the repertoire, which consists of informally institutionalized tactics. Riots, drive-by shootings, and other urban gang tactics of contention are just some examples of actions that would not today constitute innovative tactics, but which are clearly forbidden by democratic regimes in question. The criterion of “unprecedented” or novel I argue satisfactorily captures the newness of the term innovation. In contrast to this definition, McAdam (1999) explicitly notes in his study of the civil rights movement that many innovations were not so novel. Instead, tactical innovation seems to emerge when numerous insurgent groups suddenly adopt a particular tactic--a question of tactical diffusion (ibid., 738.n.6). This confusion is clearly an artifact of the concept of the general repertoire and its characteristic institutional nature; tactics only enter the repertoire, and hence are new, when they become diffuse and ritualized in their practice.

The problem of empirics may also lie behind the tendency to conflate the two. The term innovation connotes newness and creation, whereas diffusion points to a process of adoption. Innovation and diffusion, then, appear to be fundamentally distinct phenomena. Yet, as Tilly’s concept of the repertoire suggests, many groups improvise on the edges of familiar forms of contention. Numerous groups may use the same tactic but with numerous variations, eventually leading to a new tactic. Consequently, precision in the study of the genesis of a tactical



innovation is a demanding if not overbearing task. Diffusion, on the other hand, is a less demanding empirical phenomenon for the tools at our disposal.

Yet what the concept of the repertoire suggests is that the distinction between innovation and diffusion may not be insoluble. If diffusion is the act of adoption, and innovation the act of creation, for Tilly adoption can introduce newness to a tactic by changing its immediate context of creation. Actors improvise a de-contextualized tactic within its new context. The degree of improvisation, I suggest, would be roughly proportional to the difference in contexts, hence a tactic radically de-contextualized, torn from its original context of cognitive skills, emotional and moral resonance, familiarity, physical terrain, and strategic utility, would be more likely to result in a tactical innovation, because the actors employing such means improvise more dramatically to fit the new context. Hayes (2007) describes a similar mechanism of re-contextualization, which he calls *domestication*, in the diffusion and innovation of tactics in the French environmental movement. Ganz argues that the strategic capacity of actors in part depends on the ability to “imaginatively recontextualize data or synthesize them in new ways” using heuristic methods (2004: 186). This data includes the known algorithms that constitute the repertoire of contention. All of this, of course, stands on the assumption that a tactic is embedded in context, which is less the case the more a tactic exhibits modularity.<sup>13</sup> Modular tactics are easier to re-contextualize. With the exception of *hyper-modular* tactics,<sup>14</sup> the distinction between innovation and diffusion seems less fundamental with Tilly’s insight.

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<sup>13</sup> Tilly makes the logical conclusion that the repertoire that began to develop in the early to mid-nineteenth century, which is modular, autonomous, and cosmopolitan as opposed to the prior repertoire’s parochial, bifurcated, particular character, entails “significantly sharper breaks...from the locales and routines of everyday life” (1995b, 364).

<sup>14</sup> Rolfe (2005), for example, notes that some “innovative hothouses” intentionally create tactics in order to ensure their rapid diffusion. One example he uses is FloodNet, a piece of software that facilitates ‘virtual sit-ins.’ I contend that such tactics exhibit *hyper-modularity*.

Yet, if the distinction is now more subtle, it remains intuitively powerful. Creation, strictly speaking, is *not* adoption. Tactical innovations as described above in the process of diffusion and re-contextualization fit neatly what I discuss below, the marginal theory of innovation. The theory presented in this work, the biographical theory of innovation, departs from the microstructures of the marginal theory of innovation. I discuss these theories and others below. Suffice it to say, this work treats tactical innovation as an analytically distinct phenomenon from tactical diffusion.

### **2.3.2 Theories of Tactical Innovation**

There are four discernible theories of tactical innovation in the literature: marginal, anomic, strategic, and biographical. The marginal theory of innovation claims simply that within “inherited forms of collective action, there is incremental innovation and spontaneity” (Tarrow 1998, 102). Tilly describes marginal innovation as “within limits, [where] contenders experiment constantly with new forms in search for tactical advantage, *but do so in small ways, at the edge of well-established actions*” (emphasis added, 2006, 43). Marginal innovation is implied in the concept of the repertoire of contention. Large-scale economic and political processes structure everyday life, norms, repression, and the history of contention, which then structures protest behavior. Like the evolution of macro-processes, innovation is glacial, gradual, and incremental. Concepts like ritual, feasibility, script, and others express the strong structural bias of marginal innovation.

However, agency is not forsaken. On the micro-level, protests, which are naturally improvisatory and dramatic, can be innovative; actors “enliven a conventional form of collective action by adding elements of play and carnival or ferocity and menace to its basic form. But over the long run, innovations can crystallize into wholly new forms” (Tarrow 1998, 102). At

the margins of familiarity, routines are stretched, a product of “creativity, innovation, drama, and symbolism” within the constraints of the repertoire (Tilly 1978, 171; 1995b, 381). Actors possess a minimum level of “knowledge, memory, and social connections” for engagement in social, cultural, and physical relations, meanings, and actions that cluster in patterns of contentious behavior (Tilly 1995b, 43; 1995a, 27). Choice, innovation, and action are dependent on existent social webs and mutual understandings. Innovation is deliberate and bargaining important in the development of new forms of contention (ibid.). Of great importance is the acquisition of the cognitive skills required for learning to behave contentiously. Tactics must be intelligible for both the actor, the object of claims, and other publics. I discussed above the process whereby a tactic is re-contextualized and thereby incrementally altered. This relation between diffusion and innovation is characteristic of the marginal theory of innovation. However, marginal innovation does not equate tactical innovation with diffusion, for only institutionalized and generally practiced tactics are ‘innovations’ in the general repertoire. Although it does provide an agentic component, it lacks any clear or satisfactory conception of the strategic, emotive, or cultural micro-dynamics of tactical innovation.

Marginal innovation is characterized by a long temporal horizon. In contrast, Aristide Zolberg’s theory of “moments of madness” lives for the moment. This theory, which I term the anomic theory of innovation, claims that during periods of political turbulence, what Tarrow describes as “cycles of protest,” innovation kicks in at a rapid pace (1995; 1998, 145).<sup>15</sup> The temporal horizon is short; tactical innovations can be here today and gone tomorrow, yet they cluster in periods of crisis. The essence of the anomic theory of innovation captures the effects of crisis on many of the structural constraints described in the concept of the repertoire: everyday

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<sup>15</sup> Zolberg’s (1971, 184) original piece implies that the French experience of cycles of protest is perhaps unique, a point Tarrow later ignores.

life is continually disrupted and routines and rhythms are abrogated, distributions of power are in flux, patterns of repression are unpredictable, new moralities are created or adopted and practiced, to name a few. In the uncertainty and festivities of revolution or some other dramatic cycle of protest, such rapid shifts in structure can lead to dramatic innovation in the practice of protest.

Like the marginal theory of innovation, it too has its shortcomings. The anomic theory of innovation conjures scenes of exuberant joy and creative unhinging. However, its under-theorization of this creative joy, of emotion or agency, is a severe handicap for a theory that purports to explain innovation when structure bends or collapses. In addition, repertoire evolution in the long term remains glacial (Tarrow 1998, 31). Regardless of the origins, most tactical innovations are relegated to irrelevance. Only a select few tactics experience repetitive and diffuse use, what Tilly calls “durable innovations,” a process determined by the political advantage the tactic provides its wielders, which I address below (1995a, 28). Tarrow suggests that, although innovative tactics erupt in conflagrations like the French Revolution, “Their foundations were developed in the interstices of the day-to-day practice of contention” (1998, 41). Hence, for Tarrow the marginal theory of innovation encompasses the insights of the anomic theory of innovation.

### **2.3.3 Strategic Theory of Innovation**

The primary explanation for tactical innovation and protest behavior in general in the contentious politics literature derives from rational choice theory and its application to the collective action dilemma. Agents of contention, whether organizations in the resource mobilization tradition or dissident entrepreneurs in the collective action tradition, seek to achieve strategic goals through rational means; the game is one of political rivalry, a competition for

political advantage. The theory builds on dynamic models of tactical interaction in which an instrumental calculus and strategic goals determine the nature and course of tactical innovation. The model of interaction ranges from relatively simplistic dyadic games between “challengers” and “antagonists” (Gamson 1990) to more complex multi-player competitions (Klandermanns 1992; Taylor 1998). Since repertoires are interactive, both McAdam (1999) and Tarrow (1998, 102) propose the term *tactical interaction* as a dynamic of *tactical innovation* and *tactical adaptation*. As McAdam suggests in his study of the tactical dynamics of the civil rights movement, tactical interaction is essential to social movement longevity, leverage sustainability, and efficacy. Groups enter the polity and subscribe to institutional power or they experiment. This latter approach, *tactical innovation*, is simply the “creativity of insurgents in devising new tactical forms” (1999, 736). The imperative of the object(s) of claims in this situation is to “neutralize these moves through effective tactical counters,” what McAdam terms *tactical adaptation* (ibid.). Zald and Useem (1987, 259) argue that insurgents are not the only innovators in conflict; countermovements and authorities can generate new tactical forms that are not necessarily responses to specific tactics. In addition, the resource mobilization tradition points to the significance of scarce resources; social movements organizations (SMOs) competing for symbolic leadership over a movement, one of the major strategic goals of SMOs according to this tradition, will innovate in order to differentiate themselves from other SMOs competing for the same resources (Zald and McCarthy 1987b).

The latter point regarding resources highlights the significance of structural conditions for the strategic theory of innovation. In *From Mobilization to Revolution*, Tilly describes the hypothetical sheer-efficiency repertoire, in which the utility of a tactic is the only consideration actors put into its creation and use (1978, 155). In contrast to this overly rationalistic account,

Tilly viewed his conception of the repertoire as flexible, for a heavy structural bias constrains actors' calculations. However, utility of action is not absent in Tilly's notion of the repertoire. He explains, "Actors should display a preference for familiar forms that to some degree override questions of efficiency" (1979, 132). Much like the anomic theory of innovation, the strategic theory of innovation is easily subsumed under the marginal theory of innovation. For Tilly, "association with the gain/loss of political advantage by one actor or another strongly affects innovations survival and disappearance, although changes in the conditions of everyday existence and in actors internal organizations as a consequence of the struggle also affect the variability of different performances" (2006, 45). Elsewhere, he notes the roles of political success, broadcasting, and rallying in reportorial change (1995b, 381).

The strategic theory of innovation provides a useful dynamic, agentic, and relational approach to understanding tactical innovation. It draws attention to the importance of a strategic calculus in the actions of claimants and objects of claims. The theory also can account for new tactics that fail and fall into disuse. Recently, however, the strategic and rational conception of innovation has been challenged for its mechanistic conception. Sarah Soule (1999) argues that the success of some innovations, in the sense of diffusion, is not deterministically dependent on their ability to evade neutralization (or impotence) and, I would add, their contribution to attaining general strategic goals. Following Everett Rogers, she suggests the significance of deep resonance or "compatibility," the "degree to which an innovation is perceived as consistent with the existing values, past experiences, and needs of potential adopters" (Rogers 1995, 15; Soule 1999, 124). Soule's claim here is reminiscent of Tilly's understanding of the importance of norms and values. Tilly notes the significance of a "special appeal" some tactics may hold for protesters beyond their efficacy (1978, 158). Jasper describes the importance of inertia in

tactical choice and the conflict between the strategic and cultural dimensions of tactical tastes (1997, 239, 249). Together, these critiques and caveats point to the significance of the cultural, social, and historical, while not entirely dismissing the strategic capacities of claimants.

In an earlier work, Tilly developed an explicitly agentic component to the repertoire by distinguishing between a strong and weak use of the repertoire metaphor, wherein the strong version encompassed “deliberate innovation,” though still of a marginal creativity (1995a, 27). This notion of deliberation is not strictly rational; it emphasizes agency, creativity, improvisation, and other individual attributes. Below, and in step with Tilly’s strong repertoire of contention, I discuss a fuller sense of agency with the biographical theory of innovation.

## CHAPTER 3. THEORETICAL DEVELOPMENT

### 3.1 BIOGRAPHICAL THEORY OF TACTICAL INNOVATION

By virtue of its structural character, the repertoire of contention is primarily an account of what tactics are available to activists. Prior to the ascendance of Olson's model, structural strain or anomic theories of social movements generally posited that agents tended to choose and innovate tactics in accordance with their predispositions, which included their emotional states and ideology. For collective action, political process, and resource mobilization scholars, the question of tactical innovation within the repertoire is addressed by what I call the strategic theory of tactical innovation. Although caveats in this literature point to the residual or intrinsic value of tactics (Tilly 1978, 158; Lichbach 1995, 53), the majority of analytic attention afforded to the problem remains structural and reliant on agentic models of instrumental rationality. Although this model can be useful for studying movements or actions that are primarily political and instrumental, its utility has come under attack (cf. Ferree 1992). Regarding this thesis in particular, it appears less than helpful in explaining a diverse range of contentious phenomena from emotive work to the intrinsic pleasure of culture jamming. This paper hopes to contribute to the discussion on tactical choice and innovation by employing a more robust conception of agency.

In *The Art of Moral Protest* (1997), James Jasper addresses the question of tactical choice by positing what I call a biographical theory. It begins with the premise that "tactics are never neutral means to an end, but in part reflect an independent preference," the dispositions of activists (ibid., 248). The assumption behind this theory is that tactics are never unambiguous choices; when directed toward an end, such as changing public policy or halting the construction of a mall, activists have a degree of choice in their means, as the repertoire suggests, and no



particular choice is obvious. Determining which tactic to use among these choices is to a variable degree a consequence of an actor's individual and/or collective life history and their systems of preferences and values. Actors are possessed of cognitive, moral, and emotional dimensions that inform every action, including the seemingly instrumental. The activity of protest and resistance expresses "protester's political identities and moral visions," world-views and ideologies, romanticism or realism, and anger or joy (Jasper 1997, 237). Groups or individuals can be disposed towards highly instrumental strategies, while the morality or the environment they were raised in may decisively influence others. These life trajectories, identities, dispositions, and values are, as Crossley (2002b) notes, the embodiment of the established rhythms of everyday life from which the repertoire of contention draws its content.

Identity or disposition, the present biographical fulcrum of experience, serves as a determinant and consequence of contention. To be more precise, tactics are chosen to conform to an individual or group's identity *and* protest is partially constitutive of identity, of particular patterns of expression, calculation, and moral judgment congealed in the body of the individual (ibid., 238). The work of Georges Sorel (1999) and Franz Fanon (2004), for example, suggests a link between violence, identity, and self-actualization. Melucci (1996) notes the significance of expressing and creating identity in new social movements. Nepstad (2005) and Doherty (1999a; 1999b) stress the importance of values in determining the choices and innovations of protesters. Protest in its particularity, whether individual or collective, is an emanation of the habitual schemes of perception, appreciation, and action actors possess and the cultural and social context from which they derive. Hence, protest as a social context itself is generative of dispositions, and hence constitutive of a radical habitus, a disposition towards activism structured by past

activism (Crossley 2003; 2006b).<sup>16</sup> Crossley observes, “habit allows innovation to be conserved and built upon, while innovation, or at least action, provides the raw materials for habituation” (2001, 111). Hence, tactical choice or innovation is not simply an expression of a static disposition, but an active expression of dynamic dispositions and the incorporation of creative action. In Jasper’s words, activists *develop* and express a taste for particular tactics, whether they are legal, violent, radical, moral, etc. (1997, 237). Tactics possess intrinsic value distinct from their extrinsic instrumental value, a value that resonates with the dispositions of the protesters.

This paper asks how one can best explain culture jamming tactical innovation. Culture jamming, particularly the innovative hothouses discussed by Rolfe (2005), is characterized by a seemingly unpredictable, experimental, and diverse repertoire. Hence, the question arises as to why culture jammers differ in their tactical choices and innovations from the lobbying, voting, striking, rioting, and bribing of other actors. Following a theory that posits that tactical choices derive in part from the dispositions and identities of activists, their accumulated life histories and the structures that generated them, can help scholars to explain this phenomenon. It is my contention, among others (Crossley 2002b; Jasper 1997), that some of the insights of Bourdieu’s sociology prove to be valuable supplements to the biographical theory of innovation described above. Therefore, below I provide a review of his theory of practice.

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<sup>16</sup> I provide a more detailed account of Bourdieu’s theory of practice and its relevance to this study and a theory of tactical innovation below. In his language, already evident in this paragraph, the habitus incorporates the conditions of production and reproduces these conditions.

## 3.2 THE HABITUS AND REFLEXIVITY

### 3.2.1 Bourdieu's Theory of Practice

The biographical theory of innovation presented in this work draws significantly from the work of sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (cf. Crossley 2002b; Jasper 1997). Informed by his research in Algeria and France, Bourdieu attempts to conceive and explain the regularity and coherence of human action without relying on the dominant tropes of structural determinism or Sartrean voluntarism. Before proceeding, it seems helpful considering his contribution to introduce a number of concepts pertinent to his theory of practice. Of critical importance for this study are the concepts of the *field*, *capital*, and the *habitus*. A brief elaboration of each should contribute to a more satisfying and thorough account of the relation between dispositions and tactics as described in the biographical theory of tactical innovation.

Bourdieu conceives of individuals as, “active and knowing agents endowed with a practical sense” (1998, 25). Practical sense “is a quasi-bodily involvement in the world...an immanence in the world through which the world imposes its imminence, things to be done or said, which directly govern speech and action” (1990, 66). This sense:

which does not burden itself with rules or principles...still less with calculations or deductions, which are in any case excluded by the urgency of action ‘which brooks no delay,’ is what makes it possible to appreciate the meaning of the situation instantly, at a glance, in the heat of the action, and to produce at once the opportune response

is characteristic of the habitus (Bourdieu 1990, 103-4). It is what allows us to navigate the rhythms of everyday life. This instantaneous and non-calculative sense of the situation that precipitates proper action is decidedly pre-reflexive and non-intentional. Bourdieu finds the basis for the coherence and directedness of behavior in acquired dispositions, or habits. Action, then, is primarily structured; it is habitual and unconscious, yet it follows a logic that is contextual and situational, not universal and abstract. In addition, action is practical and

directional. Actors are always interested and strategic; “practices never cease to comply with an economic logic” in the pursuit of clear objectives (Bourdieu 1990, 123). As its object, action seeks the acquisition of capital, whether cultural, social, or economic, for the improvement of position within a social field or context.

Habitus are incorporated structures of perception, appreciation, and action. Through the temporal succession of practices, through action in the social world - what Bourdieu variously calls one's social trajectory or individual history - agents acquire dispositions. This process of acquisition is a practical incorporation of the conditions of the production of the habitus (ibid., 73). In other words, the habitus is the incorporated structure acquired through the practical navigation of objective structures. Objective structures, or social fields, constitute the social world; in turn, they structure dispositions. These dispositions are the structures of habit described above. The dispositions generated by the typically multiple social contexts occupied by the average individual (work, leisure, family) together constitute the habitus. Dispositions allow for the habitual ability to practically (unconsciously) perceive a situation and its distinct attributes, classify and render meaningful, or appreciate, each attribute and the situation in general, and act on the perception and appreciation of the situation in a manner that furthers our practical objectives. Objective conditions provide the raw material for the incorporation of these schemes of perception, appreciation, and action that animate practical sense. Such *structured structures*, products of histories and conditions, ensure, “the active presence of past experiences, which, deposited in each organism in the form of schemes of perception, thought, and action, tend to guarantee the ‘correctness’ of practices and their constancy over time” (ibid., 54).

These deposited practical infra-conscious schemes are generative as well. We can now begin to decipher what Bourdieu means when he describes the habitus as:

systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them (1990, 53).

In addition to a *structured structure*, Bourdieu posits that the habitus is a *structuring structure*, hence a *structured structuring structure*! While agents continually perform a process of acquisition, they simultaneously perform a process of reproduction. This process, practical and hence distinct from memory or knowledge, is the key to understanding the continuity of social relations and structures. Individual actions are in truth collective or relational efforts, perpetually and individually reconstructing or reactivating the objective structures that in turn generate the habitus individual and collective (ibid., 73). As Bourdieu elaborates:

This durably installed generative principle of regulated improvisations is a practical sense which reactivates the sense objectified in institutions. Produced by the work of inculcation and appropriation that is needed in order for objective structures, the products of collective history, to be reproduced in the form of the durable, adjustable dispositions that are the condition of their functioning, the habitus...imposing its particular logic on incorporation, and through which agents partake of the history objectified in institutions, is what makes it possible to inhabit institutions, to appropriate them practically, and so to keep them in activity...but at the same time imposing the revisions and transformations that reactivation entails (ibid., 57).

This engagement in circular causation risks the attendant dangers of determinism; structures generate action that generates structures that generate action *ad infinitum*. His description of the individual process of reactivation, however, highlights a degree of freedom and agency. Practice is explicitly indeterminate and improvisational (Crossley 2001, 114), a point brilliantly exploited by Michel de Certeau (1984). In other words, the strategic nature of practice and the infinitesimal variety of situations that practice navigates together point to the innovative capacity of the habitus. Still, Bourdieu's conception is disciplined, as he conceives of this capacity for 'freedom' as contained within the constraints of the conditions of production, or the social fields that generate the habitus (1990, 55).

From where do these structures of perception, appreciation, and action originate? The concept of fields presupposes the internal differentiation of a society. Modern industrial societies in particular are characterized by numerous relatively autonomous and highly distinct fields, or “social microcosms,” e.g. the literary, political, religious, etc (Bourdieu 1998, 83; Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 97). Fields are circumscribed experiential contexts that socialize agents into a particular content of rules, conduct, and preferences. The process to which fields subject agents is the habituation of dispositions, of schemes of perception, appreciation, and action meant to perceive and appreciate and make actionable the rules, sanctions, preferences, etc. specific to fields. Bourdieu uses two metaphors to capture the general concept of fields: games and markets. Like a game, fields are sites of struggle, with the caveat that even the rules themselves are ultimately stakes in the game. Like a market, fields are sites of the production and consumption of products (services, goods, knowledge, status) where agents struggle over profit. In this struggle, agents occupy positions. The concept of positions points to the relational core of Bourdieu’s theory of practice; positions in a field are constituted by their relationship to other positions. Actors occupy positions by virtue of the structure of the field, which is structured as such by the unequal distribution of capital (species of power). Therefore, the nature of the field, the distribution of capital valued by the field, and the positions of other actors in the field determine particular positions. In addition, fields are dynamic; positions are constantly in flux as actors employ strategies to acquire, employ, or conserve the capital relevant to the field, new actors emerge in the field, and other actors recede from the field, thereby redefining every position. Capital, then, is that resource, whether material (e.g. money) or symbolic (e.g. status), which is the object of interested strategic practical action. Hence, fields are sites of struggle

where actors strategically but pre-reflexively orient action in pursuit of capital in order to dominate the field.

Social fields structure the habitus through the particular nature of the field occupied by the agent (content of sanctions, norms, laws), its distribution of specific capital, and the position of the actor within the field. They require actors to acquire different competencies and resources (capital) specific to the field. These acquisitions come to sense within the context of the rules, laws, and sanctions unique to the field. Hence, each field operates according to its own internal logic. The artistic field, for example, operates according to the logic of its fundamental law, “art for art’s sake,” for which the acquisition of material or economic capital is anathema. The acquisition of field-specific attributes - the “internalization of an objectively selected system of signs, indices, and sanctions” - is the process of acquisition described above (Bourdieu 1993, 133). In turn, the incorporation of objective conditions, or the sedimentation of the practical navigation of particular situations, is both a weighted revision of relevant schemes and a practical and nuanced reproduction of objective structures. As Bourdieu states, “positions help to shape dispositions, but insofar as they are the product of independent conditions, dispositions have an existence and efficacy of their own and can help to shape positions” (ibid., 61).

### **3.2.2 Reflexivity, Crisis, and Choice**

Bourdieu’s concept of the *habitus* seeks to account for the coherent regularity of behavior without relying on the untenable distinction between determinism and voluntarism. However, it seems clear that Bourdieu’s theory appears to underestimate the degree to which agents or actors consciously make choices and reflect on the conditions of thought. As Crossley (2001) charges, it appears to lack the element of innovative praxis that generates habits. A number of scholars have attempted to reconcile the concept of the *habitus* with more agentic and reflexive accounts

of action (Adams 2006; Adkins 2002; 2003; Elder-Vass 2007; McNay 1999; Sweetman 2003). In the end, I believe Crossley (2001) provides the most potent corrective to Bourdieu's de-emphasis of conscious agency. Through a review of the implicit influence of phenomenologists like Edmund Husserl and Maurice Merleau-Ponty on the work of Bourdieu, he brings to the fore the necessary component of action that is innovative praxis. For example, Crossley, through Merleau-Ponty, argues that agents develop a habit of reflexivity through the incorporation of the role or perspective of others actors. This ability, which essentially offers a mirror to our own actions, allows us to, "question and reflect upon our own actions and to engage in dialogues with ourselves about our motives and courses of action" (ibid., 112). Reflexivity, then, is not opposed or necessarily distinct from the habitus.

Beyond the formidable influence of phenomenology, to counter the charges of negligence regarding agency Bourdieu himself provides two significant theoretical answers: the reflexive habitus and his concept of crisis. Efforts to reconcile Bourdieu with reflexive agency often elaborate on these concepts. Both will prove useful in clarifying the biographical theory of innovation and the broader structural determinants of tactical innovation in the culture jamming repertoire of contention, as well as in generating testable hypotheses.

Reflexivity refers generally to the ability to think about the conditions of thought and action (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 40). In order to explain the existence of Bourdieu's own work on the *habitus*, the nature of specific fields proves significant. Some fields socialize agents through the incorporation of dispositions of reflexivity. In other words, some fields, in particular the scientific and academic fields, structure reflexive habituses; reflexivity then becomes another element of pre-conscious practical sense. Social scientists, for example, through practical pre-reflective strategies must acquire the cultural capital associated with reflexivity to advance their



positions in their native field. As a scientist, the reflexive agent *par excellence*, Bourdieu has incorporated through action the particular conditions of the French field of academia, one of which is the habitual capacity to reflect on these very conditions and those of other fields. Crossley (2001; 2006b) argues that fields of contention likewise generate reflexive habituses. Consonant with McAdam's (1988) groundbreaking work on the biographical consequences of activism, he argues that involvement in social movements and protest, itself a durable social structure (a social field), potentially generates what he refers to as a *radical habitus*. The concept of the radical habitus connotes the acquisition of a disposition that exhibits critical politicized reflexivity, resources and skills pertinent to the field, and an ethos and feel for activism. In addition to academics and activists, the artists that occupy the field of cultural production, or more specifically the artistic and literary fields, are special cases of habitual reflexivity (Bourdieu 1993, 264-5).

As a field in "*permanent revolution*," contemporary Western art is riven by struggles for symbolic domination (ibid., 188). It is no wonder that the intense paroxysms of the artistic field since especially the 1960s have contributed to the so-called "death of art" (cf. Baudrillard 1993b; Danto 1986). The art field's extreme pluralism points to another important concept of Bourdieu's that concerns reflexivity, that of crisis. The concept of crisis is a skeletal effort at explaining convulsive social or personal change (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 131). He describes crisis thus:

The critique which brings the undiscussed into discussion, the unformulated into formulation, has as the condition of its possibility objective crisis, which, in breaking the immediate fit between the subjective structures and the objective structures, destroys self-evidence practically...this would-be most radical critique always has the limits that are assigned to it by the objective conditions (1977, 169).

At its most essential, crisis is a disjuncture between the habitus and its attendant social fields.

Bourdieu seems to suggest that reflexivity and deliberation substantially shape practice when

pre-reflexive practical sense is unable to adequately navigate situations. While it is important to note that functioning in the world requires habituated schemes of perception, appreciation, and action, even in tremendous crises, reflexivity, deliberation, and choice are given more degrees of freedom, so to speak, when the incessant practical process of acquisition entails a significant modification of the sedimented history of action that is the habitus. Such situations can arise, for example, in movement across fields, as in losing or getting a job, or in a general malaise, such as civil conflict or natural disaster. Attributes of post-industrial society like individual mobility and literacy, the proliferation of communications technologies, increasing indeterminacy of social fields, and institutional reflexivity seem to suggest that crises are more common in today's world than Bourdieu's account would suggest, an argument roughly consonant with NSM theorists (McNay 1999, 106-7; Sweetman 2003, 355-6)

Suggestions of pervasive post-modern reflexivity may be accurate, but, following Bourdieu, we might hypothesize that the distribution of reflexive awareness would remain relatively unequal, contingent, for example, on the distribution of resources, skills, access to technologies and information, and degrees of individual mobility and experience. The most reflexive dispositions, such as those of academics, activists, and artists, would appear to be privileged in terms of the distribution of reflexivity by virtue of the nature of their fields. Some fields, for example, are prone to endemic and perpetual crises. In particular, the field of art is a perpetually contested site of cultivated reflexivity. The rise of art as an autonomous field was "accompanied by a sort of reflective and critical return by the producers upon their productions" (Bourdieu 1993, 265-6; 1996, 242). This process only intensified as the symbolic capital associated with position in the field became, as Bourdieu argues, the denial of success and recognition of innovation, which in practice often translates as the subversion of art and its

attendant institutions. The field itself is one of the least institutionalized and indeterminate sites in the social world, meaning dispositions and positions are rarely as perfect a fit as in most other fields (ibid., 43, 61).

Together, the concepts of reflexive habitus and crisis help answer a number of the criticisms of determinism leveled against Bourdieu's theory of practice. The influence of phenomenology on Bourdieu is particularly helpful, especially for capturing the more nuanced and implicit conceptual and linguistic characteristics of Bourdieu's work (Crossley 2001), but they are not enough. More troubling for Bourdieu is the question of choice. Actors may reflect, but a sense of empowerment, agency, opportunity, and efficacy seem to be necessary for post-reflective choice. In other words, reflexivity is not necessarily transformative (Adams 2006, 522). To participate in social movements, for example, political process theorists argue that actors must achieve "cognitive liberation," the recognition or realization that one's actions can shape outcomes (McAdam 1999). Objective opportunities must accompany this sense of empowerment. Of course, the possibility of genuine choice need not imply transformative potential; notions of empowerment may prove less necessary or essential as the scale of the implications and the costs and benefits of a range of choices narrow in scope. Post-reflexive choice, then, appears to point to some of the limits of the habitus and reflexivity in accounting for the full range of human actions. Still, Bourdieu's concepts of field, capital, and position seek to account for the schemes that perceive and appreciate moments of opportunity generated by the field. The notion of an exploitation of opportunity is central to an understanding of the strategic nature of Bourdieu's concept of practical sense. In addition, a sense of empowerment need not be divorced from the habitus; for example, Crossley argues for the incorporation of an ethos of

empowerment as a habitual structure in his description of the radical habitus and fields of contention (2003, 52).

For the purposes of this paper, the possibility of post-reflexive choice and its relation to the habitus and reflexivity are largely ignored. Choice and empowerment are treated as givens of the field of art and likewise the culture jamming field of contention. As noted above, some of the insights of the collective action, resource mobilization, and political process models of contentious politics appear inapplicable to a study of culture jamming; analyses concerned with material resources, organization, selective incentives, and political opportunities can largely be ignored, though some of the insights offered will be briefly considered. The material inequalities that potentially determine the range of post-reflexive choices available to agents (Adams 2006) prove less valuable as explanatory variables when a field such as the artistic field is defined by its radically bifurcated distribution of capital in which those with the least material resources possess the most symbolic capital (Bourdieu 1993; 1996). I discuss the nature of the field of art below, but first I explore the biographical theory of tactical innovation as supplemented by Bourdieu and its relationship to the other theories of innovation.

### **3.2.3 Bourdieu and Tactical Innovation**

I argue that the biographical theory of innovation employed in this study as supplemented by Bourdieu is not a mutually exclusive theoretical explanation. In fact, biographical, marginal, anomic, and strategic theories of tactical innovation considered together contribute to stronger understanding of the determinants and conditions of tactical choice and innovation. First, I briefly address the parallels and the synthetic potential between the biographical and marginal theories of innovation. The emphasis on continuity so apparent in Bourdieu's sociology strikes a similar chord to the gradualism of the political process school's marginal

theory of innovation. Tilly's contentious agents navigate the mundane, spatial, normative, historical, agonistic, and cognitive structures that determine the opportunities and constraints conducive to or prohibitive of action.<sup>17</sup> In particular, the rhythms and organization of everyday life manifest on the micro-level as habitual patterns of behavior. Tilly's reserved attention to the drama, improvisation, and calculation that enliven performances on the margins of established forms of protest speaks to the structured and constrained space agents occupy in both their mundane existence and political resistance. For Bourdieu, everyday life and the incorporated perceptual schemes it generates, the embodiment of the rhythms of life, provide the deeper habitual patterns upon which imagination, intention, and calculation play. Hence, for Bourdieu as much as for Tilly, agents perform within the repertoire of everyday life, or the habitus, and only innovate at the limits of established forms or within the conditions of production. However, the nature and even the intensity of constraints of the habitus or repertoire are contingent on the social spaces, or fields, action occurs within. While Tilly's social topography is certainly variable, Bourdieu's field theory offers a more differentiated and cultural account of social space, one that creates variable dispositions that occupy variable fields and employ variable strategies to obtain variable ends. Tilly's sociology contributes an emphasis on the materiality and spatiality of everyday life, such as the spatial distinction between home and work and the organization of commerce and transportation. Bourdieu's understanding of the habitus, as noted above, is bodily or corporeal; dispositions are acquired in the direct and embedded immersion in the world, a point duly reviewed by Crossley (2001). His agents are certainly equipped to negotiate physical terrain, but the social constructivism that permeates Bourdieu's work provides room for a spatial analysis but is largely absent in his work. As so many scholars have shown,

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<sup>17</sup> As a consequence of his well-regarded and frequently utilized sociology, Charles Tilly is here considered representative of the political process approach and its more recent dynamic variant.

the spatial is a significant factor in the genesis, development, and form of contentious politics (Auyero 2006; Gould 1995; Martin and Miller 2003; Sewell 2001). In other words, the habitus as embodied experience possesses a somatic vehicle that navigates both social *and* physical environments. Bourdieu offers a profound investigation of the former, while Tilly and others offer a strong analysis of the latter through a macro lens. Regarding the anomic theory of innovation, Bourdieu's concept of crisis appears to account for its insights. Extreme change like revolution generates an increased dissonance between habitual behavior and perceptions (incorporated dispositions) and structural conditions (objective situations), thereby increasing the role of reflexivity and deliberation in the navigation of new situations, conditions conducive to innovative behavior.

The strategic rationality that informs the micro-foundations of the political process, resource mobilization, and collective action approaches poses a different problem. The implicit model of rationality employed by the dominant theoretical approaches has come under sustained critique in sociology, political science, and economics (cf. Ferree 1992; Jasper 2006). Tilly's account, for example, of the repertoire of contention offers a structural correction to the overly mechanical and individualistic rationalism of rational choice theory. The metaphor of the repertoire points precisely to this looser conception of constraint and action. Bourdieu is likewise animated by a desire to explain the structured character of ends-oriented behavior without relying on mechanical metaphors. His agents are endowed with a fundamentally strategic nature that allows for the perception and appreciation of political and other opportunities, a capacity that varies by the nature of the social field and the matrix of dispositions, or habitus, which informs practice.<sup>18</sup> This conception of strategic behavior assumes

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<sup>18</sup> As noted above, some of Bourdieu's sympathetic critics attempt to mitigate his apparent de-emphasis of reflexive agency, thereby providing a stronger role for conscious strategies (cf. Crossley 2001).

actors are caught up in the *illusio* of a field, the feel for the game that allows an actor to take for granted the order of the context in which he performs (1998, ch. 4). This allows agents to be possessed by the ends specific to a field. As he explains:

the term investment...must be understood in the dual sense of economic investment...and the sense of affective investment...in the sense of *illusio*, belief, an involvement in the game which produces the game. The art-lover knows no other guide than his love of art, and when he moves, as if by instinct, towards what is, at each moment, the thing to be loved, like some businessmen who make money even when they are not trying to, he is not pursuing a cynical calculation, but his own pleasure, the sincere enthusiasm which, in such matters, is one of the preconditions of successful investment (1984, 86).

Consequently, Bourdieu calls into question the assumptions of rational choice theory. His field theory provides a potential corrective to the collective action approaches lack of a theory of preferences and a more sophisticated and robust agency than the implicit Marxism of political process theories. In addition, his discussion of practical sense and strategy is consonant with what Emirbayer and Goldman call “emotional intelligence,” a directed investment in action (2005, 481-3). The above quote stresses the ‘pleasure’ and ‘enthusiasm’ of *illusio*, some of the passional dimensions that rational choice theories abstract out of goal-directed action. As Emirbayer and Goldman argue, then, Bourdieu dissolves the rational/emotional distinction, thereby providing a richer account of agency.

Through this more substantive and contextual account of rationality, the important insight found in the strategic theory of innovation—that actors generate tactics through their interaction with other actors in order to achieve strategic advantage—provides a much needed dimension for explaining tactical innovation. This emphasis on strategic interaction is perfectly compatible with a biographical account. Together, these mutually inclusive accounts of innovation suggest that actors choose from a repertoire of contention that is constituted and more or less constrained by crisis or calm; from within the repertoire, the particular biographical dimensions of the actors and the strategic imperatives they are faced with inform tactical choices.

## CHAPTER 4. STRUCTURAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL DETERMINANTS

### 4.1 CONSTRAINT AND CONSTITUTION

Despite its apparently experimental and unbounded nature, culture jamming like all other contentious politics is embedded in a structured context and is itself a constrained and structurally constituted form of political behavior. As political process theorists argue, the political opportunity structure (POS) constrains to a degree the genesis and trajectory of contention, though precisely to what degree, whether it specifies necessary conditions, and whether the concept of a POS is ultimately intelligible remain somewhat in dispute (Goodwin and Jasper 2004). However, the scope conditions of political process theory appear to exclude culture jamming, as it is not generally ‘political’ under the conception of politics utilized by these theorists. There are, of course, exceptions, including groups like the Billionaires for Bush and actions like Ubermorgen’s Vote-Auction. Certain macro-structural or institutional factors are important, however. The critical symbolic politics of culture jamming largely relies on basic civil liberties like freedoms of association, speech, and press and hence is relatively common in democratic states. In addition, this form of contention is particularly suited to capitalist democracies, especially well developed ones like those found in North America and Europe. The general affluence, education, and literacy of these populations allow for the leisure and acquisition of skills conducive to this form of contention. Consumer societies, those sufficiently affluent to mass produce consumer products for desires beyond material needs, are vital for the generation of culture jamming.

Certain political or legal variables are of consequence. As culture jamming groups like Negativland and Critical Art Ensemble show, laws regarding intellectual property rights are a prime source for grievances. Zoning regulations create the conditions conducive to the



generation of groups like the Billboard Liberation Front and Reclaim the Streets. More generally, consensus regarding neo-liberal policies and the policies themselves contribute to the generation and proliferation of culture jamming as distinct protest groups and as a method of contention utilized by social movements like the anti-globalization and anti-sweatshop movements. These policies testify to culture jammers of a political complicity in the economization of culture and everyday life.

A number of scholars have suggested that the contemporary Western democratic repertoire of contention is predominantly institutionalized, professionalized, less confrontational, and hence less violent (Everett 1992; Meyer and Tarrow 1998; Rucht and Neidhardt 2002; Tarrow 1998). Procedures for expressing and responding to discontent have become formalized; litigation, lobbying, the use of media to reach third parties, controlled demonstrations, permits, and other forms of institutionalized protest and policing are prominent means in the repertoire of social movements. The contemporary state wields overwhelming organized violence and is, therefore, a generally efficient deterrent of dissident violence. Publics and the mass media tend to disparage and stigmatize, though paradoxically sensationalize acts of violence. Accordingly, Culture jamming strategies and tactics like most protests in Western democracies are non-violent. Kurt Schock argues that a distinction between violent and non-violent tactics is significant in determining the potential variety of tactics. He states that the number of nonviolent tactics is “unlimited” (2005, 16). By virtue of their flexibility and low cost, nonviolent methods can “theoretically be implemented by anyone at any time” (ibid., 40). This, of course, runs counter to Tarrow’s contention that “Violence is the easiest kind of collective action for small groups to initiate without encountering major costs of coordination and control” (1998, 94). My research is evidence of Schock’s contention. Culture jammers are also variably but typically

highly skilled in specialized competencies, most importantly art and the use of various media technologies. Although this appears consonant with the claims of general social movement professionalization, culture jammers consciously contrast their strategies and identities to or ironically appropriate the bureaucratic professionalism of many mainstream social movements and corporations.

Like most forms of contention save the harrowing onslaughts of a mysterious Mongol raid, culture jamming presupposes a larger web of shared meanings. Steinberg's work on discursive repertoires is pertinent here, in particular the dialogist concept of "speech genre."

Steinberg clarifies genres thus:

Genres are "relatively stable types of utterance (with respect to content, linguistic style, and compositional structure) which in turn correspond to particular types of social activity [reminiscent of Bourdieu's fields]...Such genres mediate between sociopolitical and economic life on the one and language on the other". They consist of the culturally and historically specific widely accepted sets of vocabularies, meanings, and rules of use, including social forms and interaction (1999a, 746).

In his utilization of the marginal theory of innovation, Steinberg argues that challengers typically work within a genre and engage in a, "piecemeal process of questioning certain meanings" contained therein (ibid., 747, 751-3). Genres, like Linda Hutcheon's (1994, 12) "overlapping discursive communities," allow the average individual to detect and decipher the irony employed in culture jams. Culture jams typically critique easily identified popular culture or mundane icons, discourses, or situations, drawing the individual into the critique through the familiarity of the symbols invoked. The general idea is to problematize the familiar and benign, a process constrained by that which is familiar, in this case the popular meanings attached to popular symbols. This process of de-familiarization and critique appears to channel a remark of Bourdieu's on subversion: "The specific efficacy of subversive action consists in the power to bring to consciousness, and so modify, the categories of thought which help to orient individual

and collective practices and in particular the categories of thought through which distributions are perceived and appreciated” (1990, 144). Relying on the popular image of athleticism and discipline represented by the Nike swoosh symbol, culture jammer Jonah Peretti deftly engineered a confrontation via e-mail with an agent of the corporation that humorously invoked a subversive image of Nike with the word “sweatshop,” a word that itself shared a popular meaning (Peretti and Micheletti 2004).

One of the most significant structural factors to contribute to the emergence of forms of contention like culture jamming is infrastructural: the increasing sophistication and popularization of technology, especially in communications. The rise and spread of the Internet is indicative of this trend, though other technologies, including television, were influential as well. Mickle (2002, 24-25) notes that many offline tactics adapted to cyberspace remarkably well. Rolfe (2005) and Costanza-Chock (2003) note in their studies of the electronic repertoire of contention that the Internet has proven to be a fertile ground for tactical innovation. What these and others (cf. Ayres 1999) argue is that the explosion of symmetrical and viral new media, including audio cassettes, cell phones, video games, and others, but most importantly the Internet, has created a revolutionary “space” for contention. Although access and skills remain unevenly distributed, new media are conducive to tactical innovations, networking, and efficient and relatively cheap communications across vast territories, notably in the case of culture jamming in North America and Europe.

A classic question in the literature asks which organizational forms are conducive to which political or social outcomes. The effectiveness of what I term *[dis]organization* and other forms of de-centralized organization has been argued by Gerlach and Hine (1970), Piven and Cloward (1979), Powell (1990), Schock (2005), Scott (1985; 1990), and others while the same

claim for centralization and organizational coherence echo from Gamson (1990), Cress and Snow (2000), Lenin (1987), McAdam (1999), Staggenborg (1989), and others. Culture jamming [dis]organization resembles what Gerlach and Hine (1970) describe as a “decentralized, segmented, and reticulated” model of organization. It also exhibits frequent meso-mobilization (Gerhards and Rucht 1992; Tarrow 1998, 135). Schock explicitly connects loose networks and lateral relations with tactical innovation (2005, 50). Staggenborg (1989, 76) suggests that decentralized organizational structures encourage tactical innovation. Although there is disagreement regarding outcomes, scholars seem to suggest that a more de-centralized social movement industry is conducive to tactical innovation.

Another factor, one I have not found addressed directly in the literature, may be ideological pluralism. Rolfe (2005, 72) notes in his description of innovative hothouses that they are “less-cause driven,” and Tarrow (1998, 207-8) states in general many contemporary movements are characterized by “ideologies of spontaneity.” Likewise, in documenting the distinct repertoire of new social movements, Rucht (1990, 160) identifies a coagulated multiplicity of single-issue movements. Manifest in such diverse strands as eco-anarchism, post-religious anti-consumerism, anti-road, feminism, neo-Luddism, and anti-copyright to name a few, ideological pluralism is an overwhelming characteristic of culture jamming in general. Following the biographical theory of innovation, one may hypothesize that movements or groups comprised of ideologically diverse individuals with a relatively evenly distributed capacity to effect tactical choice will exhibit more variable repertoires and a higher tendency toward tactical innovation. Conversely, groups or movements with a homogenous ideological distribution among their memberships with a relatively evenly distributed capacity to effect tactical choice will exhibit

less variable repertoires and a higher tendency toward tactical inertia. This language suggests an interaction effect with organizational form.

Finally, it is worth prefacing Bourdieu's contribution. Social contexts structure the habitus through the incorporation of norms, sanctions, and schemes of perception, appreciation, and action. The field of cultural production generates the aesthetic disposition, perceptual schemes that aestheticize everyday life and all of its accoutrements. In addition, as an indeterminate and crisis-ridden social site, the artistic field houses highly reflexive dispositions more disposed to utilizing calculative and imaginative capacities to navigate the world. Those who occupy this field, artists or cultural producers in particular, are more likely to be endowed with these distinct series of properties than others. It is the burden of this paper to ascertain whether a politicized aesthetic disposition is conducive to culture jamming tactical innovation.

## **4.2 THE FIELD OF ART**

### **4.2.1 Genesis and Structure**

Bourdieu explains that in the history of complex societies, various social contexts gradually embarked on a process of divorce from the society's broader field of power, the most significant and powerful of which is the economic field. These contexts, or social fields, are constituted by sets of rules, norms, sanctions, strategies, positions, and capital that attempt to institutionalize and habituate the field's autonomy. For Bourdieu, the field of art, or more generally the field of cultural production, provides one of the more interesting instances of the emergence of an autonomous field. His two extensive studies of this phenomenon, *The Field of Cultural Production* (1993) and *The Rules of Art* (1996), as well as his larger critique of taste, *Distinction* (1984), engage in particular the French field of cultural production. Below, I exhibit

the essential dualistic structure and content of this field. Where necessary, the analysis is supplemented.

The genesis of the historical process of autonomy of the field of cultural production, which includes at any given moment journalists, novelists, painters, critics, patrons, editors, media conglomerates, museum curators, and numerous others involved in the production and distribution of culture, was, Bourdieu argues, the generation of a general struggle between two principles. Both principles, *heteronomy* and *autonomy*, designate tendencies towards hierarchization within and without the field, meaning whether the field submits to its broader context of power or remains autonomous through its segregation and valuation of forms of capital distinct from economic capital. Each principle corresponds to a ratio of specific capital (e.g. less economic and more cultural capital) and principle of domination, the latter of which Bourdieu describes as the “definition of human accomplishment” - defining the principles that legitimate artists and works of art (1993, 41). The *heteronomous* principle guides the agents of the field who regard art as literally a sector of the economy, as an activity in which success is measured in book sales, ticket sales, honors, and other measures of popular esteem. These producers tend to possess the least amount of symbolic capital and the greatest amount of material capital. Were the principle of heteronomous cultural producers to reign, the artistic field would be wholly absorbed into the fields it is embedded in, namely the field of power and the economic field. The *autonomous* principle, in contrast, guides agents who seek distance from the economy. These agents are those who regard success as a sign of compromise, of ‘selling-out.’ Autonomous cultural producers inhabit a particular “economy of practices...a systematic inversion of the fundamental principles of all ordinary economies” (Bourdieu 1993, 39). This world, the subfield of restricted production, or high culture, “is so ordered that those who enter it have an interest in

disinterestedness” (ibid., 40). Consequently, symbolic capital is in great abundance for these producers, while they tend to lack economic capital. Of course, this basic dualistic structure is far more complex. For example, each genre, from poetry to theatre to music, has its own structure that roughly mirrors the broader field. In turn, these subdivide repeatedly.

The field of restricted production is the particular site of the process of autonomy, that principle which generates instability, reflection, and crisis. In this anti-economic enclave, emerging generations challenge the field’s orthodoxy. Actors coming into the field of restricted production lacking specific assets (capital) must assert their difference in order to acquire symbolic capital. Concomitantly, they have an interest in subversion, in equating the old guard, the custodians of the subfield, with the hierarchy of the field of cultural production as a whole. The challenge from below, then, comes in the form of a redefinition of the field and its artifacts, a revolution in the form, style, or content of art that distances itself from both the larger fields of economy and power and the ageing generations of the avant-garde. Examples of prominent cultural or artistic revolutions include the Impressionist, Dada, Conceptual and Performance Art revolutions. Each of these waves of innovation not only redefined art and the artist, but the entire history of art and, especially from the Dada Revolution onwards, the world around them.

This model of change, of artistic revolution, only hints at the history of art, however. As noted above, the rise of art as an autonomous field was “accompanied by a sort of reflective and critical return by the producers upon their productions” (Bourdieu 1993, 265-6; 1996, 242). This reflection increasingly determined cultural innovation through a logic particular to the field itself and increasingly divorced from broader economic and political factors; cultural production produced products that negated the products they sought to differentiate from themselves. The particular nature of subversion in the field of art culminates in the closure of fields, meaning the

exhaustion of forms (ibid., 119). Bourdieu uses the example of painting to note that this effect of exhaustion leads to the questioning of the process of painting itself, a process mirrored in numerous other genres and arts. The notion of the closure of fields assumes agents in the field are endowed with the reflexivity, skills, and dispositions necessary to exhaust forms. He seems to suggest, for example, that closure tends to be preceded by the fetishism of technicality (ibid.). Embedded in his discussion of the nature of artistic revolution is the notion that cultural innovation is increasingly determined by the history of the field itself. Duchamp's *Fountain*, for example, as an act of distinction and rebellion presupposes the possibility of Duchamp as the artist with an acquired knowledge of the field of art and its history. Innovations are negatives of negatives of negatives, distinguished from distinctions from distinctions. Cultural production became, through the autonomy of the field, a specialized, highly reflexive, historically accumulated, internally generated dialectic. The result of extreme dynamism, subversive technical fetishism, and the so-called closure of fields are perpetual revolutions, continuous ruptures, and cultural pluralism. As art theorist Arthur Danto explains, "The art world is a model of a pluralistic society, in which all disfiguring barriers and boundaries have been thrown down" (2000, 430-431). Below, I address the dispositions generated by the field and the contemporary state of the field of art.

#### **4.2.2 General Aestheticization and the Aesthetic Disposition**

French philosopher Jean Baudrillard argues, "our society has given rise to a general aestheticization in the wake of the postmodern collapse of the domains of the economy, art, politics, and sexuality into each other" (1993b, 16; see 1975; 1993a; 1994). Others have made similar arguments about the aestheticization of everyday life (Featherstone 1991; 1992; Jameson 1991, Lash 1994; Lash and Urry 1994). For Baudrillard (1993b, 11) and Featherstone, Dadaism



was the genesis of “general aestheticization,” the fusion of the previously opposed concepts of art and life. Life is today aestheticized. Art or the aesthetic is embedded in everyday life. The process expanded rapidly with the explosion of advertising, general affluence, and Andy Warhol’s soup cans. For Bourdieu, the crucial moment was, in literature, Flaubert, and in painting, Manet. These two extraordinary individuals sought to impose the radical creativity of the pure gaze on the world around them (1993, 265). The aesthetic disposition, of which the pure gaze is an attribute, connotes “the capacity to consider in and for themselves, as form rather than function, not only the works designated for such apprehension, but everything in the world, including cultural objects which are not yet consecrated... and natural objects” (Bourdieu 1984, 3). The subordination of function to form, of life to art, is systematic; the pure gaze is essentially agnostic and amoral, irreligious and apolitical. There are consequently no limits to what cultural producers can appropriate and transform into an art object: a urinal, Brillo boxes, a cough in an auditorium, a stapler. Influential performance artist Allan Kaprow offers a superb and extreme illustration of the creative gaze at work:

I decided to pay attention to brushing my teeth, to watch my elbow moving. I would be alone in my bathroom, without art spectators. There would be no gallery, no critic to judge, no publicity. This was the crucial shift that removed the performance of everyday life from all but the memory of art. I could, of course, have said to myself, “Now I’m making art!!” But in actual practice, I didn’t think much about it...

Brushing my teeth attentively for two weeks, I gradually became aware of the tension in my elbow and fingers (was it there before?), the pressure of the brush on my gums, their slight bleeding (should I visit the dentist?). I looked up once and saw, really saw, my face in the mirror. I rarely looked at myself when I got up, perhaps because I wanted to avoid the puffy face I’d see, at least until it could be washed and smoothed to match the public image I prefer. (And how many times had I seen others do the same and believed I was different!)

This was an eye-opener to my privacy and to my humanity. An unremarkable picture of myself was beginning to surface, an image I’d created but never examined. It colored the images I made of the world and influenced how I dealt with my images of others. I saw this little by little.

But if this wider domain of resonance, spreading from the mere process of brushing my teeth, seems too far from its starting point, I should say immediately that it never left the bathroom. The physicality of brushing, the aromatic taste of toothpaste, rinsing my mouth and the brush, the

many small nuances such as right-handedness causing me to enter my mouth with the loaded rush from that side and then move to the left side — these particularities always stayed in the present. The larger implications popped up from time to time during the subsequent days. All this from toothbrushing (Kaprow 1993, 219-221).

Through Kaprow's analysis of his hygienic performance, one witnesses the gaze as it slowly invests the movements and nuances of everyday life with not only their typical practical meaning but also an aesthetic detail. Duchamp, Warhol, and Kaprow are for Bourdieu the logical extension of Flaubert and Manet's achievement. This gaze, the pure gaze of the aesthetic disposition, the capacity to appropriate aesthetically literally anything, is now an acquired and legitimate scheme of perception and appreciation in the field of art.

Bourdieu contrasts the pure gaze of the aesthetic disposition to the naïve gaze of the popular aesthetic. Lacking the perceptual and appreciative schemes specific to the field of art, the latter applies the schemes that inform practical behavior in everyday life to art works (Bourdieu 1984, 44). These ethical dispositions, as Bourdieu is quick to call them, tend to subordinate form to function, art to life; through these schemes the ethical, moral, or political impose on contemporary art. Bourdieu's dichotomy, however, may prove too neat. It would seem that for Bourdieu the aesthetically disposed are the apolitical *par excellence*. As Proudhon was so enthusiastic to point out, art for art's sake leaves no room for the moral or political. The history of art, however, shows that the aesthetically disposed are subject to the exigencies of the field (i.e. subversion and innovation), its broader context of power, and the critical reflection so characteristic of art. In the case of the Dada Revolution, this entailed a profoundly radical break with the cultural establishment, a 'political' upheaval of profound proportions within the field of art. Other upheavals followed.

### 4.2.3 The Situationists and a Political Art

Several figures and movements predate the Situationist political agenda described earlier in this paper. In his famous essay, “The Work of Art in the Age of its Technical Reproducibility,” cultural critic Walter Benjamin proposed a politicization of aesthetics to battle the Nazi aestheticization of politics. The most potent political expression of Dada was the photomontage artist John Heartfield. The epic theatre of Bertolt Brecht sought to jar spectators out of their political complacency. These and others saw the simple autonomy of the field of art as an untenable escape from, meaning a direct complicity with, the exercise of domination around them. In essentially abandoning the purity of the aesthetic disposition, which sought to bleach all ethical or emotional perception from aesthetics, individuals like Heartfield and Brecht and movements like Dada and the Surrealists nonetheless retained the perceptual schemes, formal experimentation, and the creative gaze peculiar to the aesthetic disposition.

This politicized aesthetic disposition would soon inform a politics of symbolic conflict in the form of the Situationists. If Bourdieu witnesses the exhaustion of production forms, then the exigencies of the field, which require the assertion of creative distinction, figures in not only the critical reflection on cultural products, but on the producers and the conditions of production, including the broader field of power. As Situationists Debord and Wilman put it:

Every reasonably aware person of our time is aware of the obvious fact that art can no longer be justified as a superior activity, or even as a compensatory activity to which one might honorably devote oneself. The reason for this deterioration is clearly the emergence of productive forces that necessitate other production relations and a new practice of life. In the civil-war phase we are engaged in, and in close connection with the orientation we are discovering for certain superior activities to come, we believe that all known means of expression are going to converge in a general movement of propaganda that must encompass all the perpetually interacting aspects of social reality (2007, 14).

The modified Marxism of the Situationists argued that the reign of the logic of the commodity, which dynamically absorbs all before it, results in an inauthentic self. This self is nested within

relationships mediated by the image, the commodity of the mass media. Hence, relationships are inauthentic. Acts of authenticity are critiques of the system: *détournement*. These acts of critique, part of the “general movement of propaganda,” require creative appropriation. Situationist Raoul Vaneigem’s statement that “the desire to live is a political decision” is a political affirmation of the authentic self amidst the alienating spectacle (1983, 8). In Bourdieu’s language, the autonomization of the economic field with respect to other fields and society as a whole imposes upon these fields its own hierarchical principle. Penetration or de-autonomization of other fields becomes more intense. Regarding the artistic field, Baudrillard argues that “[art] will...soon be gone, leaving behind an immense museum of artificial art and abandoning the field completely to advertising” (1993b, 17). This process of the economization of various fields, intensified by neo-liberalism, is precisely the target of anti-globalization protesters, traditional allies of culture jammers.

The disembeddedness of the economic field is concomitantly an imposition of its logic, the logic of the commodity as Debord would have it, on the society it once was embedded within. For activists like the Situationists, this imposition seeps into the very fabric of everyday life and its accoutrements: “all goods proposed by the spectacular system, from cars to televisions, also serve as weapons for that system” (Debord 1994, 28). *Détournement* is the appropriation of these weapons. Like the Situationists, many culture jammers are concerned with the commodification or rationalization of the everyday and art. Corporations and consumer culture have sublimated the vast and chaotic energies of artistic creativity into a marketing apparatus that expands and evolves to absorb and subordinate new spaces, objects, and discourses to the logic of economy. The Situationist concept of recuperation and Baudrillard’s comment on art and advertising find support not only in works critical of culture jamming as a

practice of resistance (Frank 1997; Heath and Potter 2004; Moore 2007) but also business literature (Dorrian and Lucas 2006; Levinson 2007). The aesthetic disposition is no longer the sole possession of the field of restricted production; it is the legitimate disposition of the field of art in general. It therefore informs the highly adaptive marketing strategies of corporations as much as the highly adaptive cultural strategies of art museums. *Détournement* implies the existence of that which must be turned, and late capitalism provides a rich terrain for contention.

This brief discussion of the field of art suggests that an understanding of tactical innovation in the culture jamming repertoire of contention concerns everyday life, economics, aesthetics, and politics. My theory conjectures that culture jammer's tactical innovation is a function of a radical creativity that engages the accoutrements of consumer culture or technical rationality, from billboards, sidewalks, cyberspace, surveillance cameras to shopping malls in a battle of meaning and resistance. This radical creativity is characteristic of the gaze of the aesthetic disposition, the perceptual, appreciative, and actionable schemes that confer on everyday objects an aesthetic form.

## CHAPTER 5. EMPIRICAL ILLUSTRATION

### 5.1 METHOD AND DATA

My central contention in this paper is that the aesthetic disposition peculiar to the field of art, when politically expressive, is disposed to create highly innovative forms of contention. I hypothesize that *those actors that inhabit the field of art (cultural producers or artists) are more likely to generate tactical innovations than actors native to other fields are*. This hypothesis derives directly from the biographical theory of innovation, especially as elaborated through the work of Pierre Bourdieu. The empirical direction taken in this paper, then, seeks to establish the artistic credentials of a particular group, this spirit of innovation, and most importantly, the aesthetic disposition and its relation with tactical innovation. I largely refrain in this thesis from explaining variation in dispositions toward tactical innovation among the actors of the artistic field, though I will speculate on this question. The remainder of this work seeks to empirically illustrate the biographical theory of innovation and bring to bare empirical evidence on the hypothesis above. Before proceeding, I draw attention to the methodology and data utilized in this study.

In order to illustrate the biographical theory of innovation I claim is essential in explaining culture jamming tactical innovation, this paper approaches the subject from two directions: art as a social context and culture jamming groups as agents of contention. In my discussion of the context of constraint on contentious politics in Western democracies, I addressed in particular those structural conditions that constrain and constitute forms of activism like culture jamming. Despite its apparently experimental and unbounded nature, culture jamming is a phenomenon generated and formed by particular conditions. Most importantly, it is

shaped by the history and structure of the field of art. My argument here suggests that the field of art imputes an aesthetic disposition that informs tactical choices and innovation.

The empirical weight of this paper falls on two case studies, each of a particular culture jamming group. I do not suggest that these groups are representative of culture jamming as a whole. Neither is this a random sample of the culture jamming population. Determining this population is itself a research question beyond the concerns of this paper. Rather, I chose groups that are innovative hothouses. Following Rolfe, the study of culture jamming and tactical innovation must take into account the radical creativity practiced by protest groups (2005, 72). Rolfe conceives of innovative hothouses as “incubators of innovation,” as groups with critical and technical expertise that utilize radical creativity to innovate tactically (ibid.). This study came to be when I asked where these skills and creativity originate and who possesses them? I employ the case study approach primarily because Rolfe’s account of innovative hothouses is group-centered. Beyond the volume of data available on each group, which is substantial for both groups relative to other culture jamming groups, I employ no systematic criteria for the selection of cases.

Each case study proceeds in three parts. First, I provide a general introduction to each group by describing the image they project of themselves and their actions. Included are a brief clarification of their vocabularies and an outline of their strategic approach to contention, which necessarily proceeds throughout the entirety of the case presentation of the group. Second, I briefly discuss each group’s tactical repertoire. Finally, I provide empirical support for the contention that culture jammers are not only endowed with the aesthetic disposition but are disposed to employ these perceptual schemes in their tactical tastes and tactical innovations. Two culture jamming groups are of interest in this analysis: the Critical Art Ensemble (CAE) and

Übermorgen. A relatively good deal of research focuses on some of the more prominent culture jamming groups, such as the Yes Men, <sup>®</sup>TMARK, and Adbusters. CAE is not entirely immune to this attention (Alvarez, Dagnino, and Escobar 1998, ch. 13; Stefan 1999), but the groups clearly articulated approach makes them an attractive case. In addition, they are one of Rolfe's (2005) primary examples of an innovative hothouse, and therefore a promising case for a study of the skills and creativity conducive to culture jamming contention.

The use of newspapers and other media as resources for mapping and quantifying protest events is a significant component of event analysis, the principle quantitative method of the social movement and contentious politics literatures. Unlike other protest phenomena like riots, bombings, demonstrations, or strikes, however, culture jams do not generally receive imminent, frequent, or systematic mass media coverage, a result of their largely ephemeral and often discursive nature. Thus, I conclude that no sources of systematic data are currently available for this topic of interest. With this setback in mind, I gathered data from group websites, published group texts, interviews, news articles, and a number of video and audio resources over the course of March and April of 2007 and August of 2008. This "swim in the data" traversed at least three dozen groups (See Appendix). For this papers' cases in particular, websites and published texts proved invaluable. Übermorgen's website is filled with relevant links to programs, tactics, exhibitions, interviews, and news articles, all of which provided valuable information. Along with a number of interviews with members of the group, the CAE have published texts with clear articulations of the group's claims, tactics, and philosophical justifications. These provided the bulk of the data for my analysis.

All of the data are derived from primary sources. Some sources are limited in scope and content. The bulk of the content is decidedly subjective and asystematic. Übermorgen does



provide a chronological list of actions, while CAE does not. Of the larger mass of groups studied a few websites were skeletal, content excessive, or deliberately misleading, whether through anonymity or superfluous layers of irony or vulgarity. Not surprisingly, many sources including those pertaining to the case studies express a preoccupation with anecdotes rather than analysis. The two groups under study here, however, provide ample and generally clear online material. With these caveats in mind, case selection proceeded from a short informal list of criteria including clarity of articulation and volume of data.

One important consequence of this methodological approach is that in consideration of its limitations, which arguably are of limited value in the rigorous empirical testing of hypotheses, I suggest that this paper does not provide such a test of the biographical theory of innovation and the particular hypothesis presented here. For example, I do not provide for variance in the dependent variable, tactical innovation. Rather, I suggest that this paper *illustrates* empirically the utility of this theoretical account of tactical innovation. This paper aims to follow Jasper (1997), Crossley (2002b), Nepstad (2005), Doherty (1999a; 1999b) and others in insisting on the value of bringing scholarly attention to the role of dispositions and identities in the selection and creation of means of contention. Still, I do bring a measure of data to bear on the question of tactical innovation in the culture jamming repertoire.

A word is also required on my dependent variable. Tactical innovation is difficult to measure, for the glaring reason that some tactics may be prior innovations from obscure or distance sources, a problem of tracking and identifying innovation, the birth of newness. As Rolfe notes, tactical diffusion, particularly cyber-diffusion is remarkably difficult to trace in the emerging repertoire (2005, 69). However, the significance of tactical diffusion proper is not addressed in this work. This work is not interested insofar as the research question is concerned

with the success of, failure of, or the mechanisms that spread protest tactics to other groups.<sup>19</sup> Although this is clearly a significant question, again brevity intervenes. What I am interested in are tactical innovations, those tactics (means of contention, claims, organizational forms, identities) that are to an extent unprecedented. Following Rolfe (2005), I assume that his reference to innovative hothouses, meaning radically creative and skilled groups that specialize in tactical innovations, is in reference to groups like the Critical Art Ensemble, Ubermorgen, ®™ark, Monochrom, the Cacophony Society, the Cult of the Dead Cow, My Dads Strip Club, Vacuum Cleaner, and 0100101110101101.org, to name a few. I proceed below first with an analysis of the Critical Art Ensemble and follow with Ubermorgen before concluding with the implications of this research.

## **5.2 THE CRITICAL ART ENSEMBLE**

### **5.2.1 Introduction**

Founded in 1987 by a group of graduate students, the U.S.-based Critical Art Ensemble (CAE) is an artist collective, “five tactical media artists dedicated to exploring the intersections between art, technology, critical theory, and political activism” (2000a, 136). They regard tactical media as “a critical usage and theorization of media practices that draw on all forms of old and new, both lucid and sophisticated media, for achieving a variety of specific non-commercial goals and pushing all kinds of potentially subversive political issues” (2001, 5). As the definition suggests, CAE are noteworthy for developing a sophisticated practical *and* theoretical approach to what is termed culture jamming here. As artists, they have exhibited and performed their work in numerous museums across the United States and Western Europe as well as numerous public sites not designated as art institutions. In addition to media projects,

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<sup>19</sup> See Rolfe (2005) and Ayers (1999) for a brief engagement with this issue in culture jamming and related protests.

they are one of the pioneers of bioart, an emerging movement that explores the relation between the biological sciences, ethics, and art utilizing living matter like DNA and cells. One of their early projects led to the establishment of ACT UP in Florida (Schneider 2000, 125).

Broadly speaking, CAE engages in a highly critical and reflective discourse regarding media, culture, politics, art, and technology. They describe themselves as individually differentiated and specialized in terms of skills, particular knowledge, and aesthetic values (1999, 194). Politically, they espouse a somewhat indeterminate anarchism; this “practical anarchism” is a critical discursive resistance heavily informed by thinkers, activists, and artists like Brecht, Foucault, Deleuze, the Situationists, Hakim Bey, and Julian Beck (CAE 1999). The group is united by what they call three points of agreement: “a commitment to decentralization, a commitment to individual liberty, and resistance against the total instrumentalization/rationalization of culture” (ibid. 194). They espouse no final cause or macro-strategy of revolution. In recent years, the group has developed a fixation with biotechnology and its effects on all aspects of everyday life systems. This trend, however, is an outgrowth of CAE’s general preoccupation with what they term the semiotic regime or authoritarian culture. Much of their work seeks to explore the nature of the exercise of domination. In their first major published text, *The Electronic Disturbance* (1994) and others that followed (1996; 2001), CAE contrast nomadic with sedentary power. They describe *sedentary power* as a “concrete mass that is located in easily identifiable fortresses or bunkers” (1996, 7). Bunkers are “halls of power:” castles, palaces, malls, government bureaucracies, monuments, factories, the media, corporate home offices, and other looming structures, “daring malcontents and underground forces to challenge their fortifications” (ibid., 6). Power was located within these structures, and, though they were formidable and de-moralizing, dissidents found them clear visible targets. Power

today is different, as is capital. They are a “nomadic electronic flow” (ibid.). Both move through “ambiguous zone[s] without borders,” and are composed of a “diffuse field without location, and a fixed sight machine appearing as spectacle” (CAE 1994, 11, 15).<sup>20</sup> Bunkers still exist, but only as agents of reification, as “colonize[rs] of the mind (CAE 1996, 37).” The semiotic regime and electronic networks of information flow are the bulwarks of the nomads: “the obscenity of spectacle and the terror of speed are their constant companions. In most cases sedentary populations submit to the...spectacle, and contentedly pay the tribute demanded, in the form of labor, material, and profit” (CAE 1994, 16). The spectacle works through “friendly pillage” and resides in nonlocation (ibid.).

This conception of capitalism and power necessarily conditions the dichotomy of domination/resistance. CAE introduce as compliments to their typology of power two models of disturbance. The *sedentary model* “attempts to construct a monumental counterspectacle to compete with (and hopefully overwhelm) the bunker’s symbolic order” (CAE 1996, 38). Some examples might include overwhelming mass demonstrations or the infantry of the Leninist party. The *nomadic model* “seeks to undermine the symbolic order with more ephemeral, process-oriented methods” (ibid.). In *Electronic Civil Disobedience*, CAE provide a generic model of nomadic resistance they call electronic civil disobedience (ECD), a form of resistance that utilizes the tactics of blockage and trespass familiar to practitioners of civil disobedience. ECD is novel, however, as it a distinctly cyber-practice (CAE 1996). Of particular importance to the ECD strategy is “clandestine policy subversion” and “simulated action,” suggestive of the covert nature of the disruptive event (CAE 2001, 14). Examples of nomadic practices beyond the ECD

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<sup>20</sup> The sight machine refers to one of two mechanisms in CAE theory, the other being the war machine, the apparatus of violence. The sight machine has two functions: “to mark the space of violent spectacle and sacrifice [surveillance and cartographic operations of public space], and to control the symbolic order [system of representations that normalize the function of the war machine]” (1998a, 54-55). In Situationist terminology, the sight machine appears as spectacle (CAE 1994, 15).

model include “détournement, creative vandalism, plagiarism, invisible theater, or counterfeiting” (ibid., 52).

Another distinction the group makes is between the pedagogical and the political. For both sedentary and nomadic models of disturbance, “the subtext...is pedagogy” (ibid., 39). One achieves a practice of pedagogy by “changing perceptions through representational exchange (CAE 2000a, 142).” Through detouring objects and situations, such as an entrance to a public site or a corporate ad on the sidewalk, third parties may sense a fluctuation and disjuncture in the semiotic regime and gather cognizance of the penetrability of the regime. In contrast, the political is an explicit disruption, what they describe as direct intervention “in the distribution of power on a macro level” (ibid.). Although the group is very clear on this distinction, it is not total. They manage to inject the term “politicized cultural action” into their description of pedagogical situations or actions (CAE 2001, 25). Also, their definition of political action—“the temporary or permanent redistribution or reconfiguration of power relationships (material or semiotic)”—does not square with their distinction if pedagogic action intends a “moment of liberation” (ibid.). Clearly, they conceive of liberation as a disruptive process. It reconfigures the semiotic regime, though on the micro level. Digital theater, of which CAE are one example, “is a *struggle* over the micro-sociology of the performative matrix of everyday life (emphasis added, 2001, 76).<sup>21</sup> It seems clear that for CAE “politics [can] not be separated from...cultural practice” (1999, 194).

In their work, *The Digital Resistance* (2001), CAE advance the notion that the avant-garde may not be dead, but simply unrecognizable. It consists of artists-activists who eschew the traditional role designations assigned to either group. These role designations “exclude access to

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<sup>21</sup> The performative matrix is “the aggregate interactions within social space – the dramaturgical activities of everyday life” (CAE 2000, 149).

social and knowledge systems that are the materials for their work,” systems like science and politics (ibid., 3-4). For CAE, art is a critical and creative act:

CAE would not argue that art is a force of political change, but it's undoubtedly an important component in the process of resistance. Art prepares the ground for the introduction of new realities and visions; art can act as a catalyst for critical and imaginative thought; and art can act as a signpost of political identity and solidarity” (1998b).<sup>22</sup>

The traditional designation of art as neutral, as “monologic,” as “an uplifting object that will reveal the wisdom of ages past,” serves to neuter this critical function (CAE 1996, 48-49).

Hence, CAE, “call for artists, once outside the parameters of cultural production for other members of the culture industry, to separate their work from the system of signs which shape the non-specialist’s perception of art” (ibid.). As noted in my discussion of identity claims, CAE view labels like artist and activist as tactically flexible and expedient (2000b). Their activism is cultural activism, of art in the sense CAE intends. As they argue, both “the political activist and the cultural activist (*anachronistically known as the artist*) can still produce disturbances” despite the elusive nature of nomadic power (emphasis added, 1994, 12). Cultural activists are those who resist the semiotic regime, the culture imposed by the dominant power relationships of global capitalism. With strategies nomadic and pedagogic, CAE seek to employ art as a critical activity in order to “bring to consciousness, and so modify, the categories of thought which help to orient individual and collective practices” (Bourdieu 1990, 144). As cultural activists, they seek to expose power as something distinct from its own benign presentation. For them, this exposition requires a particular form of contention, the nomadic. Below I briefly sketch the CAE’s nomadic repertoire of contention.

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<sup>22</sup> Jasper repeatedly compares protesters to artists. Both “take inchoate intuitions and put flesh on them, formulating and elaborating them so that they can be debated. Without them, we would have only the inventions of corporations and state agencies, products and technologies created to enhance efficiency or profitability” (1997, 375). He suggests that both art and protest create realities deeply resonant and “real” for the participants beyond even the reality of everyday life (ibid., 227).



Figure 1. *Cult of the New Eve* (Hawkins 2005).

### 5.2.2 Tactical Repertoires

Many CAE tactics are variations on street theater, which they define as “those performances that invent ephemeral, autonomous situations from which temporary public relationships emerge that can make possible critical dialogue on a given issue” (2001, 87). The key references here are the theater of everyday life and happenings, performances that blur the distinction between theater and everyday life. CAE’s signature tactic is what they describe as recombinant theater. This form of theater, with precedent in the theater of everyday life, involves pedagogy, participation, and experimentation. One particular innovative aspect to this tactic is its attention

to the broader structure of domination informed by their particular conception of capitalism and the digital era. Each performance not only provides opportunities for audience participation, it seeks to de-mystify power discourses, for example that of evolutionary theory. Recombinant theater resembles in some aspects a spectacular teach-in. Figure 1 presents a snapshot of an example of this elaborate tactic, the *Cult of the New Eve* project, performed in 2000 with Paul Vanouse and Faith Wilding (2000a). In this performative counterfeit, the CAE attempt to strip away what they might term the bio-techno-theological rhetoric of scientists and the industry of authority by couching it in the guise of a cult. Through web cast sermons, street actions, counterfeit products, and a pedagogical and dialogic setup, a critical space opens contributing to what the group hopes is a perpetual residue in everyday life, a “never-ending theater of becoming” (CAE 2001, 102).<sup>23</sup> The purpose of infiltrating life in this matter is to generate a direct experience of abstract and benign domination. They describe their project *Flesh Machine* as,

a participatory piece of process art that had both virtual and physical components. The primary goal was to place participants in the process of flesh commodification, so that the extent of the contemporary flesh revolution could be experienced in a direct, viewer-centered way. We hoped that those who took part in the process would come away from the experience with a deeper critical perspective on developing flesh markets (CAE 1999, 193).

In addition to the participatory counter-spectacle of recombinant theater, CAE produce extensive theoretical texts and corresponding web sites regarding each biotechnology project.

Another action the group partakes in is their example of a nomadic work in *Electronic*

#### *Civil Disobedience:*

Critical Art Ensemble designed this work to be performed at tourist sites and locations of extreme consumption. Note that such locations are heavily garrisoned and fortified, so only the slightest act of deviance is needed to provoke a coercive response.

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<sup>23</sup> Other examples include *Flesh Machine* (1997-98) and *Marching Plague* (2006). Many performances of recombinant theater revolve around their recent focus on biotechnology.



The performer selected a spot near an entrance/exit area at a public site, taking a position at the side of the entrance way so as to minimize blockage. In place, he began to set up a toy car track and then proceeded to push toy cars around the track. Other cars were displayed for anyone else who wanted to participate. Other collective members insinuated themselves into the crowd that developed, and spoke with the onlookers.

The results: The crowd generally began by speculating on the mental health of the performer. Common themes were that the performer was “loony,” “on drugs,” or a “Viet Nam vet.” Some people would join the performer in pushing cars around the track, sometimes as a taunt, but mostly as gesture of sympathy. Within two to five minutes security guards or police would arrive on the scene. They would approach cautiously, fearing it was a disturbed person who might be prone to violence....The sight of security forces would attract more people to the scene. Security would eventually tell the performer to “move along.” The performer would ignore the command, and act as if he were oblivious to the people around him. Security would then threaten the performer with arrest if he did not move. This is the moment when the most interesting dialogue began, and the greatest understanding of public management emerged. The spectators were suddenly confronted with the reality that a person was about to be arrested simply for playing with toy cars. On most occasions, the majority of people in the crowd would make verbal protests while standing in stunned disbelief, although in every case there were those who thought the police action was for the best, and that the performer really did need help. On one occasion, violence between the police and the crowd was on the verge of breaking out, and the performance was broken off prematurely. In all other cases, the performance was stopped just prior to arrest (1996, 52-54).

This nomadic action, an exercise of performance theorist Augusto Boal’s (1979) invisible theater, is a simple illustration of the logic of CAE methods. By referencing their discussion of a dramaturgical model through which to critique everyday social relations and authoritarian culture, one can note the dissolution of the divide between art and everyday life as a pedagogical project that unveils latent benign power. Like recombinant theater, participation informs this presentation as well. However, where recombinant theater seeks to subject discourse to critique, invisible theater and other similar tactics arouse the attentions of what the group might call an ‘authoritarian agent,’ police officers or security guards, and embroil them in the political drama of exposition. Such actions are similar to the effect of manufactured vulnerability found in many popular non-violent methods of contention (Doherty 1999a); only through this inadvertent complicity is the tactic effective at eliciting the appropriate cognitive and emotional response from third parties.

The group engages in a number of other actions. One of *Adbusters*'s favorite tactics and a typical one for the CAE is the uncommercial. As Åsa Wettergren (2005, 8n2) notes, the term uncommercial actually refers to two distinct tactics. One involves the spoofing of a corporate commercial in order to critique the message the corporation is sending, while the other resembles a short film that 'advertises' the concerns of the group. Along with the culture jamming group the Institute for Applied Autonomy, CAE employ what they refer to as contestational robots (2001, ch. 6). These robots are designed to take the place of the physically vulnerable human while performing certain functions that elicit the attention of authority, such as graffiti writing, pamphleteering, and performing as a mobile noise bomb. Another tactic is the strategic placement of informative works, such as those that comment on the medical regime in the United States and the superfluity of technology. Other notable actions include bike radios that blare détournements, plagiarized texts, combines and bricolages, small digital devices placed in various environments that display humorous and critical messages, "sorry" bricks and flags at tourist sites or monuments, and the renaming of streets.

#### **5.2.4 Dispositions, Strategies, and Tactics**

The question summoned here is whether CAE possess the schemes of perception, appreciation, and action that Bourdieu calls the aesthetic disposition. Attention will focus on that aspect of the aesthetic disposition, the creative gaze, which regards common, banal, even ugly objects, discourses, and practices as aesthetic materials. In addition, I further elaborate on CAE's construction of their strategies, which helps to bring together their theoretical perspective with their practical activism and clarifies the relation between dispositions and tactics.

As practitioners of tactical media, CAE employ rhetoric *and* practice in a conceptual space that blurs the line between art and everyday life. They refer to the production of culture,

the process through which the semiotic regime, the symbolic order, or authoritarian culture negotiates its domination, as their arena of contention. At the micro-level, everyday life is the site of negotiation and domination. They contend that “in the arena of cultural production...the better a work can blend with the everyday life system (and yet alienate its viewer from the oppressive rote of everyday life), causing them to reflect on their position in it, the contestational voice will enter the ideational bunker” (1996, 49). *Contra* the dichotomy between art and life, CAE seek to blur the two. In order for art to achieve its critical function, it must make itself intelligible to the viewer. Art discards its opacity by insinuating itself into the familiar. This process seeks to penetrate everyday life, the repetitious concerns, pleasures, anticipations, memories, and habits of the viewer, thereby bringing to consciousness the relation of the particular to the general, of the concrete to the abstract, of the real to the virtual. By making everyday life lucid with its relation to broader macro-processes and domination, the artwork intends to generate a moment of liberation in which the viewer becomes cognizant of the social hierarchies and power relationships they are embedded within. CAE’s high regard for the Living Theater is instructive: “The Living Theater collapsed the life and art distinction...After all, only by examining everyday life through the frame of a dramaturgical model can one witness the poverty of this performative matrix” (1994, 62). This framing is at once aesthetic and strategic, baring the impoverishment for the scrutiny of the critical. Making this poverty lucid involves a particular process:

CAE’s interest in the Living Theater stems from our belief that it offered a proto-postmodern model of cultural production. The group quite consciously located itself in the liminal position between the real and the simulated. Various behaviors were appropriated and redeployed so perfectly that, regardless of their ontological status, they had the material impact of the real. The Living Theatre performed the crisis of the real before it had been adequately theorized, and contributed to the conceptual foundation now used to understand and create virtual theatre. It helped make it clear that for virtual theatre to have any contestational value, it must loop back to the materiality of everyday life (Dery 2002).

This looping back is precisely the movement that CAE seeks to initiate. Through penetrating the rhythms of everyday life, they intend to engage participants in a more abstract discourse through a de-materialization and a detouring of everyday life, an ironic exhibition of the management of public space. In addition, by remaining within the everyday life systems of participants, CAE aim to re-materialize this discourse and fertilize a critical spirit within a mundane environment.

For example:

CAE carried out a guerrilla performance in Sheffield, UK...in the hope of revealing some of the hidden structures of domination in everyday life. CAE chose a harmless action that took place in a location where the typical activities of the local population would not be disturbed. The activity chosen was to give away beer and cigarettes. The location selected for the action was a pedestrian mall and transportation artery. Here CAE attempted to inject the expressive possibilities of open exchange found in a public bar into a space that was reserved exclusively for consumption. Although the area was allegedly a public space, no conversation, conviviality, or coming together of diverse groups (or any other characteristic of bourgeois utopian public space) occurred there. Once this managed space was broken by the alien gesture of offering free beer and cigarettes, these very same elements of utopian public space immediately emerged. However, so did other restrictive structures of everyday life. For example, the environment that was created demonstrated male privilege. Far fewer women participated, and most of those who entered the environment stood at the periphery and observed the activity from the margins. This social constellation stood out as the perfect representation of the gender hierarchy found in ordinary social space. These and other elements of expression management in the performative realm became immediately visible, particularly for those in the center of the event. The most interesting reaction from the male participants was complete astonishment at the action. The whole context—a moment of meeting new people, having conversations, getting drunk while waiting for the tram, getting free commodities, and so on—seemed so unbelievable that as one man put it, “It’s a dream come true.” Years of socialization had made it seem impossible that members of the public could appropriate the space of the commodity. In this case, prior to the event, reterritorialization of the space of the commodity through public process could only be imagined in the confines of a personal, interior dreamspace (CAE 2001, 90-91).

Through participation (“particularly for those in the center of the event”) in an event embedded in everyday life, the action aims to expose the nature of domination in the context of that which is most familiar, a mall in this case.

CAE claim that such nomadic strategies and tactics must engage nomadic power, that fluid digital flow. As noted in my discussion of culture jamming, the inherent danger in engaging in actions like détournement is the probability that the spectacle will recuperate the

appropriated object. CAE are fully aware of the strategies of power and offer a warning: “the rate at which strategies of subversion are co-opted indicates that the adaptability of power is too often underestimated” (CAE 1994, 2; 1996, 29). This is primarily an interpretive dilemma:

Tactical media rarely escapes the problems of secondary representations, and the few material trace elements, subservient and partial records of an immediate lived experience, often appropriate the value of the experiential process. After the event is over, photos, scripts, videos, graphics, and other elements remain, and are open to capitulation and *recuperation* (emphasis added, CAE 2001, 9).

Despite the inevitability of recuperation, CAE remain practical about resistant cultural practices:

Whether to take a position at the center [mainstream public discourse] or the margins really depends on the goals that have been set by the individual or group. The reasons for doing projects on the margins are obvious. Work in such areas is great for education and organizing. From a collective history viewpoint--many individuals and groups working on a specific issue can bring about some positive changes. Working in the center is trickier, because as you stated it can always be used by the center for its own ends. The same can be said when the margins are organized well enough to have a public voice. Take the example of ACT-UP. This group collectively changed the protocols at the NIH in regard to HIV. At the same time, it was used as an example of democratic action that can impact bureaucracy, an example of people having free speech, etc. In many ways the movement was used to reinforce the public perception that democracy exists in capitalist economy...However, the ability of the sight machine to reconfigure resistant actions (particularly once they address the center) is not a reason to criticize. If a group is creating resistant initiatives as a public practice (as opposed to an underground or otherwise hidden practice) then the cycle of resistance and assimilation is just a given. The important thing to watch is how well a group negotiates this give and take, and not whether or not it does it perfectly (CAE 2000b; cf. 2000a, 137-138).

They contend that “despite nomadic power, on the micro-level of everyday life activity, and within the parameters of physical locality, spatial appropriations and the disruption of mechanisms for extreme expression management still have value” (CAE 2001, 106).

The descriptions of nomadic actions provided here help shed light on some of the principles of tactical media (CAE 2000b). What the group refers to as *specificity* describes the determination of the form and content of an action by the particularities of a given audience with their everyday life system. *Nomadicality* refers to a willingness to utilize and penetrate any situation or site. Together, they describe a diffuse and situational form of activism: “[we] use any media necessary to meet the demands of the situation.... [we] do not limit [our] ventures to

the exclusive use of one medium....[S]pecialization does not predetermine action” (CAE 2001, 8). Acts of resistance and pedagogy are performed in “galleries and museums, radio, TV, festivals, bars and clubs, the net, [to] the street” (CAE 2000a, 136). The group insist that “no matter what variety of everyday life systems a person participates in, an element of radical practice can always be initiated within it” (CAE 1996, 52). They profess an interdisciplinarity in their interaction with numerous venues and audiences (ibid.). As alluded to above, *amateurism* connotes a resistance to specialization and a willingness to engage in new activities.<sup>24</sup> Adherence to principles of specificity, nomadicality, and amateurism defines tactical media as a highly adaptive and creative form of contention.

The actions sketched above clearly express an aesthetic perception of everyday life. Their actions and rhetoric suggest a critical familiarity with the field of art in general, but more distinctly the fields of performance art and theatre. These perceptions inform their strategic and tactical response to what they term authoritarian culture and the semiotic regime. In addition, the group is clearly endowed with highly critical and reflexive competencies. For CAE, cultural activism is synonymous with a process of cultural production that blends into everyday life with the intended consequence of critical reflection. Mirroring its construction of the objects of claims: the semiotic regime, bunkers, and nomadic power, CAE engage in a nomadic strategy of resistance, of claim-making that is creative, ephemeral, flexible, and simultaneously embedded in everyday life. Whether erecting counter-spectacular arenas of dialogue and subversion, infiltrating newspapers, or putting robots in the harms way of dissent, CAE exhibit a creative zeal in constructing their tactics. This politicized aesthetic disposition renders the materials of everyday life susceptible to appropriation as a tool of resistance and critique. The pedagogic,

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<sup>24</sup> The fourth principle, *deterritorialization*, describes the intentionally temporary occupation of space. *Counter-induction*, the final principle, expresses recognition “that all knowledge systems can have limits and internal contradictions” (CAE 2000b).

nomadic, strategic, and cultural dimensions of CAE practice are directly informed by an apparently reflexive and aesthetic orientation or disposition.

## 5.3 UBERMORGEN

### 5.3.1 Introduction

Based in Vienna, Austria, members Hans Bernhard and lizvix fill out Ubermorgen. Founded in 1999, Ubermorgen, which means “the day after tomorrow,” “super-tomorrow,” or “beyond tomorrow,” is a duo of artists whose art primarily revolves around an exploration of the possibilities and contradictions of media. Hans Bernhard specializes in digital and fine art and is a founder of the group etoy.CORPORATION. Lizvix produces artistic and commercial net.art and is a founder of the group 194.152.164.137. Together and apart, their award-winning work has found its way into numerous esteemed art institutions, the Internet, and other mass media.

Ubermorgen engage in what they term “digital actionism,” “media hacking,” and/or “media actionism.” Digital actionism “describes the intuitive transposition of the principles of actionism into the digital” (Bernhard 2007). Here, Bernhard is referencing the avant-garde motley crew the Vienna Actionists, a group of artists who revolutionized performance and body arts through disruptive, controversial, often violent actions. The rhetoric of a transposition of this radical repertoire into the digital serves to highlight the experimental, indeterminate, and the inhospitable in Ubermorgen action: “Playground is the body of the “Actionist” and especially the Head. It vibrates, it becomes threatening, it accelerates, the communication gets out of control and the network suddenly turns into a global menace” (ibid.). Media hacking refers to “the massive intrusion into mass media channels with standard technology such as email or mobile communications, mobile phones, etc.” (ibid.). Ubermorgen regard media “as plastic

phenomenon, media and media networks can be formed and carved and brought into form like sculptures” (Ubermorgen 2005). Their influences are not exclusively performative and digital:

Radical self-experiments, social and technological experiments... Today I consider this process to be freestyle research. Conceptual art is crossed with experimental research and massmedia stunts - but the products (sites, digital images, sculptures, emails, logfiles, paintings, drawings, etc.) are positioned in the art context (Ubermorgen, 2006).

Lizvix describes Ubermorgen’s work “as a merge between actionism, hacking, and classic pop art” (Ubermorgen 2005). Bernhard adds, “We mesh and route aggressive tactical behavior with conservative fine art in a practical and theoretical compound” (Ubermorgen 2006). The gist of this rhetoric centers on the experimental utilization and penetration of mass media, especially the Internet, and the exploration of the relationship between users and media. Referring to Ubermorgen:

Someone released an idea - a virus - and it spread it like a manic. It bounced back and lifted the .com level into extremes [100s of millions of viewers]. These research environments were fantastic, we were able to drop info-pieces into the global network-matrix and watch them travel, morph and come back.. Then we could give them another spin - mix them with other information or combine them with classic knowledge like a spin-doctor. Today I am interested in mixing the different strategies and in exploring double negative affirmative levels of meaning and blind meaning. Still not political and non-ideological, a high level of freedom is guaranteed. The reality and research becomes highly complex due to this fact. Unforeseen events are triggered and can be explored. The combination of inner networks such as the brain and the nerve-systems and the networks we are connected to are my fields of research and production. How do mental disorders of the human affect the global network and how do mental disorders of the global network affect the human. In relation to uber Morgen this is a quite interesting question. We have attacked the network with a series of totally mental / extreme projects (Ubermorgen 2005).

Ubermorgen specialize in these exploratory mental/digital research projects that attempt to spread ideas like viruses. As will become most apparent regarding the action Vote-Auction, the aggressive penetration of such environments can literally envelop millions of people and draw the hostile scrutiny of powerful governments.

As demonstrated by the quotation above, the duo is very obstinate in its claim that their work is not ideological or political. Bernhard states that the group’s actions resemble field experiments, for “political intentions would destroy the setup and we’d have a problem” (n.d.;



see 2007). Elsewhere, he stresses one of their projects does not intend to criticize its subject, but merely experiment with the “global click-economy” (Ubermorgen 2006). He rejects the terms “culture jamming” and “activism” and instead opts for media actionism because the former are too political (Bernhard n.d.). The duo states that there is “no goal except the experiment, no political message or ideological foundation to serve - an ideal world - our ‘laboratory’” (Ubermorgen 2005). However, the actionism of Ubermorgen perhaps fundamentally leads to the proposition that “Ubermorgen poses questions, the answer is up to the thinking individual user” (ibid.). It would then appear that Ubermorgen perform a critical function, as suggested by their stance towards the legal realm: “Sometimes laws have to be challenged in order to update/optimize the legal system” (Bernhard 2007). In speaking of a particular Ubermorgen action, Michael Dieter states as much when he suggests that:

*Amazon Noir* illustrates how forces confined as exterior to control (virality, piracy, noncommunication) regularly operate as points of distinction to generate change and innovation. Just as hackers are legitimately employed to challenge the durability of network exchanges, malfunctions are relied upon as potential sources of future information (2007).

After Bernhard claims their Google project was not criticizing the corporation, Lizvix describes their project as “trying to improve the system” (Ubermorgen 2006). Hence, it would appear that Ubermorgen are rather distinct in that their contentious efforts may aim to improve the system through a conscious stimulation of the process of recuperation. In another interview, however, Bernhard asserts that “[we] are not changing the situation and we do not want to” (GWEI 2006).

Beyond an overt political project, Ubermorgen, like other such groups, practice a politics of information and free speech (Dieter 2007). They describe their central motivation as the accumulation of “as much information as possible as fast as possible as chaotic as possible and to redistribute this information via digital channels” (Ubermorgen 2006). “[M]edia hacking seems to be a more efficient and intelligent way to get ideas across the news ticker” (Ubermorgen

2005). In their action *Google Will Eat Itself (GWEI)*, they decry the “inner risk of digital totalitarianism” that Google embodies (GWEI 2005a). Bernhard suggests that “[we] are simply developing strategies to symbolically *attack* such market giants,” “to search for the weak points within strong and large-scaled systems and exploit them aggressively” (emphasis added, GWEI 2006). Nebojsa Milikic describes *GWEI* as an action “that highlight[s] the boundaries of sheer necessity, namely, the imperative of defense against the supremacy of the good guys – in this case corporate logic – becoming a natural and in and of itself good state of things” (2007). In a press release, the group state that Google “must be transformed into a public institution” (GWEI 2005b). With their Amazon Noir project, they flog Amazon.com, copyright guardians, and the protectionist economy for violating their right to share and to give away, to “freely construct their own physical memory” (Ludivico, Cirio, and Ubermorgen 2005). Collaborator Paolo Cirio, when discussing Creative Commons, copyleft, and other common goods licensing, proclaims, “the latest movements [Creative Commons, etc.]...are a needed *resistance* in a world where the use of cultural content is ever less a right but ever more a business” (emphasis added, Amazon Noir 2004). Lizvlx describes her motivations for Vote-auction as disrespect for legal systems, bureaucracy, and anti-communication (Ubermorgen 2006). Altogether, although the group rejects any overt political or ideological motivations, their language and practice ambiguously betrays such motivations. This sketch of the experimental media strategies and art of Ubermorgen references a number of their projects. Before proceeding with a discussion of the aesthetic disposition, I provide an overview of the Ubermorgen repertoire.

### **5.3.2 Tactical Repertoires**

Ubermorgen’s tactical repertoire is a cornucopia of experimental actions. Their most celebrated and spectacular actions together comprise what they term their EKMRZ Trilogy. The

subject of each act is one Internet corporate giant: Google, Amazon, and Ebay. Each involves the détournement of a digital program designed by the corporation. These strategic appropriations are accompanied by a fictional story that dramatizes the action, exhibitions at museums, and websites that display theory, feedback, press, and other exhibits. The first in the trilogy, *Google Will Eat Itself (GWEI)*, centered on the corporations AdSense program. AdSense allows users to generate revenue by putting small text and image ads on their websites that when clicked incite micro-payments sent to those who run the site. Ubermorgen set up a huge store of such ads on hidden web sites. Entering any of these sites triggered a domino effect of clicks, which then resulted in micro-payments to Ubermorgen, which were then used to buy Google shares. Hence, Google was trapped in an auto-cannibalistic cycle fueled by its insatiable desire (and need) to advertise (GWEI n.d.). Google responded with letters recognizing the aesthetic function of *GWEI*, but at the same time, acknowledging the project was illegal for it ran counter to Google terms (Ubermorgen 2006). The company also took direct action in shutting down the initial website used to hook them in, though with no effect on the overall project (Bernhard n.d.).

With *Amazon Noir*, they designed a program that ripped thousands of books from Amazon.com through its “Search Inside the Book” function and made them widely available as pdf files (Amazon Noir 2006). Figure 2 presents a ‘re-materialization’ of this function. The fictional story appended to the action sketches a crime and its ‘betrayal,’ the court settlement with Amazon. In their words:

The Bad Guys (The Amazon Noir Crew: Cirio, Lizvix, Ludovico, Bernhard) stole copyrighted books from Amazon by using sophisticated robot-perversion technology coded by supervillain Paolo Cirio. A subliminal media fight and a covert legal dispute escalated into an online showdown with the heist of over 3000 books at the center of the story.

Lizvix from UBERMORGEN.COM had daily shoot outs with the global mass-media, Cirio continuously pushed the boundaries of copyright (books are just pixels on a screen or just ink on paper), Ludovico and Bernhard resisted kickback-bribes from powerful Amazon.com until they



Figure 2. A re-materialization of Amazon.com's "Search inside the Book" function (Ubermorgen 2007b).

finally gave in and sold the technology for an undisclosed sum to Amazon. Betrayal, blasphemy and pessimism finally split the gang of bad guys.

The good guys (Amazon.com) won the showdown and drove off into the blistering sun with the beautiful femme fatale, the seductive and erotic massmedia (Amazon Noir 2006).

Dramatic narratives of this sort serve to augment the aesthetic and technical quality of the action (Amazon Noir 2004).

Ubermorgen's most notable action was Vote-auction, an action dedicated to "Bringing Capitalism and Democracy Closer Together" (Bernhard n.d.). This project involved the selling of American votes online through a website originally developed by an American student. Posing as a corporation, Ubermorgen took over the operation after government pressure bore down on the American. Bernhard describes Vote-auction as "a global communication

experiment...to radically push the boundaries of mass media hacking... [and] legal art...under the constant strain of legal...and social pressure” (Ubermorgen 2006). The result was a vast media and political storm that involved a CNN special program, numerous other media outlets, and various American governmental agencies. When the U.S. government sent a flurry of e-mailed temporary injunctions, which successfully urged the DNS-Registrar, Corenic, to shut down the website several times, though with dubious legality, it inspired another signature Ubermorgen product: “(F)originals.” A (F)original is a:

forged original document; either forged or authentic document or forged & authentic: A Foriginal is always original and unique. Foriginals are pixels on screens or substance on material [i.e. ink on paper]. [F]originals are non pragmatic - they are absurd. They do not tell you whether they are real or forged - there is no original but also no fully forged / faked document (Bernhard 2007).

The first (F)original, the Injunction Generator, is a “public shutdown-service” that automatically generates a temporary injunction that is then sent to the offending website’s DNS-Registrar (Ubermorgen n.d.). This tactic, clearly hyper-modular in the sense I specified earlier in this thesis, has a number of other variations that include a bank statement generator and a prescription generator. (F)originals are not only reproductions of forged original paper or digital documents. Other notable Ubermorgen actions include PsychIOS, an installation piece documenting the symbiotic disorder between the drug, pop, and tech-addled Hans Bernhard and the global networks within which he works. As an ambiguously disinterested group, Ubermorgen also engineer a number of actions that are apparently benign, such as AnuScan, a webpainting, an absurd functionless photorealistic website, and the Sound of Ebay, a song generator that utilizes an Ebay program. Like innovative hothouse CAE, Ubermorgen’s artistic, strategic, and tactical repertoire of research, experimentation, and exhibition, whether benign or contentious, is highly variable and eccentric.

### 5.3.3 Dispositions, Strategies, and Tactics

Again, my aim is to ascertain whether a culture jamming group, Ubermorgen in this case, possesses the schemes of perception, appreciation, and action that Bourdieu calls the aesthetic disposition. As before, scrutiny will fall on that aspect of the aesthetic disposition, the creative gaze, which regards common, banal, even ugly objects, discourses, and practices as aesthetic materials. In addition, I further elaborate on Ubermorgen's strategic approach in order to clarify the relationship between dispositions, strategies, and the tactical innovations so characteristic of groups like CAE and Ubermorgen.

Bernhard suggests that essentially, what his work involves are experiments whose products are situated in the context of art (Ubermorgen 2006). Like CAE, Ubermorgen view the distinction between life and art as an artificial construct, one officially instituted by installing the object or action into a "white cube," a term connoting the sterile environment of a museum or other art institution (Bernhard n.d.). For Ubermorgen, the field of art is of an infinite expanse; everything is readily appropriated and aestheticized. As demonstrated, Ubermorgen have appropriated and hacked videogames, medical prescriptions, bank statements, Amazon.com, Google, Ebay, books, e-mail, television, cell phones, self-portraits, narcotics, advertisements, websites, and other mundane, common, or ugly objects or situations. Their site of contention, they argue, is practically uninhibited. One collaborator with the group describes the expanse of their field of actionism: "We play in different stages: on the net, on the old mass media and in the streets. We engage in our show different actors: the audience, media, art, and legal system" (Amazon Noir 2004). As the quote suggests, like CAE's 'performative matrix of everyday life,' Ubermorgen use a language of action, performance, and theatre that encompasses a vast array of social situations and physical contexts. In his discussion of digital actionism, Bernhard asserts

that created identities, both corporate and collective, are the “artistic field of expression and extreme forms of aesthetics” (Bernhard 2007, 1). The creation of various ensembles of identities for their projects, what the group calls “drama marketing,” is one manifestation of this argument (Ubermorgen 2005). The concept of “extreme” aesthetics, in particular the Psych|OS action, in which Bernhard himself is one accentuated point in a relation between users and the networks he is inscribed in, directly invokes a radical creativity, one which perceives a subversive aesthetic as a potentiality in everyday life, especially in the growing popularization of the Internet. *Amazon Noir* collaborator Paolo Cirio states, “[e]very layer of our complex society is in the scenography, because now happenings should be in the anthropological space of our contemporary culture” (Amazon Noir 2004). This scenography includes the vast new realm of the digital:

Today we face more than the Google search-engine, it has become a core-engine to organize the hermeneutics of digital everyday: searching, mapping, tagging, talking, feeding, mailing, advertising, analyzing, calculating... These actions are the emerging ingredients of media-integrated everyday life on the net – becoming the main features of communicational self-organization within the parameters of information-societies (Teufl 2008).

The tools and concepts of research and action are necessarily expanded to encompass this vast new area of experimentation and contention:

The computer and the network are (ab)used to create art and combine its multiple forms. The permanent amalgamation of fact and fiction points toward *an extremely expanded concept of one’s working materials*, that for UBERMORGEN.COM also include (international) rights, democracy, and global communication (input-feedback loops) (emphasis added, Ubermorgen 1999).

As the action Vote-auction reverberated through the mass media, for example, the scope of the aesthetic expanded. Bernhard refers to an episode of the CNN Program *Burden of Proof*, in which the action featured prominently, as a “‘contemporary pop-art’ video” (Ubermorgen 2005). In response to the American government’s actions, legal documents were aesthetically re-engineered. Ubermorgen are even keen on aestheticizing actions reminiscent of the physical transgression of the Vienna Actionists; in the appropriation of found video footage of the beating

of a police officer, an action Ubermorgen call Foriginal Media Hack No. 2, Lizvix sees “police violence and artistic performance melted together in a unique way, ugly!” (Ubermorgen 2007a).

Like CAE, Ubermorgen are highly eclectic and creative in their interpretation and appropriation of materials for opposition, experimentation, and critique. Yet they appear less explicitly political and more ambiguously disinterested than CAE. In the place of an emphasis on the cultural activist, Ubermorgen are more concerned with testing media and information and forcing them to logical extremes. This experimental practice is suffused with an aesthetic orientation or disposition, manifest in a panoply of actions that utilize the tactical potential in the accoutrements of the mundane and the new media. With *GWEI*, Bernhard describes the general approach as an “artistic strategy,” one employed by exploiting the giant’s weaknesses (GWEI 2006). Referring to another project, they state that “in general, “we use[d] language as a tactical and aesthetic tool to manipulate specific entities [i.e. institutions, media, humans] and to dream and speculate about the future” (Ubermorgen 2005). Bernhard claims the *GWEI* project is an aesthetic game. Lixvix suggests that art is their job, and that it functions as a way to pose questions (ibid.). I have shown how these operations and other actions the group partakes in are infused with a conception of art, of creative experimentation, with a grounding in everyday life and new media. In addition, much like CAE, they display critical, reflexive, and technical competencies derived from the artistic field and research on various media, especially web-based media. Following Rolfe (2005), Ubermorgen clearly possess technical skills that allow them to navigate and utilize media technologies and discourses. The process of experimentation employed by Ubermorgen necessarily entails the group’s utilization of a vast store of materials, supporting Schock’s contention that non-violent methods of contention are practically limitless in their potential variation.



## CONCLUSION

This paper has addressed the question of tactical innovation in the culture jamming repertoire. I argued that existing theories of tactical innovation: marginal, anomic, and strategic, are relatively deficient in explaining culture jamming tactical innovation. Recent approaches to the study of social movements and contentious politics have attempted to refine dispositional accounts of action. From these approaches, I embraced a biographical theory of innovation. In this theory, actors engage in actions that express and simultaneously constitute the identities and dispositions acquired through their life experience. These actions, of course, remain constrained and constituted by broader structural, environmental, and cultural determinants, but individual and/or collective life experiences, dispositions, identities, and values are essential determinants. The hypothesis presented suggests that culture jammers in particular possess schemes of perception, appreciation, and action that sociologist Pierre Bourdieu calls the aesthetic disposition. This disposition, derived from the field of art, renders mundane, common, even ugly objects, discourses, and practices susceptible to aestheticization. In addition, as a relatively indeterminate social space and by virtue of the nature of its structure, the field of art generates highly reflexive and critical dispositions disposed towards creativity, distinction, and innovation. 0100101110101101.org member Eva Mattes describes a “natural instinct...to take things and manipulate things that are already there and put them together to make something different out of them: To mix symbols of everyday life and make some creative work out of it” (01.org n.d.). The naturalness ascribed to such creativity is symptomatic of the deeply habitual nature of the aesthetic disposition. By employing the creative gaze of this aesthetic disposition endemic to the experimental and creative nature of contemporary art, culture jammers construct contentious

strategies and tactically innovate through the appropriation of the materials of the mundane and the quotidian.

In addition to my intentions, I want to stress the weaknesses of my methodological approach and the modest scope of this paper. First, there is a conspicuous lack of systematic data regarding culture jamming and other forms of symbolic contention. Second, as this paper relies on the case study approach, case selection was not random or representative, and there is no provision for variation on my explanatory or dependent variables. Considering the limitations of my methodology, I suggest that this paper aims to empirically illustrate an affinity between dispositions and tactical innovations rather than test an explicit hypothesis. While I claim to have demonstrated a link between social context or field, acquired dispositions, strategic constructions, and tactical activities, this demonstration is necessarily an illustration as opposed to a rigorous testing of my hypothesis and theory.

Third, while I claim that culture jamming tactical innovation is in large part a consequence of the dispositions produced by the field of art, I do not attend to variation within this field. Clearly, not all artists or cultural producers are culture jammers, and not all culture jammers have highly experimental and creative repertoires. Artist collectives like Ubermorgen, My Dads Strip Club, the Critical Art Ensemble, and the Cacophony Society, what Rolfe (2005) calls innovative hothouses, appear to practice such repertoires. Other groups, like the Billboard Liberation Front, la Molleindustria, or Negativland, to name a few, do not, yet they do appear to possess aesthetic dispositions. While I argue that in this paper I advanced the study of contentious behavior by specifying the social context within which culture jamming derives its radical creativity, the question remains, then, what necessary *and* sufficient conditions are conducive to the highly innovative repertoires of innovative hothouses. I therefore do not

provide an explanation for such variation. Following Bourdieu's sociology of art, however, what the biographical theory of tactical innovation suggests is that those agents at the perimeter or the frontier of the field, those who occupy the field of restricted production and pursue peripheral strategies of distinction, would be more likely to generate tactical innovations.

As a corollary to my third reservation, I also do not address the important question of politicization: why do some agents of the artistic field possess political dispositions while others do not? One of the reasons the field of art is so indeterminate and non-institutionalized is the heterogeneity of dispositions that are drawn to the field. The incorporation of the norms and rules and dispositions of the field are necessarily deposited atop a highly variable distribution of dispositions. A more detailed and nuanced analysis of the biographical dimension of cultural producers, of culture jammers and their fellow artists, should provide more perspective on the variation in both politicization and innovation. To be more general, a nuanced analysis of micro-foundations could provide a more systematic and discriminating portrait of contention in general, and culture jamming in particular.

Fourth, another limitation of this paper is an inattention to culture jamming as a social movement industry and a field of contention. Following Crossley (2003; 2006b), it seems plausible to argue that culture jamming as a form of activism has itself generated its own dispositions. Evidence of this contention can be found in the culture jamming repertoire of contention described earlier in this paper and in the case studies presented above. The Critical Art Ensemble, for example, employed a sophisticated vocabulary derived from and reflective of an immersion in historical traditions of cultural resistance. Attending to the particular dynamics and structure of such a field should provide generous possibilities for future research into semiological, discursive, and symbolic forms of activism.

Fifth, an astute observer may note the potential fragility of using a term like repertoire to organize conceptually the tactical and strategic practices of an innovative hothouse like Ubermorgen. Such experimental and creative groups, though constrained and constituted, nevertheless appear to have broken free of the glacial metaphor of the repertoire of contention. Rather, this paper argues that despite such apparently boundless agency, culture jamming does not possess a limitless fountain of tactics. It is constrained and constituted by political, economic, mundane, spatial, normative, historical, agonistic, and cognitive conditions. These include the legal and material conditions of advanced capitalist democracies and their particular policies regarding neoliberalism and social control; the radical creativity of corporations and consumer culture as manifested in products and advertising; the available and resonant discourse of the market and globalization; the particular linguistic and semiotic structures that allow for the creation and interpretation of irony and other plays of meaning; the structure and nature of the field of art; the historical precedents of the Situationists and other groups; and its embeddedness in the general aestheticization of postmodernity. As lizvix claims, *Google Will Eat Itself* is a product of its time, a unique result of a unique concatenation of phenomena (GWEI 2006). In this regard, culture jammers, especially innovative hothouses, are, like all social movements and contention, products of their time and place. If we follow Crossley (2002b) in arguing for a more differentiated social topography in social movement studies, then the logic of fields can help us to better distinguish between repertoires that vary in their tendencies towards tactical inertia and tactical innovation.

Finally, this paper does not attempt to address the question of tactical diffusion. As it is interwoven intimately with many scholars conception of tactical innovation, if not for empirical convenience, more work on the transnational origins and diffusion of such actions as

shopdropping, subvertising, and whirlmarting might help scholars to better understand the dynamics of diffusion in media-saturated societies and in phenomena like culture jamming. As Tilly's marginal theory of innovation suggests, tactical diffusion potentially initiates tactical innovation. Specifying the conditions under which such creativity occurs can only contribute to a fuller understanding of the tactical and strategic behavior of culture jamming in particular and contention in general.

Beyond culture jamming, there are other areas of contention witness to certain flurries of tactical innovation. In his work on the culture jamming group Reclaim the Streets, John Jordan approximates my thesis with regard to the direct action or DIY movement in Great Britain. Direct action is a movement or form of contention not entirely conceptually distinct from my understanding of culture jamming. After the explosion in inspiration laid down by Dada, Surrealism, the Situationists, and the 1960's counterculture movements, Jordan states, "It seems that at the close of the twentieth century new forms of creative and poetic resistance have finally found their time" (1998, 129). Brian Doherty likewise observes that direct action environmentalism in Britain is unusually creative and tactically obsessive (1999a: 88). ACT UP is another interesting anomaly in terms of tactical repertoires. In such forms of political action, the political creativity of contention that has blossomed in the last quarter century continues to appropriate and detourn new areas like biotechnology and the Internet. Considering the modesty of this thesis, a more expansive study may find the precise political, cultural, historical, material, and biographical factors conducive to such tactical creativity.

This thesis contributes broadly to studies of political contentious behavior. While some actors express themselves politically or make claims by voting, rioting, blogging, striking, petitioning, marching, or donating, culture jammers engage in highly creative and ironic means

of participation and action. These include whirlmart, virtual sit-ins, counterfeit, virtual blockades, flash mobs, gripe sites, e-mail bombs, collage, link bombs, bricolage, computer viruses, Hakim Bey's poetic terrorism, worms, Trojan horses, agit-prop, slashing (or textual poaching), pie attacks, shopdropping (or droplifting), subvertising (or adbusting), cut-up, spontaneous community, plagiarism, imposture, copyleft, pirate radio, virtual hunger strikes, sousveillance, fax bombs, uncommercials, media hoaxes, and innumerable variations of street art and street theater. As these and other actions attest, culture jammers have relaxed the glacial analogy through the possession of artistic and creative perceptual schemes and radically pushed their repertoire through experimental and innovative agency.

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## APPENDIX:

### CULTURE JAMMING INDIVIDUALS, GROUPS, AND EVENTS

0100101110101101.org	<a href="http://www.0100101110101101.org">http://www.0100101110101101.org</a>
The Abbie Hoffman Brigade	<a href="http://users.lmi.net/bblackie/ahb">http://users.lmi.net/bblackie/ahb</a>
Adbusters	<a href="http://www.adbusters.org">http://www.adbusters.org</a>
Akayism	<a href="http://www.akayism.org">http://www.akayism.org</a>
AmeriCON Inc.	<a href="http://americanincorporated.com">http://americanincorporated.com</a>
Banksy	<a href="http://www.banksy.co.uk">http://www.banksy.co.uk</a>
Barbie Liberation Organization	<a href="http://www.sniggle.net/barbie.php">http://www.sniggle.net/barbie.php</a>
Billboard Liberation Front	<a href="http://www.billboardliberation.com">http://www.billboardliberation.com</a>
Billionaires for Bush	<a href="http://billionairesforbush.com/index.php">http://billionairesforbush.com/index.php</a>
Biotic Baking Brigade	<a href="http://www.bioticbakingbrigade.org">http://www.bioticbakingbrigade.org</a>
The Bubble Project	<a href="http://thebubbleproject.com">http://thebubbleproject.com</a>
B.U.G.A.U. P.	<a href="http://www.bugaup.org">http://www.bugaup.org</a>
The Burning Man	<a href="http://www.burningman.com">http://www.burningman.com</a>
C6	<a href="http://c6.org/subdir_xml/index.php">http://c6.org/subdir_xml/index.php</a>
The Cacophony Society	<a href="http://www.cacophony.org">http://www.cacophony.org</a>
California Department of Corrections	<a href="http://www.geocities.com/billboardcorrections/index.htm">http://www.geocities.com/ billboardcorrections/index.htm</a>
Center for Tactical Magic	<a href="http://www.tacticalmagic.org">http://www.tacticalmagic.org</a>
The Church of the SubGenius	<a href="http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Church_of_the_SubGenius">http://en.wikipedia.org/ wiki/Church_of_the_SubGenius</a>
Clandestine Insurgent Rebel Clown Army	<a href="http://www.clownarmy.org">http://www.clownarmy.org</a>
Critical Art Ensemble	<a href="http://www.critical-art.net">http://www.critical-art.net</a>

The Cult of the Dead Cow	<a href="http://www.cultdeadcow.com">http://www.cultdeadcow.com</a>
Cultural Terrorism Agency	<a href="http://www.irational.org/cta">http://www.irational.org/cta</a>
The Disumbrationist League	<a href="http://archive.groovy.net/dl">http://archive.groovy.net/dl</a>
The Droplift Project	<a href="http://droplift.org">http://droplift.org</a>
etoy.CORPORATION	<a href="http://www.etoy.com">http://www.etoy.com</a>
The electrohippies	<a href="http://www.fraw.org.uk/hippies/index.shtml">http://www.fraw.org.uk/hippies/index.shtml</a>
Emergency Broadcast Network	<a href="http://emn-usa.com/ebn">http://emn-usa.com/ebn</a>
The Evolution Control Committee	<a href="http://evolution-control.com">http://evolution-control.com</a>
Free Words Project	<a href="http://www.freewords.org">http://www.freewords.org</a>
Goy Division	<a href="http://web.archive.org/web/20000610141109/www.monsterbit.com/candyass/kritikal.html">http://web.archive.org/web/20000610141109/www.monsterbit.com/candyass/kritikal.html</a>
Graffiti Research Lab	<a href="http://www.graffitiresearchlab.com">http://www.graffitiresearchlab.com</a>
Guerrilla Girls	<a href="http://www.guerrillagirls.com/posters/index.shtml">http://www.guerrillagirls.com/posters/index.shtml</a>
Hyper-Redundant-Mart	<a href="http://www.trojanmedia.org/hypermart/about.html">http://www.trojanmedia.org/hypermart/about.html</a>
Institute for Applied Autonomy	<a href="http://www.appliedautonomy.com">http://www.appliedautonomy.com</a>
La Molleindustria	<a href="http://www.molleindustria.it/home-eng.php">http://www.molleindustria.it/home-eng.php</a>
Magnum-Opus	<a href="http://www.magnus-opus.com">http://www.magnus-opus.com</a>
Monochrom	<a href="http://www.monochrom.at/english">http://www.monochrom.at/english</a>
My Dads Strip Club	<a href="http://www.mydadsstripclub.com">http://www.mydadsstripclub.com</a>
National Cynical Network	<a href="http://www.nationalcynical.com">http://www.nationalcynical.com</a>
n.a.t.o.	<a href="http://www.beyondtv.org/nato">http://www.beyondtv.org/nato</a>
Negativland	<a href="http://www.negativland.com">http://www.negativland.com</a>

New World Disorder	<a href="http://www.newworldisorder.tk">http://www.newworldisorder.tk</a>
The Obey Campaign	<a href="http://www.obeygiant.com">http://www.obeygiant.com</a>
People Like Us	<a href="http://www.peoplelikeus.org">http://www.peoplelikeus.org</a>
Persuasive Games	<a href="http://www.persuasivegames.com">http://www.persuasivegames.com</a>
PublixTheatre Caravan	<a href="http://www.no-racism.net/nobordertour/publixtheatre/publixtheatre.html">http://www.no-racism.net/nobordertour/publixtheatre/publixtheatre.html</a>
Rebar	<a href="http://www.rebargroup.org">http://www.rebargroup.org</a>
Reclaim the Streets	<a href="http://rts.gn.apc.org">http://rts.gn.apc.org</a>
Reverend Billy & the Church of Stop Shopping	<a href="http://www.revbilly.com">http://www.revbilly.com</a>
Richard Dedomenici	<a href="http://www.dedomenici.co.uk">http://www.dedomenici.co.uk</a>
®™ARK	<a href="http://www.rtmark.com">http://www.rtmark.com</a>
The Ruckus Society	<a href="http://www.ruckus.org/index.php">http://www.ruckus.org/index.php</a>
Ryan Watkins-Hughes	<a href="http://www.shopdropping.net">http://www.shopdropping.net</a>
Soy Bomb Nation	<a href="http://www.hiphopmusic.com/soybomb.html">http://www.hiphopmusic.com/soybomb.html</a>
Space Hijackers	<a href="http://www.spacehijackers.co.uk">http://www.spacehijackers.co.uk</a>
Survival Research Labs	<a href="http://www.srl.org">http://www.srl.org</a>
The Surveillance Camera Players	<a href="http://www.notbored.org/scp.html">http://www.notbored.org/scp.html</a>
Temporary Services	<a href="http://www.temporaryservices.org">http://www.temporaryservices.org</a>
Ubermorgen	<a href="http://www.ubermorgen.com/2007/index.html">http://www.ubermorgen.com/2007/index.html</a>
Undenk	<a href="http://www.undenk.com">http://www.undenk.com</a>
The Vacuum Cleaner	<a href="http://www.thevacuumcleaner.co.uk">http://www.thevacuumcleaner.co.uk</a>
Wearcam	<a href="http://www.wearcam.org">http://www.wearcam.org</a>
The Yes Men	<a href="http://www.theyesmen.org">http://www.theyesmen.org</a>

## VITA

David Iles, III, was born in Denham Springs, Louisiana, in 1982. He is a 2001 graduate of Denham Springs High School. In the spring of 2002, he began undergraduate studies at Southeastern Louisiana University, from which he received in 2006 a Bachelor of Arts Degree in political science and history. He continued his studies at the graduate program in the Department of Political Science at Louisiana State University that fall. He is scheduled to graduate with a Master of Arts Degree in May of 2009. His major field of interest is comparative politics, and research interests include contentious politics and social theory. He currently resides with his father in Denham Springs, Louisiana.