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EIGHT IS NOT ENOUGH:
A HISTORICAL, CULTURAL, AND PHILOSOPHICAL ANALYSIS OF THE FLASH MOB

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of Communication Studies

by
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ……ii

LIST OF FIGURES ……..……...v

ABSTRACT ……..…vi

CHAPTER
ONE FLASHPOINTS ……..……...1

TWO FILL/FLASH/MEMORY: A HISTORY ……...…39

THREE FLASH FLOODING: CULTURE AND COMMUNITY IN THE MOB ……..75

FOUR FLASHES: SPECTACLE, SURVEILLANCE, AND POLITICS IN THE MOB ……105

FIVE FLASH! A-AH! HE'LL SAVE EVERY ONE OF US!...……..…137

REFERENCES ……..….....170

VITA ……...179

LIST OF FIGURES

1. Photo of mob number 3 ……..76

2. Photo of mob number 3 ……..76

3. Photo of mob number 3 ……..76

4. Photo of mob number 3 ……..76

5. Photo of mob number 6 ……....112

ABSTRACT

In 2003, writer and cultural critic Bill Wasik stunned the world with his newest experiment, the MOB Project, which flooded the streets of New York City with strange performances quickly labeled "flash mobs" by participants and local media. With the goal of understanding the communicative purpose and function of these new performance events, this project analyzes the flash mob through the lenses of performance studies, rhetorical studies, cultural studies, and continental philosophy. Drawing from genealogical research, rhetorical analyses, and critical philosophy, I argue the flash mob is a new form of performance serving as a locus of community, creativity, and politics in an age overrun by spectacle and surveillance. Moreover, whether created as complex communal in-jokes or a modern form of cultural critique, flash mobs act as elaborate pranks played out within the quasi-public realm of the capitalist city, exposing its heretofore unrealized methods of operation. Through a critical application of the theories of philosophers Michel de Certeau, Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, I analyze the ability of Bill Wasik's flash mobs to highlight the dominant strategies of surveillance, standardization, and structure operating within the capitalist system. In so doing, I explore the tactical nature of the flash mob as a performance event.

CHAPTER ONE
FLASHPOINTS

Not satisfied with the suggestion through paint of our other senses, we shall utilize the specific substances of sight, sound, movement, people, odors, touch. Objects of every sort are materials for the new art: paint, chairs, food, electric and neon lights, smoke, water, old socks, a dog, movies, a thousand other things which will be discovered by the present generation artists. Not only will these bold creators show us, *as if for the first time, the world we have always had about us but ignored*, but they will disclose entirely unheard of happenings [italics added] (Kaprow 57).

Eight years ago, in the spring of 2003, a strange phenomenon began to occur in the streets, shopping malls, and vacant lots of New York City. Large numbers of people with no apparent political or social agenda began to gather en masse at a particular, seemingly predetermined place, and perform a short series of actions before quickly dispersing. Their performance seemed odd for a multitude of reasons. First, they apparently had no leader, or director, who told them what to do. Instead, upon arriving at a site, they all seemed to know instinctively what actions to perform. Second, they carried no signs and spoke no slogans regarding the political or social purpose of their actions. Instead, they chose to let their actions speak for themselves. The decision to remain silent seemed very strange because the actions themselves were silly and out of place – applauding in a hotel atrium, for instance, or prostrating themselves before a giant robotic dinosaur in a toy store. Even when these strange people's actions did make sense, the actions still seemed odd due to their being enacted en masse, by hundreds of people instead of one or two solitary individuals. Finally, the performers of these strange phenomena refused to stick around and answer questions regarding their involvement in the event. Rather than explain themselves, they all – as if on cue – left the site of the performance after a short period of time, usually around ten minutes. While the residents of New York City rushed to find a name for these strange occurrences, writing about them in their local newspapers and magazines, other citizens of the United States began to notice similar events

happening in their towns. San Francisco, Dallas, and Chicago witnessed what New York reporters had begun to call "flash mobs" in their own cities only a few short months after the original "mobs" appeared. After a few more months, reports began to spring up about flash mobs taking place in European cities, Mumbai, and the Philippines. Just as quickly as the craze spread, however, it seemed to die out. By the end of 2003, no one in New York City seemed to be talking about flash mobs anymore, and by the following summer, the only people who seemed interested in these odd events were the corporate executives who wondered if they could use similar strategies to sell their products. However, the corporations could not seem to co-opt the strategies of the flash mobs successfully, so their interest in the phenomenon quickly waned. Or so it seemed. In the past few years, the world experienced a resurgence of flash mob style performances, many of which seemed harmless fun, while others operated as political tactics and advertising strategies. Still, discussions of this new phenomenon lack a detailed analysis of its history, founders, performers, and purposes. Perhaps it is time to address this deficiency.

Introduction

The typical flash mob begins when a person acting as an organizer (usually using a false name to protect anonymity) sends e-mails or text messages to a list of people, inviting them to arrive at a specific place at a certain time and to wait for further instructions. This anonymous organizer serves as the catalyzing force behind the creation of the mob and often invents a set of actions for the mob to perform on-site. However, the organizer of a flash mob should not be viewed as its leader, as often her desires are usurped, her initial list of addressees expanded beyond her control, and her anonymity maintained. The size of mob participants grows exponentially as each recipient forwards the invitation to her own electronically stored lists of friends and acquaintances. Usually, upon arrival, participants are given instructions on fliers

detailing what they should do during the flash mob. As a rule, flash mobs tend to last no longer than ten minutes **(**Wasik 66). Participants arrive at a site, perform their action(s), and then leave, often just before the police arrive. These actions range from shopping en masse for a rug to pointing at a fast food menu and mooing like cows to pretending to stand in line for Strokes tickets (Johnson, Wasik).

Seven years ago, Artforum International devoted an article to the flash mob phenomena, validating the flash mob's status as a legitimate form of performance art, which author Tom Vanderbilt linked to the historical avant-garde genres of Happenings and the Situationists. Hearkening back to Kaprow's words quoted at the beginning of this study, Vanderbilt asks, "What if Happenings involving tens of thousands of people . . . could be generated through network messaging?" (72). Vanderbilt's conclusion seems to state that this is exactly what the flash mobbers are doing – creating massive Happenings all around the world, using the most advanced technologies available.

However, other performance movements seem to inspire the flash mob. One can see the influence of various modes and styles of performance art: the Situationists' emphasis on scene and event, the Surrealists' fascination with surprise and juxtaposition, the anarchical spirit of the Dadaists, and the humor of the Yippies resonate in the flash mob. All of these forms of performance showed, as Kaprow predicted, "the world we have had always about us but ignored," and I argue the flash mob is just the latest in a long line of culturally influenced experimental performance. However, like Kaprow's Happenings and many of their avant-garde predecessors, flash mobs have been relatively ignored as an object of study by those interested in performance, primarily for their seemingly purposeless, silly nature. Yet, as Mikhail Bakhtin reminds us, laughter liberates, and one must not forget that the carnivalesque form often carries

serious undertones.[1] Therefore, this study proposes to examine Wasik's original eight flash mobs through a variety of lenses. I investigate this largely overlooked performance phenomena by applying historical, cultural, and philosophical perspectives. Specifically, I am interested in how the flash mob might serve as a locus of community, creativity, and politics in an age overrun by spectacle and surveillance.

Forty-Second Street Alcove

I'm not sure how long I stood there, but it felt like ages. Picture a girl with face pressed firmly into her camera, silhouetted against a pale grey-blue sky and the tips of all these well-known giants: The Empire, ComCast, Chrysler. I bought the camera for a trip to Africa in 2000. It had a killer zoom lens that began flat but then expanded outward, layer upon layer until this telescopic phallus protruded almost six inches from the base. I used this camera successfully, to hunt down those animals too far from the Jeep to catch with a regular lens, and I was using it now, to hunt for, of all things, a grey cement alcove, somewhere along 42nd street across from the Conde Nast Building. I began my search on the ground, but after realizing how idiotic a choice that was, I joined my friends for the trip to the Top of the Rock, and now, as they surveyed Central Park and helped other tourists take pictures, I frantically angled along the edges of the plastic glass barriers, pushing aside tourists when possible and leaning over and between sheets of glass, inserting my tiny phallic telescope through the cracks in an attempt to get a better look. Unfortunately, too many choices stared back. This search might have gone on for ages, me and my lens moving in and out of tiny cracks in the protective plastic wall, if it hadn't been cold and windy and if my friends hadn't decided that it was time for a warm tavern and a cold pint. I took one last chance, dodging a small child or two to crawl into a little nook I

[1] See Bakhtin, Mikhail. Speech Genres & Other Late Essays. Trans. Vern W. McGee. Eds. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Austin, University of Texas Press, 1986, p. 134.

hadn't found before. I scanned my camera over the possible options when suddenly, I saw it. Or at least, what I think was it. I stared at the flat gray slab of concrete, rather unassuming, yet large and attached to an office building of some sort. There were a few shrubs along the edges, and two large signs advertising tickets for The Lion King and Jay Z's upcoming tour hung from the building's forward-facing side. It seemed a theatre of some sort, a thought which brought an immediate smile to my face. Slowly, I let my large telescopic lens trace a slow and steady path down the front of this building, across the street and up the front of the building on the other side. As the lens became more and more erect, I could feel the tension inside building. This had to be it. Of course, I wouldn't know for sure until much later, when I could check my photos against others found on the internet. Even so, when my lens fell upon that large greenish number four, something inside of me exploded.

Wasik's eighth and final flash mob took place on September 10, 2003. Like the seven that preceded it, Wasik's final flash mob began with a simple e-mail forwarded to a list of friends and acquaintances from an anonymous account. Like the other seven flash mobs, the e-mail for this one invited recipients to participate in "MOB the project that creates an inexplicable mob of people in New York City for ten minutes or less" (Wasik 57). The e-mail also asked those who received it to forward the message to others they knew who might like to join in. Unlike the other seven mobs, however, the e-mail for mob number eight contained instructions as to the actual location of the event – a concrete alcove on Forty-Second Street at the entrance to the Sixth Avenue subway train, directly across from the Conde Nast Building. The e-mail also alerted participants that "at 7:41 a performance will begin on the sidewalk . . . Be an enthusiastic audience . . . disperse at 7:46 no matter what 'the performer' does" ("Mob #8"). Finally, unlike

any of the earlier e-mails for prior flash mobs, the e-mail for mob number eight alerted participants that this would be the last mob of the MOB project.

According to both Wasik and other participant accounts, hundreds of participants swarmed the alcove at the appointed time. So many participants, in fact, that soon their cheers of excitement and anticipation easily drowned out the instructions for action emanating from "the performer," a small portable stereo previously placed on a brick ledge. According to Wasik, right about this time an unidentified man whom he describes as "in a toque, apparently some sort of opportunistic art shaman" somehow managed to get the attention of the mob participants by opening a briefcase that contained a glowing neon sign (59). According to one participant's account, the man's sign read "Café Thou Art" ("Mob #8"). The size of the crowd was apparently so large that many people could not hear or see the stereo "performer" so when this unknown man (later described by some participants as an unidentified performance artist) displayed his sign, most of the crowd assumed that he was "the performer." After displaying the sign to the crowd, the unknown man/performance artist held up two fingers, at which point the entire crowd of mob participants started chanting, "Peace!" over and over again. The chant lasted about a minute before mob participants dispersed. One participant account refers to the unidentified man as "Neon Sign Guy" and states that after the mob dispersed, he signed autographs and posed for pictures with mob attendees.

I find it very intriguing that no one really seems to want to talk about flash mobs. Although flash mobs received a lot of press coverage during their initial phase in 2003, a shift from mainstream to more critical discourse concerning this new form of expression never occurred. Furthermore, although the flash mob appears to have been the origin of many subsequent types of urban or crowd performance, such as the zombie mob, the pillow fight mob,

or even some of the more recent work of the New York City based Improv Everywhere, no investigation of the flash mob's origins or influences seems to exist. Typically, when someone questions the flash mob's origins or influences, a teleological trail emerges tracing back to one man, Bill Wasik, and his fascination with both hipster culture and technology.

When flash mobs emerged, journalists called them "wacky" (Kornblum 6D) and "absurd events" (Hoge 1B) noting that "the experience – its calculated mystery, its silliness – was fun, but the whole phenomenon begs the question: what for?" (Berens 112). As silliness and direct action have often been combined to promote change and make political statements, as seen in Kaprow's Happenings, the Situationist movement, and the stunts of the Yippies, the dismissive attitude toward these playful performances seems odd. Yet Berens anticipates the potential of flash mobs by writing at the end of his 2003 article, "maybe these mobs will prove to be good and useful training for future forms of protest and political organization" (Berens 112). Perhaps journalists were dismissive of flash mobs because of their inability to connect specific mobs to specific political programs advocating change.

I also find the debate over whether flash mobs are a form of performance art, such as a Happening, or a new type of social movement fascinating. As a performance studies scholar, I believe that social movements and performance art are not mutually exclusive phenomena. Many members of the general public, however, do believe in such a distinction, as seen in the statement of *Smart Mobs* author Howard Rheingold, speaking to CNN in 2003:

> So far it is harmless fun – a harmless way to experiment with a new form of technology-enabled collective action. But the same technique of using the Internet and mobile phones to organize collective action was used to bring down the Estrada regime in the Philippines and to tip the Korean election toward the ultimate winner, President Roh. All mobs have the potential for danger. (Shmueli)

Although certain differences between performance art and social movements exist, history reminds us that performance art and social movements have a symbiotic relationship. The creators of the Dada, Futurist and Surrealist avant-garde movements all wrote manifestos outlining their political ideologies and detailing their performance techniques as strategies to be used toward achieving political ends.[2] In fact, by relegating the flash mob too quickly to one particular historical precedent, one might fail to understand it in its full historical, social, technological and theoretical context and complexity. Instead, I argue for studies such as the present one, where I examine the flash mob via multiple lenses, allowing for a richer understanding of the flash mob as a communicative act.

In order to gain a richer understanding of Wasik's eight original mobs, I undertake a study of the mobs which focuses on a few key issues through the use of multiple theoretical lenses. Predominantly, I concentrate my attention on questions of technology, spectacle, space, and surveillance. I then approach these questions from historical, cultural, and philosophical perspectives. Technology serves as an excellent example. Obviously, Wasik's eight original mobs could not have happened without the technological advances resulting from the internet and cyber-chip booms of the 1990s that expanded the cellular phone technology necessary for pulling them off. Thus, I consider technology through a cultural lens, using the work of scholars such as Donna Haraway on cyborgs, Judith Nicholson on mobile mass communication, and Judith Butler on performativity, thereby enabling a fuller understanding of the relationship between technology and flash mob participants.

[2] For example, see Andre Breton's Le Manifeste du Surrealisme, 1924; F. T. Marinetti's The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism, (Paris) Le Figaro, February 20, 1909; dada manifesto Hugo Ball and Tristan Tzara, 1916 and 1918, respectively.

Saint Patrick's Cathedral

Stroke: (strōk)
1. The act or an instance of striking, as with the hand, a weapon, or a tool; a blow or impact.
2.
    a. The striking of a bell or gong.
    b. The sound so produced.
    c. The time so indicated: *at the stroke of midnight.*
    d. A single uninterrupted movement, especially when repeated or in a back-and-forth motion: *the stroke of a pendulum.*
    e. Any of a series of movements of a piston from one end of the limit of its motion to another.
    f. A single completed movement of the limbs and body, as in swimming or rowing.
    g. The manner or rate of executing such a movement: *My favorite stroke is butterfly. She had a very rapid stroke.*
    h. The rower who sits nearest the coxswain or the stern and sets the tempo for the other rowers.
    i. The position occupied by this person.
    j. A movement of the upper torso and arms for the purpose of striking a ball, as in golf or tennis.
    k. The manner of executing such a movement.
    l. A scoring unit in golf counted for such a movement: *finished six strokes under par.*
    m. A single mark made by a writing or marking implement, such as a pen.
    n. The act of making such a mark.
    o. A printed line in a graphic character that resembles such a mark. ("stroke")

It's getting late and they're sick of me and I sent them off to H&M but I can tell they no longer find this as cute as they did this morning but what does it matter because here it is here it is here it is and it is big and spiky or spindly rather lots of spindles and there is so much traffic and I am running and taking photos this crazy girl running and taking photos and almost getting hit by taxis and bikers and all anyone can tell is that I must be some sort of crazy tourist obsessed with churches which isn't the case but isn't quite not the case so perhaps it is not not the case or something I am not quite sure but here it is and it's beautiful really really beautiful and as I pace around it or rather as I paced around it for I did lose track of time and of myself and of all tenses really, even pretense which is funny because this is the one that was all about pretense anyway as I am pacing and looking for a door I am struck by its beauty and I want to

stop taking pictures that capture it and start taking ones that maybe will explain it but that isn't the purpose so I keep going and I am looking for a door for any door and ah there it is, such a beautiful door really and snapping away now and trying to imagine how long the line must have been how it wrapped all the way around and this appears to be a place they serve food sometimes or a tour entrance or something so I guess people really were taken in because there really are a lot of people around here I mean my god on every damn corner there are people and now I have made the circuit now I have captured the scene with this lens of mine and I want to go back and re-walk it so I can perhaps loiter and maybe capture something else perhaps a sense of purpose or perhaps whatever may be lingering or perhaps just to perhaps but there are my friends waiting now looking very impatient now and so I have got to be going but I will be back pat's my saintly little pat's and I do so hope I will get to know thee better.

On August 26, 2003, a large group of people gathered to form a single-file line beginning outside of a wooden door on the north side of St. Patrick's Cathedral, along Fifty-First Street. The line, which appeared out of nowhere, quickly wrapped around almost the entire building, snaking down Fifth Avenue and around to the Fiftieth Street side of the cathedral. If any curious tourist or passerby approached someone in line and asked what they were doing there, participants had been instructed to respond that they "heard they were selling Strokes tickets" (Wasik 62). Further instructions had been given to participants that they should not allow any cutting in line. After waiting patiently in line for precisely five minutes, the line vanished as rapidly as it had appeared, leaving many confused, a few delighted, and not a soul with a ticket to see The Strokes.

Spectacle also demands analysis in relation to the flash mob. For the purposes of this study, the term "spectacle" stems from the work of Guy Debord in his Society of the Spectacle.

For Debord, spectacle is the system that is a confluence of advanced capitalism, the mass media, and the types of governments who favor those phenomena: "... the spectacle, taken in the limited sense of 'mass media' which are its most glaring superficial manifestation"(Debord 19). The spectacle is the inverted image of society in which relationships between commodities have replaced relationships between people, in which passive identification with the spectacle replaces genuine activity (Debord 12). However, Debord carefully warns us that, "spectacle is not a collection of images. Rather it is a social relationship between people that is mediated by images" (12). If spectacle is a form of social relationship, how might the flash mob trouble and/or progress that relationship? One might begin to answer that question by examining the relationship between spectacle and specific types of culture(s). This study scrutinizes the flash mob in relation to both the hipster culture out of which it arose, as well as the carnivalesque nature of its many forms.

When Bill Wasik, the originator of the eight flash mobs under investigation, named himself in a 2006 Harper's magazine article as the creator of the flash mob, he revealed the following:

> The basic hypothesis behind the MOB Project was as follows: seeing how all culture in New York is demonstrably commingled with *scenesterism*, the appeal of concerts and plays and readings and gallery shows deriving less from the work itself than from the social opportunities the work might engender, it should theoretically be possible to create an art project consisting of *pure scene* – meaning the scene would be the entire point of the work, and indeed would itself constitute the work . . . What the project harnessed was the *joining urge*, a drive toward deindividuation easily discernible in the New York hipster population. (Wasik 58)

For Wasik, then, the flash mob as an art project arose out of a critical response to hipster culture. In his opinion, hipsters quickly and willingly flocked to, partook in, and promoted those bands, fashion, venues and books judged as "cool" by other hipsters, simply out of a desire to be part of the group – to be seen and accepted by others *as* a hipster. As Wasik remarks:

> The hipsters make no pretense to divisions on principle, to forming intellectual or artistic camps; at any given moment, it is the same books, records, film that are judged *au courant* by all, leading to the curious spectacle of an 'alternative' culture more unanimous than the mainstream it ostensibly opposes. (Wasik 56)

Wasik later refers to his mob project as "a metaphor for the hollow hipster culture that spawned it" highlighting his intention for flash mobs to serve as artistic, miniaturized critiques of the hipster culture to which he belonged.

The term "hipster," used here to describe a particular sort of urban individual found in New York and other cities through the 1990s and early 2000s, originates in the 1940's. "Hipster" stems from the slang terms "hip" and "hep," which jazz musicians used to describe anyone who was "in the know" about the emergent African-American jazz sub-culture. As journalist Christian Lorentzen argues, hipsterism "fetishizes the authentic" found in any fringe movement of "the postwar era – Beat, hippie, punk, … grunge [and] white trash chic." Lorentzen describes post-millennial New York hipsters as white 18-to-34-year-olds who through their inauthentic regurgitations of the fringe movements have created a "repertoire of meaninglessness." Lorentzen's remarks on hipsters are bold and in many ways, rather limiting. Hopefully, by understanding the flash mob's association with hipster culture, one might view the mobs not only as empty fads but also as powerful and perhaps meaningful communal acts.

The Grand Hyatt Hotel

Date: July 2, 2003

Time: 7:07 pm

Place: New York City's The Grand Hyatt Hotel, fronting on 42nd Street and adjacent to Grand Central Station.

Event:

"Picture a lobby a whole block long sporting well-maintained fixtures in the high

Eighties style, gold-chrome railings and sepia-mirror walls and a fountain in marblish stone, with a mezzanine ringed overhead. The time was set for 7:07 p.m., the tail end of the evening rush hour; the train station next door was thick with commuters, as was (visible through the hotel's tinted-glass façade) the sidewalk outside, but the lobby was nearly empty: only a few besuited types, guests presumably, sunk here and there into armchairs. Starting five minutes beforehand the mob members slipped in, in twos and threes and tens, milling around in the lobby and making stylish small talk.

Then, all at once, we rode the elevators and escalators up to the mezzanine and wordlessly lined the banister. The handful of hotel guests were still there, alone again, except now they were confronted with a hundreds-strong armada of hipsters overhead, arrayed shoulder to shoulder, staring silently down. But intimidation was not the point; we were staring down at **where we had just been**, *and also across at one another, two hundred artist-spectators commandeering an atrium on Forty-second Street as a coliseum-style theater of self-regard. After five minutes of staring, the ring erupted into precisely fifteen seconds of tumultuous applause – for itself – after which it scattered back downstairs and out the door, just as the police cruisers were rolling up, flashers on" (Wasik 58).*

Space plays an important role in the flash mob. Wasik's original mobs, and most of their subsequent offspring, were urban acts, conducted in privately-owned public space. Wasik's mobs did not act upon personal space – as did Improv Everywhere's later "Ted's birthday mission" – or on public space such as government buildings or city parks – the sort of space typically acted upon in one of Rheingold's "smart mobs."[3] Rather, Wasik's eight flash mobs occurred in corporate space, a significant aspect when considering both the particular historical and social context of the flash mob, as well as its operation as a performance. Can the flash mob be read as part of the chain of carnivalesque, urban public protest found in the anti-globalization efforts of such groups as those at work in the 1999 Seattle World Trade Organization protests? Or, if we consider space in relation to the spatial framework of a performance – i.e., how bodies are situated in relation to each other, to performers, and to objects – then what do the swarming

[3] Improv Everywhere's "Ted's birthday mission" took place on September 19, 2003. Participants gathered at Dempsy's Bar in Manhattan to celebrate the birthday of "Ted" an unaware NYU student. The student had no idea who all these people were showing up with a cake and presents, or why they all called him Ted and acted as if they knew him.

tactics of the flash mob communicate to us, the general public, as both audience members and fellow performers in corporate space?

Times Square Toy's R Us

Date: April 2008

Time: around 5 in the evening

Place:

"I'll go with you" she says but she doesn't but I don't really care because I've got my super grande skim latte and my camera and I figure it's only a few blocks and I have an excellent, excellent sense of direction.

But, I'm stopped. I'm awed by the theater district – yes, ***the*** *theater district and that deli that's in all the movies and the signs are confusing and there's people everywhere and time is squared and she said "you'll know it when you see it" and "we'll meet you there" but I don't see it and I certainly don't know it because it takes me 12 blocks and 30 minutes before I realize I've been standing in it for the past five.*

Billboards. Lights. People.

I ***really*** *don't wanna grow up.*

Geoffrey smiles down on me with his big giraffe eyes and I follow, mesmerized, into his kingdom-sized garden of delights.

If you were in Times Square on August 7, 2003 around seven o'clock in the evening, and if you just so happened to choose Hamburger Harry's as the spot for your evening meal, you might have received the following instructions on a small slip of paper handed to you from a young man. Should you have followed these instructions, you would have found yourself in the midst of Wasik's sixth and most notorious flash mob:

Duration: 6 minutes (Gather at 7:18; disperse at 7:24)

The Site: Toys R Us (Broadway at 44th St)

By 7:15, situate yourself on the second floor of Toys R Us, away from the Jurassic Park section.

At 7:18, approach the giant animatronic dinosaur. Fill in all around it. It is like a terrible god to you. Stare at it transfixed.

At 7:20, drop to your knees, still staring at the dinosaur. Whenever it roars, moan and cower behind outstretched hands.

At 7:24, disperse. No one should remain in Toys R Us after 7:27.

KEEP THIS SLIP HIDDEN. NO PHOTOS OR INTERVIEWS BETWEEN 7:15 AND 7:20. (Erway)

Had you followed these instructions, you would have recognized that many people jumped the gun with the start times. Apparently, people got excited very easily and wanted to skip ahead to the next phase. You also would have been faced with a choice of what exactly to do when, after cowering at the dinosaur for only one minute, store employees turned it off. If you had followed the rest of the crowd, you would have chosen not to continue cowering for another four minutes until the designated end time, but to stop cowering immediately and exit the store. As you slowly followed others onto the down escalator and traveled from the second floor to the first, you would have passed a cop who told you to leave, which probably would have sounded a bit redundant, as you were already clearly on your way out the door. You also would have seen a reporter or two interviewing some bewildered customers and tourists who happened to be in the store at the time of the mob and unaware of what was happening. What you would not have seen was anyone taking credit, or espousing an agenda, or breaking the law.

Based upon the socio-historic context of the mobs as post-9/11 performance events, occurring under the provisions of the newly-instated USA PATRIOT Act[4] and in the same year that the Department of Homeland Security was founded, we can view the mobs in relation to notions of surveillance and of what many label a "control society." My use of these terms stems from the work of Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze. Surveillance refers to forms of oversight and supervision, and as such, is the foundation for what Foucault labels the disciplinary society. In the disciplinary society, particular institutions, most notably the prison – but also the factory, the school, the church, and the home – discipline individuals into proper forms of behavior via surveillance over their particular actions. Through such surveillance, these institutions are able to create docile bodies – bodies that raise a hand when they wish to speak in class, instead of just shouting out loud. Ultimately, according to Foucault, the individual begins to self-surveil, monitoring her own behavior, thereby making the work of any overseeing body somewhat superfluous. Foucault's conception of the disciplinary society was long-agreed on as the operating theoretical basis of our most modern governing institutions. However, in 1990, Gilles Deleuze espoused a different theory in the "society of control." Deleuze argued that with the advent of new technologies, most notably the computer, one no longer seeks control over individual bodies, but over networks and populations. To achieve such control, individual forms of testing and labeling that were typical of the disciplinary society, such as the examination, are replaced with more continuous forms of control, such as perpetual training. In other words, one does not move from one institution to another, as in the disciplinary society – the school to the barracks to the factory – starting over at the inception of each. Rather, "one is never finished with anything" but always co-existing between institutions, whose controls are manifested as

[4] The full name of this piece of legislation is the Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism Act of 2001.

slight modulations or adjustments (Deleuze 1). For example, although one may have graduated from school long ago, to stay competitive in today's job market one might very well be forced to return to school for so-called "continuing" education courses.

Within such a society – the society of control – the flash mob appears. It also appears at a particular time characterized by rapidly decreasing civil liberties, a heightened, color-coded state of emergency, and amazingly innovative new technologies able to track every act of our consumption. Thus, understanding the world in which the flash mob emerged, that world it – possibly – sought to act against, or at the very least, communicate with, is an imperative.

Our current understanding of flash mobs, and for that matter, most forms of performance strongly tied to culture and technology, often derives from a typically limited scope and overall lack of theoretical integration. Cultural studies scholars might be inclined to examine the flash mob through the lens of technocultural theory while continental philosophers might focus on ideas of swarms, surveillance, and control. Performance studies, as a discipline, may come closest in integrating theoretical lenses and forms; however, one might spend too much time debating what type of performance the flash mob is – i.e. to which of Schechner's categories does it fall? – or try to locate what particular predecessors its form is most reminiscent of – Situationists or Happenings? In any of the above scenarios, one could lose sight of the more important question: what do these performances communicate?

In this study, I hope to answer that question, as well as those of origin and influence, through an integration of historical, cultural, and philosophical perspectives. Wasik's original eight flash mobs are performances by and for a localized community – that of the New York hipster – yet practiced in a global world using global technologies. This study proposes that a more globalized, integrated notion of theory be applied to the flash mobs to understand them.

Central Park

"I never held mobs in the open, the bloggers complained, in view of enough onlookers, but this was entirely purposeful on my part, for like Colin Powell I hewed to the doctrine of **overwhelming force**". *(Wasik 65)*

"I agree with Fancy Robot: I want an audience, preferably one composed of tourists; we've had enough inexplicable mobs with no one to see them besides reporters and salespeople. When's the Times Square mob?" (Mike "Mob #5")

"And then we were There. We stood atop a huge boulder just inside the Park, staring out through the tree canopy at the Museum of Natural History. Crammed on the ridge as we were, those not at the absolute front of the mob couldn't even see the street so the presence of media and secondary mobs didn't have the distracting effect that it did the last time. Ars gratis artis, baby". (Willet)

Like most of Wasik's flash mobs, MOB #5 began with instructions to meet in one of four bars near Central Park West, the eventual site of the mob. Participants were told to arrive at the bar at or before 6:55 p.m. on July 24, 2003 and to await 'the drop' of further instructions. At 6:55 p.m., the drop was made, and participants were handed 4x5 note cards with instructions listing the actual location and actions for MOB #5. According to one attendee, the instruction card for MOB #5 read:

MOB #5

THE SITE: Central Park West – near 81st and Central Park West. Enter between 80th and 81st, across from the museum. Make your first hard left, merge with another path, then turn left again. Walk to the right, in front of the ridge, and face CPW [map was included here]

START TIME: 7:18 DURATION: 8 minutes. Disperse at 7:26: no one should remain at the mob site after 7:28.

- Stand still and stare straight forward. For the first 3 minutes, make as little noise as possible. If you can make a realistic bird call, you may occasionally do so.
- By 7:21 you may all make bird calls, unrealistic or no.
- By 7:23 you may also mumble "bird noise."
- By 7:25 you may also call out "Nature here! Come get some nature!" to passerby.
- By 7:26 chant "Na-ture" for 20 seconds; cheer and disperse.

Please do not take photographs at the mob site until 7:23.
Please do not interview anyone at the mob site until 7:26. (Willet)

Participant accounts indicate MOB #5 began a few minutes ahead of schedule, and like many of Wasik's other mobs, failed to stick to its strict time regime. Starting two or three minutes before 7:18 p.m., apparently it took only about thirty seconds before the entire crowd of flashmobbers erupted into bird calls, 'unrealistic or no' ("Mob 5: a cute dog but no bingo"). After following Wasik's general instructions and progressing through the different styles of bird calling, participants dispersed, although most likely without lasting an entire eight minutes as planned. To this day, MOB #5 remains the least discussed and/or referenced of Wasik's original eight flash mobs, as well as the only one to take place in a truly public space.

As stated earlier, this study examines the flash mob through three primary lenses: history, culture, and philosophy. To do so, I primarily draw upon the research of scholars in performance studies, critical and cultural studies, and continental philosophy. Each of these theoretical arenas affords the reader a particular perspective on the flash mob; however, my application of theory and research from each field is by no means exhaustive. Rather, I chose to limit the scope of my study to those areas of each field I understand to be most applicable and productive in terms of gaining more knowledge about the flash mob and leave any further application and analysis to future research.

In the area of performance studies, I engage in genealogical research to understand what sort of performative practices and movements might serve as predecessors of the flash mob. I undertake this analysis in two different ways. First, I seek to produce a historical timeline – similar in form to that of RoseLee Goldberg's in her book, Performance Art: From Futurism to the Present. I will trace those styles and forms of performance whose philosophies and practices are similar to the flash mob. After I outline this traditional history, I disrupt it by engaging in the sort of genealogical research described by Joseph Roach, in his introduction to Cities of the

Dead. Roach extends Foucault's notion that genealogy should be the work of discovering various hidden, assumed, and multiple histories at work in the effects of power on the subject. Roach's method seeks to track the historical transmissions and representations of cultural practices past and present in an attempt to highlight the play of difference and deferral. In other words, Roach's methodology, by tracking similar practices of behavior, uses of space, or methods of performance over a certain period of time often unearths the sort of historical connections between people and practices that typically and often purposely remain hidden in favor of one easily understood, unchallenged historical explanation for a phenomenon that often supports those in a position of power. Through the application of Roach's principles, I uncover hidden and multiple histories present in the flash mob, and to broaden our understanding of historical practices and performances for which the flash mob might be playing surrogate.

Furthermore, I draw upon the work of Mikhail Bakhtin to outline the specific uses of space and time in the flash mob and its genealogical predecessors. Bakhtin was a Russian philosopher, semiotician, and literary critic whose writings influenced not only these fields but rhetorical theory as well. The relationship between Bakhtin's theories and performance studies can be traced to performance studies' historical relationship to literary theory as well as a fascination with Bakhtin's writings on carnival and carnivalesque forms in his later work. Bakhtin's concept of the chronotope examines how space and time stipulate and are stipulated through human, embodied activity. Originally conceived in connection with his writings on literary theory, Bakhtin's chronotope defines both "genre and generic distinctions" as they relate to the novel (Bakhtin "DI" 85). In other words, chronotope determines the kinds of things that can happen in a given genre; how much can a character change, grow, or redeem herself? How does she experience time and space?

Drawing upon the work of others in the field of performance studies, such as Judith Hamera, I expand Bakhtin's notion of the chronotope outside the realm of the novel and into those arenas of public life where the flash mob operates.[5] In doing so, I highlight those vortices of behavior throughout history that might inform our understanding of the flash mob as a type of performance created for and enacted in and upon privately-owned, urban public space.[6] In so doing, I not only hope to discover how flash mob participants might experience time and space during a flash mob, but also how the space and time of the flash mob, and other performances enacted in similar spaces and times throughout history, condition the behaviors of its performers.

The use of Bakhtin also allows an exploration of the carnivalesque nature of the flash mob and the potential liberatory power inherent in its use of laughter and carnival forms. However, although flash mobs portray a number of the characteristics of carnival outlined by Bakhtin – the inversion of hierarchical norms, an emphasis on the marketplace or public square, the formation of a large crowd of like-minded individuals, and the display of silly, somewhat foolish behavior – the flash mob is not a carnival. Rather, the flash mob surfaces as a carnivalesque form of performance, referring to its carnival-like properties, but distinguishing between this fractured form of a carnival and the carnivals of the Medieval period to which Bakhtin devotes most of his attention. Bakhtin tells us in Rabelais and His World that despite the efforts of the bourgeois culture to stifle carnival and its forms, carnival did not die, rather, "it was merely narrowed down" ("Rabelais" 276). Peter Stallybrass and Allon White detail this narrowing down of carnival as a four-part process in their book, The Politics and Poetics of

[5] Hamera discusses the ballet studio as a chronotope, in "Performance, performativity, and cultural poesis in practices of everyday life" in The sage handbook of performance studies, eds. Soyini Madison and Judith Hamera, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications Inc., 2006.

[6] Roach uses the phrase "vortices of behavior" to refer to places or sites of memory created through technological (often architectural) invention and social organization that "canalize specified needs, desires, and habits in order to reproduce them" (Roach 28). Examples of such vortices of behavior given by Roach include, but are not limited to, the marketplace, the theater district, the square, and the burial ground.

Transgression. Using their research, I argue that flash mobs engage in techniques of carnivalesque protest against what M. Lane Bruner labeled the "humorless state" (Bruner 140). By existing within the realm of society, yet refusing to play by its rules, carnivalesque protests offer multiple forms of coalition, democracy and governance.

Finally, I begin my application of Deleuze and Foucault's work to the flash mob through a discussion of performativity, drawing upon the work of J.L. Austin and Judith Butler. J.L. Austin was the first to coin the term "performative" in his discussion of speech acts that not only assert something, but rather do or enact something in their utterance. Austin's example was the phrase "I do," uttered in most Western wedding ceremonies, in which a bride and groom not only state that each promise to keep their vows, but actually enact the marriage at the moment of their utterance. Butler's use of the term "performative" in Gender Trouble refers to language, gestures and other bodily enactments that people use to signify, or perform, their gender identity to others. Her assertions "that the gendered body is performative" and that sex is only intelligible to us in that performative moment where the body is consolidated, are often critiqued for their apparent dismissal of the material body (Butler, "GT" 173). However, Butler's aim in Gender Trouble is not to dismiss the corporeality of the body itself – as she discusses in her later work, Bodies That Matter – but to "open up the field of possibility for gender without dictating which kinds of possibilities ought to be realized" ("GT" viii). According to Butler, gender is a repeated performance we engage daily. In order to explore alternate possibilities, one must begin to repeat with a difference, to collect and explore all those moments when we slip up in our regular gender performances and find ourselves performing or acting in another manner. I believe that flash mobs are performative in the same way, although what they highlight are not our gender performances, but our discipline-based normative ones – those everyday behaviors where we

follow the unspoken rules and norms of our society. The actions performed in a flash mob are deemed silly not because they are outrageous in their own right, but rather because they are being performed in either the wrong way or wrong place in light of our prevailing social norms. For these reasons, I argue the flash mob acts as a type of performative resistance to what Foucault labels governmentality, or the conduct of the conduct of others.

Otto Tootsi Plohound, Lafayette Street

I was born in Silver Spring, Maryland. My parents took a trip there just last week with my brother's family and his children, and they called to tell me how beautiful a place it is. I wouldn't really know. I did not grow up there. It is merely the town with the closest hospital to the place of my childhood, Crofton, Maryland. I think my mother told me how beautiful it was because she knows I have no attachment to the place, except perhaps for a love of its alliterative name – Silver Spring. That, and I think she wanted me to know I was born somewhere pretty.

I lived in Crofton, Maryland until the summer of my twelfth year. At that time, my father was offered a promotion that moved us back to his home state, Texas. It was also close to the place of my mother's birth, Louisiana, where I resided during my doctoral coursework. When I lived in Maryland, I was often made fun of for my Southern pronunciation of words that I had picked up from my displaced parents, such as my description of "warshing" the clothes. My brother was teased and bullied for wearing Dallas Cowboys jerseys to grade school in Washington Redskins territory. I thought that when we moved South, this sort of thing would stop. Of course, it did not.

I remember one particular interaction that occurred during my first week at my new middle school. I was in the hallway with a newly made girl friend when a group of three boys approached us. Excited and apprehensive as all thirteen year old middle schoolers, we began a

conversation. At some point, being the new kid, I was asked exactly where I was from. "Maryland," I stated. "Maryland?"one kid replied, "What do you mean, Maryland? There's no state named Maryland." I remember pausing for an instant and simply staring at the guy, trying to decide whether or not he was kidding. Quickly, I realized that he wasn't.

That was the beginning of my attempts to teach Texans about a far off land named Maryland, a place that no, wasn't north of the Mason-Dixon line and therefore was not technically "Northern." It also wasn't "Yankee" for although Maryland did not fight in the Civil War, or excuse me, the War of Northern Aggression, it was southern-sympathetic, meaning it ran weapons and other materials through its ports to assist the Confederacy in their campaign. I thought this sort of rational information would persuade them to stop teasing me about my home state. Of course, it did not.

On July 16, 2003, over two hundred people entered Otto Tootsi Plohound, a very expensive New York shoe store, on Lafayette Street. Following instructions received earlier, the two-hundred strong mob pretended that they "were on a bus tour from Maryland. You are excited but also bewildered. It is as if the shoes were made in outer space" (Mike "Mob #4"). After milling about and gawking at the footwear, the mob participants left the store as instructed. Such a large crowd of people in such a tiny space apparently prompted clerks to call the police soon after their arrival, and as one blogger noted, annoyed those few customers in the store at the time. Posted next to a photo of these individuals, this particular blogger's caption reads, "These actual customers didn't seem to be having much fun. Perhaps they were from Maryland" (Mike "Mob #4").

Theories from rhetorical and cultural studies enable an understanding of the flash mob in light of its particular socio-historical context as well as that of its performer, the urban hipster.

Flash mobs are a type of performance inextricably linked to the means of their production – technologies such as e-mail and cellular phones – and as such cannot be fully understood without an examination of the relationship between those technologies and the cultures that produce and use them. I draw upon cultural scholars who investigate the complex relationship between technology and human beings, specifically to determine privileges – social, cultural, and political – created by new developments in technology. Technology, while often making life easier, also offers opportunities for new methods of domination and exploitation of humans. As such, this approach provides us with a new standpoint for viewing the flash mob and raises interesting questions about the politics of such a performance.

For example, Jay Kinney, writing in 1996, rather accurately prophesizes our current love-hate relationship with the internet and the world-wide web of connections where we find ourselves caught. Kinney refers to this relationship through the construction of two future-oriented tracks, Track A and Track B. Track A holds the promise of a future made easier through the use of the internet – widely accessible information, home banking, social networking and political empowerment. Track B, as Kinney states, "is the reality of money laundering by electronic funds transfer" where "the NSA and FBI want to assure their access to everyone's private files 'just in case'"(Kinney 139). Ultimately, Kinney asks the following question, which seems perhaps more vital today than it did fifteen years ago:

> In such a future – an instrumentalized, administered, metered, and market-defined future to be sure, when Track A and Track B are so inextricably interwoven that leaving the Net becomes as unthinkable as giving up breathing – where is the place for politics, new or otherwise? (151)

Working from Kinney's research, as well as Judith Nicholson's and Howard Rheingold's discussions of technology and flash mobs, I seek to ascertain what role the flash mob might play in such a seemingly anti-political, technologically centered age.

Conversely, technocultural theory also forces an acknowledgement of the connection between technology and culture, focusing on the lack of separation between the technological and the human. As Donna Haraway states in her A Cyborg Manifesto:

> I am making an argument for the cyborg as a fiction mapping our social and bodily reality and as an imaginative resource suggesting some very fruitful couplings. . . . By the late twentieth century, our time, a mythic time, we are all chimeras, theorized and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism; in short, we are cyborgs. This cyborg is our ontology; it gives us our politics. (150)

Here, Haraway's cyborg metaphor suspends our demonization of technology long enough for us to realize our affinity with machines and the possibilities for communication and connection they provide. Within the light of this realization, I argue that mobile mass communication technologies (such as e-mail and text messaging) operated as the most logical and effective forms of agency for the flash mob. In so doing, the flash mob promoted awareness of the multitude of uses (social, cultural, and political) for such technologies outside of the strictly personal.

Also within the area of rhetorical and cultural studies, I call upon the work of those theorists who have studied hipster culture and the urban hipster in an effort to understand the particular cultural ideologies and practices that inform their performance – past and present. Using these studies I compare the underground, jazz-obsessed hipster of the 1940s discussed by Frank Tirro and Marty Jezer to the current urban hipster studied by Robert Lanham and discussed by contemporary journalists in an attempt to discover the ideological similarities of these young, urban dwellers informing performances such as the flash mob. Finally, I draw upon the work of Guy Debord in Society of Spectacle as well as that of Giorgio Agamben in State of Exception in an effort to understand the politics of performance in our spectacular, post-9/11 society. Agamben is an Italian philosopher interested in the relationship between language and

social conflicts, particularly those conflicts that deal with issues of human rights. I use Agamben's discussion of the state of exception to examine the potential political undertones that might be inherent in the flash mob's unique approach to questions of identity, community, and visibility. In State of Exception, Agamben discusses the government's increase and extension of power(s) during times of crisis – such as natural disasters, wars, or terrorist attacks. Agamben argues that extensions of presidential or ministerial power during such periods serve to create sovereigns with the ability to strip the average citizen of her rights in an effort to protect the citizenry at large. Written in 2005, Agamben's text discusses the political climate in which flash mobs arose – a post-9/11 society operating under the USA PATRIOT Act where fears of terrorism led to the wiretapping of ordinary citizens. Within this context, Agamben states that it has become increasingly difficult for man to act against the State, because the space of politics – formerly understood as that space of human action existing between law and life – has diminished through the State (or sovereign's) extension of the law through the use of the state of exception. Due to this shrinking space of politics, one must find new ways and new places to act against the State, or the extension of the State's power. The flash mob, I believe, finds a place for this sort of politics, or action against the State, through the use and manipulation of Guy Debord's spectacle.

Debord's spectacle, as mentioned earlier, creates its own laws that dictate when and where we may produce and when and where we may consume. These unwritten, unspoken laws are so pervasive that we have begun to view them as an inevitable part of life itself – participation in the spectacle under the rules of the spectacle seems mandatory. Debord unmasks this lie, in much the same manner as Giorgio Agamben reveals the false conflation of law and life in The State of Exception. Each author reminds us that no universal moral basis for such

strategies exist, but rather, they are creations of a particular power system that seeks to justify itself through its own theorizations on its existence. Agamben and Debord also remind us that a place for transgression exists in both the state of exception and the society of the spectacle; we merely need to realize its location and begin experimenting with how one might use such a place. I believe that the flash mob, when viewed in its particular historical and cultural context, is an example of such experimentation, what Debord might refer to as "a mobile space of play" (126).

Macy's Department Store, Herald Square, Broadway and 34th Street

Fred Gailey: Is it true that you're the owner of one of the biggest department stores in New York City?
Mr. R. H. Macy: THE biggest!
(Miracle on 34th Street)

Mr. Richards: What arrogance! That little worm of a stock boy has created an affront to the dignity of this store! (Mannequin)

Imagine you are an employee at one of the largest, most historic department stores in New York City. Every day, as you walk through the doors of this ten floor behemoth you feel a sense of pride and tradition that slowly envelops you. It might fade just a little, however, as you ride the series of escalators higher and higher to your post on the ninth floor. The ninth floor itself is a sort of hodge-podge of sale items, things people need but tend to buy only once in a blue moon: furniture, mattresses, luggage, and your specialty, area rugs. The rugs themselves are beautiful, but not the best company, as there are seldom more than a few customers at any given time (if any at all) and no fellow employees in your department with whom to wile away the hours. So perhaps you have friends in some of the other, more high traffic departments – furniture, beds, watch and jewelry repair. Perhaps you even visit the wig salon that sits on this floor every now and then, and try out a fun new style while making small talk with the salesperson there.

Whatever the details of your particular daily routine, it is likely that around seven o'clock in the evening on June 17, 2003, you were not expecting the sudden influx of customers to the ninth floor. In fact, you might even have found it shocking. Not quite as strange, however, as when they all converged on your department, almost a hundred strong, and requested your assistance in purchasing a large area rug for their commune in Long Island City. Perhaps you even flinched, despite your training, when they referred to the rug as their "love rug." Moments later, after you and your fellow employees tried in vain to answer all of their questions and show off your best merchandise, you watched as they all turned and left en masse, around 7:37 p.m. Finally, imagine that as the bulk of people filed down the escalator to the eighth floor, one or two stayed behind and asked you what you thought of everything that had happened in the past ten minutes. Imagine. What would you have said?

The continental philosophies of Gilles Deleuze and Michel Foucault illuminate the particular tactics, power dynamics, and relationships inherent in the flash mob. Specifically, Foucault's writings on power, discipline and governmentality assist my argument that the flash mob is a form of performative resistance to governmentality which highlights our normative disciplinary performances. As Foucault writes, "The characteristic feature of power is that some men can more or less entirely determine other men's conduct – but never exhaustively or coercively" (Foucault "Power" 324). This governmentality seeps into our daily lives through various institutions (focusing not just on disciplinary modes of power, but control of biological processes as well – e.g. the legislative issues inherent in the debate over abortion or Terry Schiavo's feeding tube). In our current society discipline has not been lost or even swept aside, but our own emphasis on constantly disciplining ourselves to make sure our actions and bodies reflect some pre-determined norm allows the state to exercise a bio-power control over the

population. The combination of constant surveillance (from disciplinary measures) and comparison to a norm (from bio-power) creates in us unconscious modes of behaviorally based docility that we no longer even actively recognize, but rather accept as normal.

This behavior – this conduct of our conduct – seems to be what the flash mob wants to transgress and expose. I build upon these assertions by conducting an analysis of flash mobs based on the theories of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, as outlined in their book A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia. Through Deleuze and Guattari, I argue that flash mobs operate as a war machine using swarming tactics to occupy a smooth space where normative habits of conspicuous consumption are deterritorialized through expressions of playful capitulation to the corporate industrial complex. In other words, flash mobs strategically swarm and disperse from a site in a rapid manner in order to avoid capture from those who would disapprove of their behavior – namely the owners and managers of the site who tend to call the police and ask them to disperse the large crowd. Furthermore, I believe the so-called "silly" actions members of the mob engage in on-site are also strategically chosen behaviors aimed at highlighting the submissive nature of our normative behaviors in what I have called "corporate space." Deleuze and Guattari's terminology and theory, like the flash mob, focus on ideas of movement and space, and therefore allow for insightful and innovative conceptions of the flash mob's significance, as well as its potential adversaries. Typically, large crowds of people gathering in public are discussed either in terms of power (as in most social movement theory) or psychology. However, through the use of Deleuze and Guattari's movement-centered discourse and theory, we can begin to escape such limited conceptions and unearth new understandings that allow us to value the flash mob in entirely different ways.

Claire's Accessories, Near Astor Place

I couldn't find it. It was the one site I really wanted to go to, because it held some sort of mystical power of origin for me at the time. But I couldn't find it. No, let me re-state. I failed to find it. I failed, because it was possible to find. No police, or broken limbs, or interpersonal crises prevented me from finding it. It was something I could have accomplished, had I researched more, had I allotted myself more time, or even more money for a cab driver. But no, I failed. Failed. Utterly and completely failed, as it turned out, for as I was searching for it somewhere in central Manhattan between the Theater District and the Garment District, I should have been searching in the East Village.

Wasik failed as well. On May 27, 2003, he sent an e-mail to "some sixty friends and acquaintances" (Wasik 57). The e-mail invited those who read it to take part in what he named the MOB project, and asked recipients to forward the e-mail to any person they knew whom they thought might be interested. As mentioned earlier, the e-mail was sent from an anonymous webmail account so that there would be no direct trace to Wasik himself. There was however, a section in the e-mail for Frequently Asked Questions, commonly referred to as FAQ's. Wasik's FAQ section consisted of a sole question: "Q. Why would I want to join an inexplicable mob? A. Tons of other people are doing it" (Wasik 57). There were a few other important details contained in this e-mail, such as instructions for participants to synchronize their watches, to approach the mob site from four different directions (depending upon one's birth month – a tactic often used in later mobs by Wasik when designating drop sites), as well as instructions for the actions of the mob itself. Unlike Wasik's later mobs, he included both the mob site as well as the instructions for action in his e-mail invitation, a choice that ultimately led to mob number one's failure.

The site for the mob was Claire's Accessories, a small retail store that sold earrings and hair accessories near the Astor Place shopping center in the East Village. According to Wasik's e-mail, mob participants were to converge upon Claire's (from one of four directions, based on birth month) at 7:24 p.m. the following Tuesday, June 3rd. After seven minutes of assembly, during which time participants would fill the store and then the street, allowing those outside of the store to chant "Accessories!," the mob was to dissipate at precisely 7:31 p.m. As with the instructions for Wasik's later mobs, his original e-mail invite cautioned participants in large capital letters that "NO ONE SHOULD REMAIN AT THE SITE AFTER 7:33" (Wasik 57).

According to Wasik and other mob participants, one concerned participant alerted authorities at the store, who alerted the police, as to the date and time of the impending mob (Bemis 2). So, on June 3, 2003, at 7:24 p.m. when people began flocking towards Claire's Accessories, they found six police officers and a police truck blocking their entrance to the store. In 2004, Wasik admitted that he had actually been alerted to the police presence at the store right before leaving home to attend the mob. According to Wasik's own account, many people simply saw the police and kept walking, while others, around fifty or so, stood around in the area outside the store. Only fifteen or so people actually were allowed into the store by police (Bemis 2). To put it simply, Bill Wasik's first attempt at a flash mob had not created a mob at all. It was a failure.

A number of limitations exist in this study. To begin with, my research, being critical and theoretical in nature, does not allow me insight into the actual desires or intentions of the participants in Wasik's flash mobs, other than through comments they might have given to reporters or left on websites, both of which are questionable. In addition, I have never participated in a flash mob; therefore, I lack firsthand experiential or phenomenological

knowledge of my object of study.[7] Also, as stated earlier, I apply theories from each field of study that are best suited to my object of study. As such, I am always already aware that my applications of theory and method are by no means final or exhaustive. Finally, I am only discussing Wasik's original eight mobs, not the multitude of flash mobs that followed suit in the United States and abroad, let alone the vast array of offshoots and/or predecessors that mirror the flash mob in some capacity. I do address these additional performances in the final chapter of the study, as examples of the flash mob's impact upon culture and performance, as well as arenas of future research.

Furthermore, the fields of research I apply to flash mobs do not exist in isolation. Rather, each area informs and overlaps with the others, highlighting valuable sites of connection and shared interest. The intersection of technology, culture, and performance is one of the fastest growing areas of research in both performance studies and critical and cultural studies, so much so that it spawned the name of a new field: (new) media studies. In addition, this study also seeks to emphasize the important connection between continental philosophy and performance studies, particularly their shared interest in bodies. Both Deleuze and Foucault are enormously concerned with bodies, movement, and the acts of production created through bodies in motion – acts, I would argue, of performance.

Finally, none of the aforementioned methodologies or philosophical perspectives should be viewed as a given. The application of any particular theory, perspective, or methodology is heavily influenced by both the researcher using it as well as the particular historical, social, and political climate in which it is being used. For this very reason, an interdisciplinary study using

[7] Although I have yet to take part in what I consider to be a "true" flash mob, at least in Wasik's definition of the term, I did participate in a freeze, a variation of the flash mob. I discuss such variations as well as my own personal experience in Chapter Five of this study. I also attended two flash mobs in 2009 where I acted as an observer with knowledge of the event, rather than as a participant in the action.

multiple theoretical and methodological lenses to study a particular phenomenon is essential in regard to the flash mob. Without such an approach, one might easily overlook some of the particular contextual elements that shine light upon the emergence, death, and/or mutation of this particular form of performance.

Conclusion

Arguably, one of the fastest growing areas of research in the field of communication studies is the so-called realm of "new media" – that area where culture, communication, and technology collide. As I argue, a study of the flash mob necessitates a study of this particular intersection and provides the field of communication studies with a deeper understanding of how performance and performance-related theories, methodologies, and ideologies shine a light upon this growing area of interest. Further, for those of us interested in performance studies, an examination of the flash mob provides us with a wealth of information regarding potential strategies, tactics, and processes for creating performance in the digital age. An analysis of the flash mob provides insight into the potential effects of such performances.

Aside from the sense of belonging that comes from joining a pack such as that of the flash mob, or the political statement one might achieve through the swarming of a particular corporate space, many other reasons to study the flash mob and its participants exist. For example, the mob potentially creates a positive feeling amongst its participants. As Wasik reminds us, a participant's motivation for taking part in a flash mob can stem from a variety of different desires, and "for some, it is purely funny. For others, it is social – they like being out with people" (Shmueli). However, if Rheingold's prediction is correct regarding the inherent political or social power of the flash mob as a force of change, then one is compelled to ask the question, what sort of politics are we talking about? Might we begin to see how the flash mob

offers a potential solution to some of the problems resulting from the onslaught of identity-based politics in our country in the last few years? The work of those fighting for equality in the realm of identity politics, laudable for its accomplishments, often traps individuals in particular categories of representation – female, Caucasian, middle-class. In fact, as Jeffrey Nealon reminds us, "this inability to treat multiple subject positions – the inability to attend to more than one alterity at a time – has come to be the dominant critique of so-called identity politics" (4). The flash mob, like most mobs or crowds, consists of people from all walks of life claiming all sorts of identities. Furthermore, the purpose of the flash mob is for all these different people to act in concert in the creation of a performance event. As such, one finds it difficult to label the flash mob and stick it into one particular category; it is not simply a female thing, or a queer thing, or even a hipster thing – for certainly not every attendee of Wasik's original eight mobs fit the cultural definition of that category. Therefore, one must realize that the flash mob allows for a new understanding of identity and connection not offered in the realm of identity politics.

Giorgio Agamben speaks of this reclamation of subjectivity through his discussion of "whatever beings," most notably in his book Means Without End. By refusing to accept the identity-based subjectivities allocated to them by society, Agamben's "whatever beings" are free to move towards their own production of singularity. In this movement, through the disavowal of representation, these whatever beings become an inherent threat to the state, especially when they begin to form communities and work together towards a common goal. According to Agamben, "the threat the state is not willing to come to terms with is precisely the fact that the unrepresentable should exist and form a community without either presuppositions or conditions of belonging" (89). The inherent power in the lack of visibility traditionally associated with notions of identity and subjectivity threatens the state apparatus and, as Agamben reminds us in

the example of Tiananmen square, pushes the state towards a violent form of retaliation. How then might the disappeared, whatever beings come together in a manner that allows them to (re)appear into politics without a loss of the power their invisible, unmarked status grants them? Furthermore, how might such people protest the actions or conditions of the state without losing their lives in the process?

The answers to such questions are, of course, many years down the road. However, studies such as this, focusing on the intersection of performance, technology, and culture, begin to approach answers. Hopefully, the flash mob can teach us a few helpful lessons that will guide our progress on this long and arduous journey.

Chapter Outline

After introducing my project and describing each mob in Chapter One, Chapter Two begins with an analysis of the possible historical predecessors of the flash mob. Initially, I undertake a comparative analysis with other forms of performance using a linear timeline such as that of RoseLee Goldberg in Performance Studies: From Futurism to the Present. However, as mentioned earlier, I also use Joseph's Roach's genealogical approach to trace possible predecessors for the flash mob that may have been lost in more traditional performance histories. In this effort, I draw upon Bakhtin's writings on the chronotope and carnival to help inform my research.

Chapter Three applies the lenses of rhetorical and cultural studies to the flash mob. In this chapter I examine the specific social, cultural, and political influences of/on the flash mob and its participants, with a particular emphasis on technology and the hipster subculture. In this chapter I draw upon Kenneth Burke's dramatism, Donna Haraway's cyborg theory, and current

writing on urban hipster culture. Using Burke's Pentad as a framework, this chapter explores the agent, agency, and scene of the flash mob, as well as their relationship to one another.

Chapter Four turns toward an analysis of the particular movements of each of Wasik's eight original mobs through the lenses of continental philosophy, most notably theories of deterritorialization advanced by Gilles Deleuze. This chapter explores the specific actions of each flash mob as possible redefinitions of privately owned public space. I then expand on this analysis by investigating the possible purpose of such movements or deterritorializations. Through the work of Michel Foucault and Judith Butler, this chapter advances the argument that flash mobs are a type of performative resistance to current forms of governmentality.

Chapter Five concludes the study by exploring what flash mobs and their multiple offspring might teach the field of performance studies about the growing intersections of culture, technology, and performance. In the eight years since Wasik's flash mobs burst onto the scene, use of this new form and/or method of performance expanded and matured. Today we see flash mobs operating as elaborate pranks, outright protests, and even television program plot lines. The worldwide embrace of the flash mob points toward an interesting and ever-expanding fusion of performance, culture, and new technologies.

When it comes to writing, specifically, performative writing, Ron Pelias reminds the author that "the search for form requires more than anything else, the maneuvering of self, sometimes putting the self forward, sometimes holding the self back…" (71-72). In this chapter, as well as those that follow, I sometimes do just that – insert and remove my "self" from the page, always in an attempt to find a form that pushes the writing forward, provokes the reader to thought, and presses the writing to perform. My ultimate goal, most succinctly stated by Marvin Carlson, involves a style of writing where "performance . . . becomes not only a subject for study

but also an interpretative grid laid upon the process of study itself" (208). [8] However, such an attempt often constitutes "bad," although well-intentioned, writing. So let me rephrase, via Della Pollock. My desire in this writing, this maneuvering of self onto and off of the page, is to shift, as Pollock suggests, "from documenting 'me' to reconstituting an operative, possible 'we'" (87). I hope these performative departures stimulate the senses of the reader, engage her on a physical as well as mental level, and trigger her towards connections heretofore unseen.

[8] Carlson spoke of performative writing in regards to ethnography, however I believe his concept applicable to other forms of academic research in the larger realm of performance studies.

CHAPTER TWO
FILL/FLASH/MEMORY: A HISTORY

"It is the flash which appears, the thunderbolt will follow" (Voltaire Oreste II.7).

"Unpinned even by rudimentary notions of time and space, dreams float or flash by, leaving in their wake trails of unease, hopes, fears and anxieties" (Brook 84).

A few years ago I received my first and only digital camera, a Nikon Coolpix 4600, as a Christmas present. I remember feeling very excited, not because of the 4.0 megapixels, 102 millimeter optical zoom, or in-camera red eye fix technology, although these were all admirable qualities. No. I was excited because the digital camera allowed me to edit at will. Any picture deemed a poor or unfavorable representation of reality could be deleted instantly with the push of a button. No longer would I agonize over a set of prints containing shots with unfortunate lighting, unflattering camera angles, or unusually evil red eyes. Instead I was now allowed unlimited attempts to capture, delete, and recapture reality until my pictures reached a level of representation I found acceptable. (In this way, I find digital photography to be a lot like writing). My camera was able to perform these functions due to the existence of a small memory card using flash memory – a type of computer memory than can be electrically erased and reprogrammed. Flash memory is used in almost all of our modern portable electronic devices, from digital cameras to laptop computers to USB drives.

Despite flash memory, my Nikon Coolpix was not without its faults. Over time, I discovered that my pictures were more often blurry than sharp due to my inability to hold the camera perfectly still while shooting. The Nikon also consumed batteries in a record amount of time, requiring me always to carry an extra supply so as to not find myself without the power to record. And that awesome power of instant editing ultimately became annoying, as it allowed not only me but also friends and family instantly to critique my shots and demand their deletion.

For all of these reasons, when it came time to take my first backpacking trip a year ago, I chose not to take my small, lightweight digital camera but rather to opt for an older, heavier Minolta that required the use of film. Doing so added to the weight of the load of my pack, but it insured that my photos would be clear, crisp, and unavailable for friendly critique until a much later date.

Over the years, my Minolta proved reliable. It takes clear, high-quality pictures with a low level of distortion (unlike my digital Nikon). Nevertheless, the Minolta possesses a few drawbacks. As I stated earlier, it is larger, heavier, and requires film. I have to pause much longer between shots when taking photos with the Minolta, and I am stuck with the pictures I take; pictures I often do not see until many weeks or months after they are taken. Sometimes, I find that these photos are not accurate representations of the reality I remember experiencing at the time I took the shot.

In photography, a flash illuminates scenes that do not have enough available light to adequately expose the photograph – such as shot taken at nighttime or inside a dark room. Today, most cameras, especially digital cameras, contain an automatic fill flash – a low powered flash used to illuminate scenes where the ambient light is not that strong. The fill flash illuminates subjects close to the camera while simultaneously adding enough light to capture background detail. While useful, the fill flash has its weaknesses: it only works on subjects that are very close to the camera; the red-eye effect results from the flash; and perhaps most importantly; flashes tend to startle a subject and are difficult to use in an unobtrusive manner.

Like photography, historiography provides the novice with multiple avenues of exploration and attack, each with its own particular set of drawbacks. Much like the photos from my Minolta, the history already captured and recorded in the archive is one with which I must reckon. However, another history also exists, an undiscovered history, made by the historian in

her own editorial process. What alternate avenues does she choose to pursue, to disregard, or to revise and rewrite? How many outside voices influence her choices? This history, like the pictures from my Nikon, always appears a little blurry and somewhat uncertain. Still, it allows for the emergence of a new narrative, drawn from a different sort of archive, which like the fill flash, often illuminates a background that is otherwise lost.

For the purposes of this study, I undertake two disparate methods of writing or making a history of flash mobs, similar to the two types of cameras described above. The first, a so-called traditional history based on the written archive, expediently situates the flash mob within the larger field of performance studies, although doing so often requires that I refrain from following particular lines of flight out of a desire for a more cohesive narrative. The resulting picture looks undeniably crisp and clear. The second method, a more contemporary genealogy of the flash mob, produces a blurrier shot. This narrative, although controlled, is often difficult to follow; it jumps from one historical period to another, allowing multiple voices an opportunity to offer their opinions on the subject at hand. Neither of these histories is discrete. The format of this chapter highlights the overlapping nature as well as the beneficial qualities of both historical methodologies, by allowing the archival history to overflow onto the more performative genealogy. Hopefully, in so doing, the reader will be allowed two pictures – one crisp and one blurry – that awaken and engage a critical and physiological understanding of the historical context of the flash mob.

The term "history" is perhaps most simply defined as the telling of a story of past events. More specifically, our society understands history as a story written and/or based upon an examination and chronological organization of the written archive in an effort to explain the

causes for particular events or phenomena.[9] The first methodological approach I undertake in this chapter has a similar aim. I wish to tell a story explaining the origins of the flash mob, based upon an examination of the written archive. This story has a teleological aim. In other words, if it were to stand alone, my history would argue that flash mobs are the natural evolution of a particular type of performance arising out of the historical avant-garde and their performance-inclined offspring. As such, this particular history will describe and highlight the similarities between the practices and performances of the Dadaists, Surrealists, Situationists, and Happenings artists. However, as David Lowenthal notes, three limits exist to what can be known from such a history: "the immensity of the past itself, the distinction between past events and accounts of those events, and the inevitability of bias" (214). I begin by acknowledging these limits, while still asserting that this particular sort of historical work has merit. Without such a history, one loses a contextual frame that despite its obvious bias, provides a common language from which communication and critique about a particular event – such as Wasik's flash mob – begins.

On the other hand, taking into account that such histories are always biased and arranged so as to promote a particular narrative as well as to reinforce specific or predominant power relationships, one finds it necessary to disrupt them. I do so through my second historical methodology of genealogy, drawn from the work of Michel Foucault and Joseph Roach. In his essay, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History" Foucault argues that, "the purpose of history, guided by genealogy, is not to discover the roots of our identity but to commit itself to its dissipation" (162). In other words, for Foucault, the genealogist disrupts the dominant historical narrative through exhaustive research which once compiled, highlights the futility of the typical historian's search for origins. Furthermore, Foucault focuses the genealogist's gaze away from the archive

[9] "History." Webster's New World Dictionary of the American Language. Revised. 1984.

and toward the body, for he sees it as "the inscribed surface of events" and contends that the genealogist's work is located "within the articulation of the body and history" (148). Ultimately, a proper Foucauldian genealogist uncovers hidden, assumed, and multiple histories at work in the effects of power upon the subject.

Drawing upon Foucault's method of genealogy, Joseph Roach articulates several strategies for highlighting power struggles, specifically those found in our cultural practices. In his own work, Roach desires to make visible the play of difference and deferral inherent to such power struggles, specifically those in the circum-Atlantic and New Orleans area.[10] In order to do so, Roach attempts to track the historical transmissions and representations of cultural practices both past and present. Roach organizes his research into five categories, or sites of cultural practice: surrogation, orature, kinesthetic imagination, vortices of behavior, and displaced transmission. For the purposes of my study, I focus on two of these five categories – surrogation and vortices of behavior – as I find these categories most predominant in the performance of the flash mob.

Roach's first category, surrogation, refers to the use of stand-ins to reproduce and re-create culture. Often due to the loss or departure of a particular person or people, surrogation replaces the void they left in the cultural milieu. Such fill-ins, of course, fail to satisfy, and their re-created performance always differs from the original. A current example of surrogation can be found in the television program, The Tonight Show. Johnny Carson served as host of The Tonight Show from 1962 until 1992, when he retired. For thirty years, Carson appeared on television almost every night, thereby working his way into the hearts and homes of most Americans and establishing himself as part of the cultural fabric. Upon his retirement, television

[10] Roach, Joseph. Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance. New York: Columbia UP, 1996.

executives announced that Jay Leno, a comedian and regular guest host of The Tonight Show in its later years, would replace Carson as the host. Although Leno did a respectable job, he never fully replaced Carson, or Carson's role in American television history. Rather, he – as well as David Letterman, Conan O'Brien, and other late night television talk show hosts – acted as stand-ins seeking to fill the void left by Carson's retirement. For the purposes of this study, the question of surrogation serves as a starting point for much of my genealogical research. In other words, I question for which cultural practice/performance might flash mobs be standing in (i.e. reproducing or re-creating)?

The second of Roach's categories used in my research involves a focus on vortices of behavior. For Roach, these are sites of memory where certain everyday practices become legitimated, reinforced, and intensified. In other words, vortices of behavior are those places where cultural behaviors begin to emerge and take shape. Roach uses the example of the red light or theater district, where certain outrageous behaviors are first allowed, then tested, then popularized. Therefore, vortices of behavior exist as ludic spaces – spaces where culture gets produced, practiced, and investigated. Coffeehouses served as such places during the time of the historical avant-garde. In my own research, I look at the particular vortices of behavior for Wasik's flash mob – pseudo-public or corporate space – and then question what sorts of behaviors are promoted and/or played with in such spaces.

Roach tends to begin his genealogical work by describing some particular cultural practice, often one found in the past, and then he investigates the bodies, space, and transmission related to this practice using his categories. He interprets the practice as it relates to a wider cultural code and then tracks the practice to other sites of performance, often returning to the present to show that the cultural code is still in place. Once he has done so, Roach seeks to

disrupt this code by offering disparate histories that are resistant to it. In Cities of the Dead, Roach begins by describing the Rex and Zulu parade krewes and practices at Mardi Gras in New Orleans. He tracks these practices historically, focusing on issues of surrogation, vortices of behavior, methods of displaced transmission, and practices of orature and kinesthetic imagination. In doing so, Roach avoids presenting a seamless narrative of the Rex and Zulu parade krewes' origins, but rather describes a network of practices, places, and behaviors that create, contribute to, and symbolize questions of race, class, sexuality, and nationality.

Like Roach, I situate the flash mob within a particular cultural code or practice through the work of my more traditional history described above. Also, like Roach, I disrupt an understanding of that code/history by offering multiple and diverse histories which seek to resist it. However, unlike Roach, I do not seek to do so in a linear fashion, as I feel that doing so creates a seamlessness that ultimately defeats the work of disruption. Instead, I allow my multiple and disparate histories to rub up against one another in an effort to highlight my personal bias as historian, as well as to remind the reader that no history can ever fully express the historicity (or embodied, lived experience) of the individuals, sites, or events under investigation. Rather, I can only tell my own story – a narrative of avant-garde tactics, medieval dance manias, house parties full of *45ansas4545nt*, and the psychology of flashing. This narrative, as read in the organization of this chapter, as well as in the movement between past and present, linear and oblique, serves as my personal experience of making a history of the flash mob.

The Vanguard

Being on the cutting edge of an artistic scene, is, pardon the pun, a double-edged sword. On the one hand, you are given the opportunity to make a name for yourself as a leader in some

new movement – part of the vanguard, the first and foremost advancing front. On the other, you are well aware that behind you stands the entire arsenal of history, pushing you forward, providing you the shoulders upon which you stand, and ready to trample over you once your time has run its course. After all, always remaining on advance, holding one's guard, is rather difficult. Consequently, the time of the vanguard is always limited. Sooner or later a particular vanguard's unique tactics and talents are seen as passé, and another crowd of artistic soldiers eagerly awaits its turn on the front lines. However, this limited time construct also stems from the fact that soldiers on the front line operate under a different set of regulations than those in the rear. Those at the front provoke the enemy, seek to push him back, or annihilate him altogether. Those at the rear hold the ground gained by those in the vanguard. This difference in goals and behaviors – to push, to provoke, and to destroy rather than to maintain – along with the limited time and particular space allotted for the accomplishment of those goals, establishes what I am referring to as vanguard time, or the chronotope of the vanguard.

Artistic front lines are different than military ones, however, so let me be more specific in regards to the topos of the vanguard. Although performance studies traces its history as far back as the very roots of mankind – the first story told, ritual performed, or person imitated – when one speaks of the avant-garde, or vanguard of performance, they are typically referring to a particular period in history (the early to mid-twentieth century) and a particular set of artistic provocations (Futurism, Constructivism, Dada, Surrealism, Bauhaus, and Live Art). The artists at the forefront of these movements sought to push the medium forward, to subvert (or provoke) the status quo, and to annihilate canonical conceptions of what made "good" art. These artistic vanguards also tended to gather and grow out of one particular place – the coffeehouse or café.

The earliest documented Parisian café, the Café Procope, opened in 1689 and acquired its name from its owner, Francois Procope. Procope, an expatriate from Florence, began his career as a lemonade seller; however, upon adding coffee to his menu and noticing the rapidity with which it sold, he quickly moved into the café business, following the models of Islamic coffeehouses. In an effort to attract a higher class of customer, Procope located his café directly across from the Comedie Francaise, a state theater founded nine years earlier by Louis XIV. Procope's strategy worked, and soon his café was full of actors, theater-goers, writers and musicians. Parisian cafés became gathering places for the intellectual elite, sites of argument and creation, all fueled by the ever-flowing cup of coffee. As historians Bennett Alan Weinberg and Bonnie K. Bealer observe:

> Like its English counterparts, the Café Procope became a center for political discussions. Robespierre, Marat, and Danton convened there to debate the dangerous issues of the day, and were supposed to have charted the course that led to the revolution of 1789 from the café. . . . By one accounting, during the reign (1715-74) of Louis XV there are supposed to have been six hundred cafes in Paris, eight hundred by 1800, and more than three thousand by 1850. According to another more modest reckoning, there were 380 by 1720. (72-73)

Regardless of the exact numbers, cafés spread rapidly across France, as coffeehouses had in London fifty years earlier. Filled to the brim with a heterogenous mix of clientele, cafés were exciting spaces standing in stark contrast to the still popular yet more controlled salons. As editor Charles Woinez said on the announcement of the publication of a leaflet periodical in 1858 entitled "The Café, Literary, Artistic and Commercial," "The Salon stood for privilege, the Café stands for equality" (Ukers 34) .

In the cafés and coffeehouses of Europe, the historical avant-garde (as contemporary artists and performers refer to it) sprang up. Full of various types of free-thinking artists and intellectuals, such places became the natural breeding grounds for artistic conversation and

revolution. As such, new movements or tactics for creating art and provoking the status quo emerged, many of which we find operating in Wasik's flash mobs, in these cafés and coffeehouses. The first of these forerunners, at least historically, are the Dadaists.

Dada

I trace the roots of Dada to the cafés and bars of Munich, where Benjamin Franklin Wedekind, Oskar Kokoschka, and Hugo Ball staged and debated their irreverent performances and artistic ideologies. In turn, the general populace opposed the work of these young men and viewed their irreverent satires highlighting the hypocrisies of the bourgeois and the corruption of the government as "an eccentric affront to public morals" (Goldberg "Performance Art" 52). However, when Ball arrived in Zurich in 1916 and opened his own café-cabaret with Emmy Hennings, the Cabaret Voltaire, Dada was given its proper birth as an artistic movement.

A daily performance space, the Cabaret Voltaire housed musical cabaret numbers performed alongside poetry readings and spontaneous dances. Over time, the primary vanguards of the Cabaret Voltaire – Tristan Tzara, Emmy Hennings, Georges Janco, and Richard Huelsenbeck – began to use the daily performances as opportunities to experiment with artistic form itself. As historian RoseLee Goldberg, working from the writings of Ball, Huelsenbeck, and other Dada artists, points out, "under pressure to entertain a varied audience, they were forced to 'be incessantly lively, new and naïve. It is a race with the expectations of the audience and this race calls on all our forces of invention and debate" ("Performance Art" 58). Thrown onto the front lines in this manner, Dada artists created inventive and often frenetically paced performances that erupted into raucous celebrations. Audience members in the Cabaret Voltaire often walked out or left abruptly during the café's more controversial performances. As Huelsenbeck writes, "it was the sons of the Zurich bourgeoisie, the university students, who used

to go to the Cabaret Voltaire, a beer parlour. We wanted to make the Cabaret Voltaire a focal point of the 'newest art' although we did not neglect from time to time to tell the fat and utterly uncomprehending Zurich philistines that we regarded them as pigs and the German Kaiser as the initiator of the war" (43).

Although Dada performance enjoys many unique qualities, two tactics and/or inventions of the Dadaists prevail in the flash mobs of Bill Wasik. The first of these is simultaneity of action. In Dada performance, simultaneity of action often surfaces in the recitation of a simultaneous poem. Hugo Ball described a simultaneous poem as:

> a contrapuntal recitative in which three of more voices speak, sing, whistle, etc. at the same time, in such a way that the elegiac, humorous, or bizarre content of the piece is brought out by these combinations. In such a simultaneous poem, the willful quality of an organic work is given powerful expression, and so is its limitation by the accompaniment. Noises (an rrrrr drawn out for minutes, or crashes, or sirens, etc.) are superior to the human voice in energy. (Ball 57)

Flash mobs use this notion of simultaneity of action in a similar manner to shock the audience as well as highlight the bizarre nature of a particular place or the behavior it stipulates. Although flash mobs by their very form call for simultaneity of action among individual performers working from a set of instructions, one particular mob serves as a nice example: Wasik's fifth mob, where participants gathered along a particular ridge in Central Park West and stood in silence for three minutes before erupting into a series of planned "bird calls." As stated previously, participants began these "bird calls" earlier than planned, and the general mood erupted into a sort of simultaneous spontaneous explosion of bird noises and shouts of "Nature! Come get your nature here!" Alongside the almost definite existence of actual bird calls and noises of nature always found in the park, such a performance highlighted what Ball describes as the "humorous or bizarre content of the piece" (57).

A general spirit of anarchy is another characteristic of Dada performance art found in Wasik's flash mob. Although the Dada artists are not the only members of the historical avant-garde to express such a spirit in their work, Dada arguably existed as one of the more unfocused movements of the historical avant-garde, sprouting up here and there across Europe during its heyday and then quickly disappearing. Furthermore, Dada's attentions were focused across the board – not simply at art, but at politics and society as well. Goldberg notes that Hugo Ball "was caught up in the excitement of arranging programmes and writing material with his various colleagues. They were less concerned about creating new art . . . Rather he enjoyed the role of catalyst: 'Producere means "to produce", "to bring into existence." It does not have to be books. One can produce artists too.' "(Goldberg "Performance Art" 56). As a result what one finds in descriptions of Dada performance is not always a new art form, but rather a desire to disrupt previously established forms. The flash mob also harbors this anarchical tendency.

Flash mobs create an anarchic situation where numerous results are possible. In other words, as detailed as the instructions for a flash mob might be, no one can predict what will happen when it takes place. How many people will take part? Will they follow the instructions they have been given? How will the "audience" react? Will the police be called? Furthermore, the desire among flash mob participants, to disrupt the normal flow of everyday life and to upset the normative social order by substituting a scene of disorder and/or chaos, is anarchic in the more traditional use of the term. However, the flash mob's anarchy forces a consideration of ethics not found in Dada. Often, a member of the flash mob's target audience, such as an employee, will see the large number of people arriving at their establishment and take action to accommodate them. One has only to think of the employee in the Macy's rug department or the clerks in the small shoe store to find examples. However, perhaps the most fitting example of

this difference lies not in one of Wasik's original eight mobs, but in one of the immediate offshoots it spawned in Auckland, New Zealand in September of 2003.

A flash mob entered a Burger King restaurant with instructions to point at the menu while frowning, smile at the employees, erupt into a cheer for the employees, and then leave. When the manager of the Auckland Burger King saw the mob approaching, he assumed they were some sort of large travel group and so quickly prepared extra food which he was later forced to throw out, losing money over the affair (Johnson). In a Dada performance, audiences always knew that they were watching and involved in a performance, and therefore performers were allowed to transgress norms without worrying about the welfare of specific individuals. Flash mobs, however, complicate their transgression by refusing to inform their audiences of the performance situation.

Surrealism

Following so closely on the heels of the Dadaists that the two movements were almost concurrent, the Surrealists officially arrived on the art scene in 1925 with the publication of The Surrealist Manifesto (Goldberg "Performance Art" 88). Arising out of the Dada café-caberet-performance scene in Paris in the early 1920s, surrealism was heavily influenced by the writings of Sigmund Freud on the unconscious. Many of the artists in the Paris Dada scene felt that Dada, as an experimental art form, concentrated so much on anarchy and destruction of the past, that it failed to provide any sort of direction for the present. As historian RoseLee Goldberg notes, "To them, Dada represented the destruction of established order, which was acceptable. What was unacceptable, however, was the fact that they saw 'no new value arising from the ashes of past values' " ("Performance Art" 82). The artists in the Surrealist vanguard sought to fill this hole –

this desire for a new value, order, or direction. They saw the Surrealist process as their opportunity to move out of the general rank and file and into the front lines.

Andre Breton, one of surrealism's founding fathers and early stars, as well as a one-time friend and collaborator of Tristan Tzara, viewed Dada as a dead art whose time had passed. "Leave everything. Leave Dada. Leave your wife. Leave your mistress. Leave your hopes and fears," Breton wrote, "Set off on the roads" (166). Those roads, apparently, involved a move away from Dada's anarchic, chance-based form of performance and a move towards explorations of the unconscious, dreams, and the realm of human thought. Breton's early definition of Surrealism states, "*Surrealism*: noun, masc., pure psychic automatism, by which an attempt is made to express, either verbally, in writing, or in any other manner, the true functioning of thought" (Goldberg "Performance Art" 89). In other words, surrealism, as its very name suggests, moved away from the realism found in traditional forms of art and theatre. However, unlike Dada artists who sought a state of permanent and ongoing revolution, Surrealists did not resist outlining a particular path of exploration. As Breton goes on to explain in his definition, Surrealism desired to investigate, "hitherto neglected forms of association, in the omnipotence of the dream, in the disinterested play of thought" (Goldberg "Performance Art" 89). Many members of the Paris scene still loyal to Dada's anarchical spirit viewed Breton's particular pathways of artistic exploration as controlling and antithetical to Dada's goal. Ultimately, these tensions led to a split between the two camps, and out of this split, Surrealism found its place as a form of art and performance separate from Dada.

Surrealist artists' interest in the unconscious led to an array of interesting performance techniques, including automatism and dreamwork. However, I find the tactic of juxtaposition, along with the aspect of surprise, to be the elements of Surrealism still operating in the flash

mob. Surrealists used juxtaposition in their art and performance work in order to re-create the feeling of a dream in the mind of the audience, or to force unconscious thoughts forward into the conscious mind. This tactic of juxtaposition – joining two disparate images together in order to create a new, third image – can be found in Wasik's flash mobs. For example, the Toy's R Us flash mob, took the behavior found in a place of worship – bowing and gesticulation – and juxtaposed it against the setting of the toy store and an animatronic Tyrannosaurus Rex. By doing so, a third image was created – bowing/gesticulation to a dinosaur – that confused audiences and forced conscious considerations of the relationship between such disparate images. Surprise, on the other hand, is not unique to Surrealism. The Dada and Futurist performers also relied heavily on surprise as a strategy in their art and performance work. However, unlike Dada and Futurist performance, surprise in Surrealist pieces arises from the associations found in various juxtapositions, more than in an artist's ability to shock an audience (as in Dada) or in the overall pace of a piece (as in Futurism). I see this use of surprise, the surprise of association, operating in the flash mob.

Flashdance: A Pathology of Mania

The dancing was not normal. Normal was long hours of physically exhausting work, the possibility of sickness that spread rapidly into death, the lack of good or even filling food, and a mass on Sunday warning of hellfire and eternal damnation. So you can see how dancing, outside of the King's court, and away from the pub's hearth, was something out of the ordinary. Dancing was such a strange word for it really, because no formal moves or steps were involved, just an erratic display of physical expression through one's limbs and arms – a jump, a hop, a step, a shake. The dance began slowly, with a single body, and then somehow, it spread – mostly women at first, but later children, beggars, and able-bodied men joined the dance as well.

At present, the description of such erratic dancing might seem normal, which is understandable. We see it all the time these days. Nearly every week, another Youtube video posted to someone's facebook page alerts us to spontaneous outbreaks of dance. A train station in Belgium begins to play a tune from The Sound of Music, and slowly, one by one, we see bodies begin to dance in its central lobby, until the place swells with dancers. On a summer day, tourists and other onlookers near the Powell Street cable car stop in San Francisco watch in amazement as, one by one, bodies line the sidewalk, hands swinging like claws in the air as the dancers move to the beat of Michael Jackson's Thriller. These days, "spontaneous" dance happens all the time. Watching it on a computer screen is one thing; seeing it in person, right in front of your very eyes, quite another.

In the medieval era, twenty-four hour cable news networks, personal computers, and widespread internet access did not exist. A dancing mob in the middle of town, out in the open, and out of the blue was not normal. Spontaneous mobs of dancers were so abnormal in fact, so aberrant, that people created special names for such occurrences: spells, manias, the Dance of Death. Regardless of the name of the dance, townsfolk viewed the dancers as diseased and prescribed remedies, the most common being "fasting and ice-cold water baths" (Mau & Rockwell 115). Doctors searched for a cause. In Italy, they blamed it on a spider bite, and related the phenomenon to the female worshippers of a Dionysian cult, known as Tarantates, ultimately leading to a derivation of the dance we know today as the tarantella. In Germany, they called it St. John's or St. Vitus' dance and viewed the dance as a form of possession by the devil. In the last twenty years, historians suggested alternate and varied opinions as to the cause of the medieval dance manias, ranging from mass hysteria to the effect of psychotropic drugs

introduced into the food supply. Jamake Highwater's explanation, however, seems most insightful:

> The old beliefs and the fanaticism of the new Catholic theology – the visions of damnation and the torture of Christ on the cross, the prevalence of pestilence, famine, and warfare – combined into a mystic fatalism unique to the Middle Ages. The Dance of Death, which was never truly a dance, symbolized the essence of the era which recreated it. The tensions this symbol represented eventually found expression in a psychopathic dance which terrorized much of Europe: the dance mania called St. John's or St. Vitus' dance. . . . People danced compulsively, in wild delirium, unable to stop. Often these dances began at funerals and then gathered momentum until they whirled through the streets and beyond the towns collecting more and more people as they moved along, like the procession of the legendary Pied Piper. (42)

More than a mere symbol of an era, for Highwater the medieval dance manias were expressions of the tensions of the times. Whether they were brought on by spider bites, devil possessions, or poisoned food, the dance manias were an aberration and abnormality enacted not by forlorn individuals, but by miserable masses. As historian Barbara Ehrenreich explains,

> . . . in the medieval dancing manias, we can also discern faint political overtones, perhaps even a half-conscious form of dissent. It was the poor who were most likely to be stricken, and they often experienced their affliction as a cure for what Heckler describes as a 'distressing uneasiness,' marked by dejection and anxiety, or what we would now call depression. (87)

Furthermore, through the dance, participants found outlets for particular desires and behaviors that society viewed as unlawful, unholy, and unacceptable. Manic dancers often undressed entirely or wore strange outfits, laughed and wept uncontrollably, and/or howled and made obscene gestures (Mau & Rockwell 115). Other researchers note that "many took part out of loneliness and carnal pleasures; others were curious or sought exhilaration" (Bartholomew & Radford, 144). Dance manias, then, provided members of medieval society a spontaneous outlet for expression in a highly structured, hierarchical society full of numerous physical, political, and social dangers.

As such, dance manias were extremely dangerous affairs, able to pop up unannounced at any time, often with disastrous effects. The first recorded dance mania occurred in 1278 when more than two hundred inhabitants of the Dutch city Utrecht became seized by the dance while standing on a bridge over the Mosul river. They refused to stop and ultimately the bridge collapsed, drowning all the dancers. Other accounts speak of dancers almost a hundred years later who foamed at the mouth, described wild visions, and ultimately collapsed from exhaustion (Mau & Rockwell 115).

In medical terms, pathology is understood as a departure or deviation from a normal condition. For the doctor, such deviations from the norm point towards the existence of a larger, underlying disease. Otherwise, according to the doctor, a particular individual would not deviate from her regular pattern, or condition. If, however, she did choose to enact some form of departure (such as interrupting her narrative by flashing back a few hundred years), such a deviation would definitely not be normal.

Situationists

Arriving from London in the 1950s, painter Ralph Rumney quickly found his way into the Parisian café scene, particularly Chez Moineau, located at 22 Rue de Four, a block from Saint-Germain-des-Pres. Author and historian Greil Marcus describes Chez Moineau in the following manner:

> People from all over the world passed through. It was a haven for refugees, would-be artists, budding suicides, runaways and class cutters, petty criminals, dope pushers, bums, eccentrics (one old man regularly appeared in a Japanese warrior's helmet from which, by means of a wire, he flew a pack of cigarettes), and the new Lettrist International, which is to say a table, where sat those Debord judged ready to change the world. (376)

The Debord described by Marcus is Guy Debord, soon-to-be author of The Society of the Spectacle, co-creator of the Lettrist International, and before long, co-founder and de-facto

leader of its offspring, the Situationist International. [11] Artists like Rumney, Asger Jorn, and Gil Wolman congregated regularly around Debord's table at Chez Moineau, and the Situationist International was born out of their conversations.

Officially christened during a drunken week spent at a hotel run by a friend's family member in the small city of Cosio d'Arroscia, the Situationist International had one primary goal: the appropriation and alteration of the city and its space. As Simon Sadler elucidates, the Situtationist ideal grew out of a fear of the spread of both communism and capitalism, as well as an overall dislike of the revolutions in urban planning and construction grown out of the modernist movement:

> In short, the Situationist International aimed to convert avant-garde interest in everyday space and mass culture into a revolution. There was an urgency in all of this. The Parisian built environment had not encountered a stylistic revolution as authoritative as modernism since the Renaissance, and the Lettrist International, sensing that modernism's functionalist and rationalist tentacles were about to squeeze its Left Bank bohemia to death, insisted that politico-artistic struggle be played out at the ultimate level – that of the city itself .(Sadler 11)

The idea, as well as one can make out, seems to be that through the construction of situations – alterations and changes made to one's environment (either public or private) – one could reveal the authentic nature of real life existing underneath layers of artifice and spectacle. The situationists defined the constructed situation as "a moment of life, concretely and deliberately constructed by the collective organization of a unitary environment and the free play of events" ("Definitions" Internationale Situationiste # 1).

In general, four Situationist ideas/philosophies dominated both their discourse and movement: psychogeography, the derive, unitary urbanism, and detournement. Each of these

[11] The Lettrist International was the name chosen by those young artists and scholars, like Debord, who chose to break away from Isidore Isou's Lettrist movement and form their own group in 1951-1952. Isou's Lettrists, it should be noted, were admirers of both the Dada and Surrealism movements, and claimed both Trista Tzara and Andre Breton as strong theoretical influences.

ideas served as a theoretical principle and/or tactic for combating both the overarching spread of spectacle – that "collapse of reality into the streams of images, products, and activities sanctioned by business and bureaucracy" – created by capitalism, as well as the loss of the individual (in favor of the collective) found in communist ideologies and modernist work and aesthetic practices (Sadler 15). Within the descriptions of these terms, officially given in the first issue of the Internationnale Situationiste, one comes to understand the philosophy as well as the tactics of the Situationists.

First, situationists concentrated on psychogeography, or the physiological effects that a particular environment created within an individual or group of individuals. Put more plainly, situationists noted how certain places within the city had certain feelings or "vibes" about them, and therefore, people acted certain ways in particular spaces – e.g. the red light district, church, "bad" part of town. As Sadler notes, "Psychogeography comprehended buildings through their use, their history, and their collective and associative generation of meaning and mood, like words in poetry; it inferred a poetic rather than analytic response to the environment" (160). A situationist's primary method for engaging in psychogeographic study was the derive.

Derives were unplanned, unfocused rambles from place to place within a city, in which an individual let her feelings and desires, rather than some instrument of control such as a map or society, guide her. Writing about his own derives with fellow situationists in Paris, Ralph Rumney states, "we wandered from café to café – we went where our feet and our inclinations carried us" (65). In so doing, a person often discovered new places or routes for travel within the city that had been hidden previously. After engaging in derives and other forms of psychogeographic study, a situationist had enough knowledge of a particular urban environment that she could engage in detournements.

Although the situationist's emphasis on the urban environment and its effect upon an individual's behavior may connect to Wasik's flash mobs, I believe the strongest link occurs in detournement. Simply stated, detournement is a true tactic of the situationist – a method for alterting the urban environment in order to counteract the influence of capitalism and modernism upon it. However, as Simon Sadler carefully elucidates, the term detournement, "can be translated most simply as 'diversion,' though at the loss of the nuances encoded in the original French – 'rerouting,' 'hijacking,' 'embezzlement,' 'misappropriation,' 'corruption,' all acts implicit in the situationist use of society's 'preexisting aesthetic elements' " (17). For the situationists, experimentation with detournement began on a small scale, with the detourning of pre-existing paintings, or the re-naming of streets. Rumney tells the following story regarding the origin of the detournement, "Baj, Jorn, and I used to go to the flea market on the outskirts of Milan where you could find various old daubs, bad paintings displayed by the poor. Someone said: 'What if we altered them?' The results were fantastic" (76-77). More than mere collage, however, the goal of detournement was not simply to layer a new picture or idea over an older, pre-existing one, but rather to corrupt, hijack, or divert the aesthetic elements and goals of the original work. Detournement stands in opposition to recuperation, that tactic of the spectacle which seeks to re-claim radical ideas and images by repackaging them into a safer commodified version of the original. Rather, detournement seeks to alter those images, spaces, or ideas produced by the spectacle which support the status quo, by making them into images, spaces, or ideas which subvert it. In the flash mob, we find detournements accomplished not through the work of brushes or letters, but through the behaviors of individuals.

In the Grand Hyatt Hotel mob, the cold, formal, proper space of the lobby detourns into a warm, informal, communal space of celebration through the gathering and clapping of flash mob

participants. The Central Park mob takes the quiet, contemplative, organized place of a particular section of Central Park and detourns it into a place of absurdity and performance through the bird-like chirping behavior of the flash mobbers. Wasik's final mob, in which participants gathered in an alcove on forty-second street and followed the instructions of an unknown individual rather than the planned instructions on a boom-box, detourned the cold, modern, industrial space of the alcove into that of a street party.

Unlike the detournements of the situationists, those of the flash mob are not permanent. However, flash mobs do transform place, something the Situationist International became focused on during its later years. In fact, certain situationists became so committed to this focus that a schism erupted within the group between those focused on the creation of art and other aesthetic pursuits and those engaged in the exposure of the spectacle and a revolution against its control(s). Despite these differences, one easily locates the influence of the Situationists in the actions of the flash mob. Like the Situationists, Wasik's flash mobs act upon urban spaces, seeking to do so by altering the behavior of individuals within those spaces. As a result, the psychogeographic condition of a space changes, if only for a few brief minutes before the flash mob disperses. Ultimately, it is within those minutes of detourned play where we find actual acts of revolution.

Writing By Someone Who Doesn't Know How To Write

We all know one: a friend or acquaintance who views herself as not merely ahead of the trends, but rather above and beyond them. "Too cool for school," everything she does seems to have an ironic edge to it; however, only those who share her dress, her attitudes, her opinions, and her sense of humor seem to understand the intelligence or hilarity of her actions. The rest of

us, poor rubes that we are, find ourselves feeling left out, uncool, and perhaps too dumb to "get" the joke.

Her art, should she have one, comes more from her ability to satirize and/or recycle everything that has come before, rather than from any attempt to make something new. This is not to say she carries no interest in the new or groundbreaking attempts of others. Quite the contrary, she cultivates knowledge of such things, always aware of the newest music, literature, clothing, and visual art. After all, this knowledge, combined with a refined attitude of nonchalance, provides her with her status as a cultural aesthete.

In 2003, while preparing his mob project, Bill Wasik chose the kind of individuals I describe above – of which he was admittedly one – as his subjects. He also gave them a label: hipsters. He writes:

> Consider the generational cohort that has come to be called the hipsters – i.e., those hundreds of thousands of educated young urbanites with strikingly similar tastes. Have so many self-alleged aesthetes ever been more … "submerged in the group"? (Wasik 56)

A hipster's status arises not from their label, dress, musical, or literary preference. Rather, as any self-respecting hipster would demonstrate by denying any association with the term "hipster," it exists in their attitude. And the attitude – that of a detached, ironic aesthete – is nothing new.

In the fall of 1882, a group of artists and intellectuals with a similar attitude as the modern hipster debuted their work in the Left Bank Parisian apartment of writer Jules Levy. Titled "Arts 61ansas6161nt," the exhibition was billed as a show full of "drawings by people who don't know how to draw," a not-so-subtle attack on the academic art establishment.[12] Two thousand intrigued invitees piled into Levy's apartment, roaming amidst sculptures created out of

[12] Information drawn from New York University's Grey Art Gallery online exhibition page "The Incoherents" in the exhibit Counter Culture. 11/17/98 – 1/16/99. <http://www.nyu.edu/greyart/exhibits/counter/index.html>.

found materials such as bread and cheese and monochromatic paintings like poet Paul Billard's Negroes Fighting in a Cellar at Night, which consisted of a large, framed black rectangle. The artists displaying work in Levy's apartment that night, regulars in the Parisian cabaret scene, shared interests that tended toward humor, parody, and satire. Taking their name from the exhibition title, they began calling themselves "les 62ansas6262nt" and over the next ten to fifteen years, they exhibited their work annually at gallery shows and masked balls, donating the profits to public assistance projects.

Although the 62ansas6262nt cared more about satire, absurdism, and irrationality than paving the pathway for a new type of art, certain members made notable contributions to the realm of art and performance. For example, in 1885, filmmaker and incoherent Emile Cohl previewed photographs of an ear filled with cotton and a hand holding a rose that pre-date many similar images of juxtaposition later to be found in Surrealist art. In 1887, early performance artist and incoherent Sapeck, also known as Eugene Bataille, exhibited a portrait of the Mona Lisa smoking a pipe at an incoherent show, years before Marcel Duchamp thought to add a mustache to the famous lady. Despite such innovative and forward-thinking efforts, due to their satirical and overall humorous nature many found the art shows and masked balls produced by the 62ansas6262nt to be nothing more than elaborate in-jokes. As one New York Times review from 1886 reads:

> Their aim is to make something new. They do not always succeed in this. In fact, they seldom do more than attain eccentricity. . . . I cannot see where art is to find much progress in this kind of wild improvisation, and the best way to consider the matter is to deem it a colossal farce, one of those many things that Paris needs to make up its Winter amusements. . . . on the whole, the effect is forced and only suitable to the peculiar interests it excites." (L.K. 1)

One can easily empathize with the statements of the Times' critic. After all, being a part of the out-group is never much fun, as one is made to feel not smart or culturally savvy enough to get

the joke. However, for this very reason, we often find it difficult to write such in-group people off. We want to "get" the joke, understand the root of the satire and the attack against the establishment. This is why we all know, or want to know, or perhaps even want to *become* one of them, hip and incoherent as she may be.

Happenings

Although they originated out of academic circles rather than cafés, Happenings, another movement of the traditional avant-garde, also share a striking resemblance to the flash mob. Happenings arose in the early 1950s out of collaborations between artist-scholars at Black Mountain College in North Carolina as well as New York's New School for Social Research, and consist of a series of performed actions devoid of any plot or storyline operating within a specified place and timeline. Visionaries such as John Cage, Allan Kaprow, Wolf Vostell and the Gutai group in Japan produced events that combined art with live action (Goldberg "Performance Art" 128). For these particular artists, the goal of performance evolved from achieving a certain level of closeness with the observer to the fusion of art with the everyday world. Although employed and associated with academia rather than a penniless anti-bourgeois café crowd, the artists-scholars who made Happenings in the 1950s and 1960s did so as a result of extended conversations, debate, and experimentation in the classroom that were very similar to the debates held in the European cabarets and cafés.

Happenings and flash mobs share a number of similar practices and tactics. To begin with, the form of a Happening is almost identical to that of a flash mob – a timed series of actions enacted within or upon a particular space. Perhaps the only true difference rests in the Happenings audience's awareness that they are watching, or engaged in, a performance. I will

discuss three practices of Happenings I find operating in flash mobs: an emphasis on place and space, the use of games and play, and a fusion of art with everyday life.

Place and space each play an important role in Happenings. Place in a Happening is generally regarded as the actual site where the performance occurs. Happenings have occurred in a wide variety of places, from the Brooklyn Bridge to an artist's backyard. Space in a Happening refers to the spatial framework of the performance. In other words, space consists of how bodies are situated in relation to each other, to performers, and to objects. Artists often play with space in a Happening by constructing pathways on which audience members must move in order to view the performance.

As Claes Oldenburg noted, "the place in which the piece occurs, this large object, is part of the effect and usually the first and most important factor determining the events (materials at hand being the second and players the third)" (Goldberg "Performance" 134). Performances such as Ken Dewey's "City Scale" and Milan Knizak's "Demonstration for all the Senses" illustrate the importance of place. In both of these Happenings, spectators were led by the Happening's creator throughout the city to observe different occurrences. Dorothy Seckler explains the reasoning behind selections of place during her discussion of Kaprow's 1962 courtyard happening:

> The experience would be very different – certainly less moving – if the 'happening' had been held in a museum. The striking continuity and shifting identities of real and unreal would be blurred. This is one of the reasons why most of the artists discussed say they would prefer to have their works presented outside the cloistered atmosphere of cultural institutions. (66)

In addition, place figured prominently for Happening artists because the transformation or total use of a place allowed the spectator to be brought completely inside the realm (or space) of the performance. Furthermore, the performance of a Happening in an everyday place such as

a backyard, street corner, or field allowed for the creation of a liminal realm/space in which the artistic world of the performance could be fused, at least momentarily, with the everyday world. This fusion of art with everyday life gave audience members a stronger feeling of inclusion in the performance.

In the flash mob, place and space are integral to the overall event. If the place is too large, too remote, or too well publicized, the flash mob fails as a performance event. We find an example of this in Wasik's original flash mob in June of 2003. Wasik e-mailed fifty of his friends and told them to gather in a Manhattan retail store at a specific time. However, on the day that Wasik and his friends tried to convene on the store grounds, they were met by store managers and police. Apparently, some unknown possible participant tipped off the store, and Wasik was forced to cancel the event. This experience led Wasik to name one place as a point of assembly for potential flash mobbers, and then upon arrival, to hand out fliers detailing where the actual site was located.

Flash mobs occur in department stores, city streets, parks, and parking lots. Often the place dictates the action performed. For example, at a July 2003 Rome flash mob, participants gathered in a music and bookstore and began to ask for non-existent titles. In every flash mob, the size of the large group of participants, usually between 100 to 400 people, highlights the space of the place chosen. Whether taking place on a street corner in Berlin or a Macy's department store in New York, the large crowd of people draws attention from those not participating and creates a liminal realm where an everyday place suddenly transforms into an artistic stage (or space). This emphasis on place and space coincides with that of the Happenings artists and serves as one of the foundational links between the two.

Al Hansen once stated, "because the happening notation has anarchy and freedom

built into it, because people are free to be as noble or evil as they want […] hair raising events can occur" (20). In other words, happenings were often a sort of game for the audience, one without many rules, allowing multiple opportunities for participation. Johann Huizinga, theorizing the relationship between play and performance wrote, "Summing up the formal characteristics of play, we might call it a free activity standing quite consciously outside of 'ordinary' life as being 'not serious', but at the same time absorbing the player intensely and utterly" (13). Happening artists often turned to games and play primarily for their ability to involve the audience in the performance. Whether one watches a game or actually becomes involved, she concerns herself with both how the game is played and who will emerge as the winner. Michael Kirby's 1963 happening, "The First and Second Wilderness, a Civil War Game," stands as an excellent example. Kirby transformed a downtown loft into a battle zone where two-foot-high cardboard soldiers assigned to either General Washington or General Richmond waged war. This war was conducted by moving of cardboard soldiers according to the generals' instructions by actors dressed in black. Throughout the battle, women costumed as cheerleaders as well as audience members cheered, generally for the side to which they were seated closest, while a bikini-clad woman on a ladder marked scores.

Kirby's ability to take an actual event, a Civil War battle, and turn it into a game illustrates the way Happenings creators combined art with everyday life situations. Furthermore, Kirby's technique may be argued to be Brechtian, as it alienates audiences by turning the performance into an actual sporting event and then forces viewers to evaluate the performance critically by choosing a side for which they will cheer. In essence, Kirby turned the performance situation inside out, by asking audience members to become the actual performers in his

Happening. As such, each audience member must choose between passive inactivity or active inclusion in the performance, thereby acknowledging her role in the performance event.

Play is often discussed by performance scholars as an eruption of freedom or license in the midst of a rule-bound, highly regulated society. This desire to transgress the norm through play is exemplified in the flash mob. As Bill Wasik once said, "It's spectacle for spectacle's sake – which is silly, but is also, as I've discovered somewhat to my surprise, genuinely transgressive, which is part of its appeal . . . People feel like there's nothing but order everywhere, and so they love to be a part of just one thing that nobody was expecting" (Hewitt). Often, flash mobs involve the playing of actual games during the event. In one Dallas, Texas flash mob, participants gathered in an empty parking lot to play a game of red rover (Bedell 1A). Other times, participants play roles, such as that of a hick tourist from Maryland (in the 2003 Soho shoe boutique mob) or that of a bird (in the Central Park bird mob) (Shmueli). Like Happenings, this sort of play forces the involvement of the unaware audience member or shoe boutique clerk in the overall "game" of the performance. The flash mobbers have gathered to see how the target audience will react to their game; however, unlike Happenings, the audience (not having received an invitation of their own to the mob) remains unaware of their involvement in the piece until after the performance ends and the participants dissipate. This distinction matters; the flash mobbers purposefully deny the audience this awareness, in order to disrupt the usual order of society.

Perhaps the most fundamental characteristic of a Happening is its desire to fuse art with everyday life. The creators of Happenings used common materials (e.g., paper, plastic, and metal) in conjunction with familiar actions (e.g., juicing an orange, sweeping, playing tag) in an effort to force audiences to re-evaluate their everyday actions and surroundings. Lee Baxandall

explained this idea writing, "Happenings remove people from the illusory world which, swathed in abstractions, is their everyday life, and put people into the actual world through devices which freshen perception" (33). Hansen echoed this statement when he wrote, "At the core of happening theory, and central to the thinking and philosophy of the happening people, is the idea that there is a fusion of art and life" (85). By placing an audience in an unfamiliar and often chaotic situation where they are forced to think twice about actions or ideas that they have long taken for granted, artists sought to illustrate that art happens around them everyday, and that art exists as more than something found on the wall of a museum.

Similar ideological shifts took place in dance and music through the work of Martha Graham and John Cage. Throughout the arts, people experimented with realism and sought to abandon artifice. However, performance art historians typically note the Happening as either the forerunner or the apex of the general movement because of its combination of elements of dance, music and performance. Davis states:

> What is further known but little granted is that the central impulse behind the 'happenings' movement – which I take to mean the use of simple, everyday activity in art for its own sake – persisted through the 1960s, surfacing in other, more formal genres, such as music and dance – on their left-wing, avant-garde front (31).

Whether Happenings were the first or ultimate expression of the abandonment of artifice in favor of realism is debatable and, for the purposes of this study, irrelevant. What is significant is the fact that Happenings artists concerned themselves with fusing elements of art with everyday life often to such an extent that the two became interchangeable.

Flash mobs, like Happenings, seek to blur the distinction between art and everyday life. However, while Happenings used everyday materials in both unconventional sites and traditional theatrical spaces to highlight their materials' aesthetic qualities, flash mobs bring artistic and aesthetic performances into everyday spaces in an effort to force their audiences to realize the

artistic possibility of everyday places and practices. An example can be found in the July 24, 2003, flash mob at an Irish pub in New York City. Hundreds of participants poured into the small pub and gathered around the jukebox, where they began to chirp like birds (Johnson). The chirping of the entire mob lasted for only a minute or two, and then the participants quickly left the establishment. The choice of the jukebox as a gathering point in the pub points toward a reading of the performance that seeks to highlight both the musical elements of the natural phenomena we encounter everyday (such as conversation in a bar or the literal chirping of birds outside our window) as well as the annoyance of the constant "music" of small talk that surrounds our everyday outings in society. In the flash mob performance, the techniques of fusing art with everyday life may have changed, but the desire to remind people of the aesthetic qualities of our daily lives remains.

Flash Drives

1. *The first time I remember doing it is when I was sixteen or so, although it is possible that I did it earlier*. I was on a trip, with my church youth group, and we were driving somewhere in large vans. At certain times during the long, very boring drive, the two vans would be side by side on a highway, and whenever this occurred, kids from one van would try to taunt the kids in the other with handmade signs, silly faces, and hand gestures. I was in a van with a few girlfriends, and some boys we liked were in the other van. They had already tried to tease/insult us with a few insulting faces and gestures earlier. In an effort to impress as well as to raise the ante on our shenanigans, my girlfriends and I schemed about what to do when our van next passed theirs. I remember we were talking, and that we had no plan for what to do next, when the other van began to approach. My girlfriends and I quickly scrambled, trying to create an adequate action, when suddenly we stopped in our tracks. As the other van pulled up alongside

ours, three very pale pairs of buttocks pressed up against its back windows. I remember feeling shocked, and then quickly laughing, along with everyone else in my van, including those students unaware of our game who began shouting, "Oh my god! They're MOONING us!"

2. *I did it once on a dare*. I was young and drunk and honestly have no recollection of what it felt like. I am fairly certain I blacked out. I do know that the realization that I had done it caused me to stop drinking for almost three years. I felt it was something rather dangerous for a female to do and I realized that my impaired judgment led to the choice.

I have never seen any other single person do it, at least not in person. On television, yes. Sporting events appear to be the most common site. Also college campuses. I have seen people do it en masse. While working at Louisiana State University for my doctorate, I was made aware of an annual event known as the "underwear run." In early December, right before final exams, students gather on campus at night, strip down to their underwear and run. Doing so apparently allows them to blow off steam and is not uncommon for a college university. Students at Tufts University have been doing so with no clothing, in much colder temperatures, since the early 1970s, and recently even had the event sanctioned by the University which provides entertainment and refreshments throughout the evening before the run takes place.

The year I attended LSU's "underwear run" only a few students chose to strip down to nothing but their sneakers. Before you get too excited, dear reader, let me also note that I only attended the run as an observer, not a participant. My past streaking behavior left me uncomfortable with the idea. The underwear run, however, changed my mind. The students looked so carefree, so excited, so safe that I found it difficult to worry about their motivations or sobriety level. I had nothing to fear by streaking through campus, at least not in a pack. As I drove home from campus that evening, I remember envying those students. I wanted to know

what it felt like to expose one's body completely to the elements in a manner that was both safe yet somewhat subversive. I envied their knowledge of that feeling, and I wondered if I were ever tp streak again, would my body remember the feeling?

3. *My best friend believes that it is always funny*. In the ten years I have known her, she has been known to pull sneak attacks on others, often while passing them in a car, or encountering them in a hallway. "Always funny," she says and smiles. I envy her lack of inhibition. She does have one stipulation, however. She won't flash her chest anywhere she feels society expects, such as Bourbon Street in New Orleans. She does this because she locates her enjoyment of flashing in her own ability to choose times and places where such behavior seems absurd rather than sexualized.

Although I don't agree that such random acts of flashing are always funny, I do believe my friend has hit the proverbial nail on the head with her stipulation. The act of flashing is no more or less sexual than mooning or streaking; however, once outside of the sanctioned space of sites like Bourbon Street in New Orleans, our society views flashing as indecent exposure and flashers as sexual predators. If you don't believe me, ask Janet Jackson.

Wasik's flash mobs derive their name not from any connotation with flashing or exhibitionism, but rather from Larry Niven's 1973 science-fiction short story "Flash Crowd." Niven's story highlights the possible drawbacks of cheap teleportation technology. In the tale, the advent of teleportation as a method of travel allows for the emergence of mobile mobs and even riots. Upon hearing of an exciting new travel destination, or an exciting news occurrence (such as a fight or protest) people quickly beam themselves to the location. The ability to get from one happening spot to another quickly and easily is the "flash" in "Flash Crowd." Noting a similar use of technology and a desire to be part of the happening scene, Sean Savage, a blogger

and flash mob attendee, gave the flash mob its name in one of his early descriptions of participation in the mob, at his weblog "cheesebikini?".

Even though the name itself has no direct linkage to the actual act of flashing, something may be said of the similar connotations attached to both the acts of flashing and of flash mobs. Like flashers, flash mobs choose their victims. The goal is not simply to expose oneself to anyone, such as the random faces in the crowd at a sporting event where an individual might choose to streak. Rather, with flashing, one plans her assault carefully, plotting the best time of day or the most likely spot to encounter a victim. I believe this careful sort of planning emerges in Wasik's choice of venues, as well as in his careful instructions and time coordination with his flash mob participants. Furthermore, the limited time constraint applies to both activities. Flashers flash their victim and leave, much like flash mobbers act upon a site and then disperse within a limited ten-minute timeframe. Of course, the same can be said for mooners and streakers. These forms of exhibitionism contain no desire to linger.

In fact, when one considers the playful, prank-like nature of the flash mob, streaking may seem a more suitable comparison. The streaker merely desires to run free, uninhibited, through a space or place where social norms and customs (as well as actual laws) inform her she possesses no such freedom. In many ways, one sees a similar desire in Wasik's flash mob participants. However, to stop here ultimately does the flash mob a disservice. Although I am not comfortable alleging that flash mobs (specifically Wasik's original flash mobs) seek to prey upon a site like a flasher seeks to prey upon her victim, I am also uncomfortable with the notion that flash mobs are simple pranks. In truth, I believe the answer lies somewhere in the middle, much like my best friend's stipulation about her own flashing behavior.

My friend enjoys flashing people in those times and places where it is unexpected for her to do so. She harbors no desire to hurt or act as a sexual predator; however, she is also not completely innocent. I would argue that her flashing allows an avenue for experimenting with and acting out sexual drives and desires. Moreover, by flashing a friend in the supermarket rather than a stranger on Bourbon Street, she leaves with the knowledge that she did so because *she* desired to – not because society expected her to, or because it was socially acceptable, or because she wanted some beads. Wasik's flash mobs are similar. Their occurrence was unexpected and unsanctioned. Often the flash mob's behavior within the particular site stood in such contrast to "normal" or expected behavior that it seemed absurd, not predatory. Underneath all this, however, some subversive drive or desire within the participants of Wasik's flash mobs drove them to take part in such abnormal behavior. Because of this final reason, I find it difficult to say that either my friend's random flashing or the actions of Wasik's flash mobs are "Always funny."

Conclusion

For the past few months, an undeveloped roll of film sat on the entryway table just inside the door of my house. I saw it every day as I left and entered the house, and I had multiple opportunities to take it with me on shopping trips or other expeditions where I could easily get the roll developed, perhaps within an hour. As of yet, I have not done so. I am unsure as to why.

To begin, I am somewhat unsure of what images remain on the roll of film, but I have a strong suspicion that the film contains photos of my final days with friends, mentors, and colleagues in my last city of residence. A small chance exists, however, that I am wrong. The roll of film may contain pictures from a trip I took over a year ago to Minnesota. The uncertainty of what I will find on the roll of film bothers me.

Archives are often tricky. The documents we find within them capture moments, record events, even share opinions, yet something is always missing – the body. Within our bodies, we carry another set of records – the feeling of flashing a stranger, the smell of a Parisian coffeehouse, the tone of a voice, and the desire to dance. By attempting to provide the reader with a history culled from the combination of two separate approaches – the first a linear story of influences and the second a network of practices and behaviors – I seek to create the fullest picture of the flash mob's history, as well as acknowledge my own participation in the creation of that history. However, without participating in a flash mob of her own, the reader has as little knowledge about what it feels like to be in one as I do of what exists on my undeveloped roll of film – a few suspicions, an educated guess, but no verified truth.

In Chapter Three, I seek to address this problem by studying those particular individuals who participated in Wasik's original eight mobs, as well as the socio-historical context in which the mobs took place. Doing so will never provide the reader with an understanding of what it felt like to participate in Wasik's mob project; however, an understanding of the climate in which the flash mobs were created as well as a knowledge of the shared beliefs, practices, and behaviors of the mob participants further enriches the study. In this chapter, I sought to provide the reader an answer as to what flash mobs are – a performative practice existing within a long and complex history of similar practices. Chapter Three searches for answers to the question of who the performers of this practice are, as well as when, where, and how they enacted their performance.

CHAPTER THREE
FLASH FLOODING: CULTURE AND COMMUNITY IN THE MOB

Skene: [13]

> Date: Wed, 25 Jun 2003 21:45:21 -0700 (PDT)
> From: The Mob Project
> To: themobproject@yahoo.com
> Subject: MOB #3
>
> (Apologies to those who received an incomplete version before.)
>
> You are invited to take part in MOB, the project that creates an inexplicable mob of people in New York City for ten minutes or less. Please forward this to other people you know who might like to join.
>
> FAQ
>
> Q. For a mob to be inexplicable, does it need to take place in an otherwise empty space?
>
> A. No.
>
> (Savage)

A Scene:

Fred has a nice action shot of MOBsters applauding. Notice the smiles. You couldn't *help* smiling; it was gorgeous (Ginger).

The Scene:

> 3 July 2003
> I just returned from Flashmob #3. This was called "The Grand Central Mob Ballet," and was supposed to involve claiming to be waiting for a train, and writing the word "MOB" on a one dollar bill, but none of that came into play. Instead, we got a form saying:
>
> *** MOB #3 ***
>
> *Change of Plans*
> If you are reading this, we have decided to change venues.
>
> (1) By 7:02, walk out to 42nd St. and look for the main entrance to the Grand Hyatt.

[13] A term taken from ancient Greek theater, a skene is the structure facing the audience forming the background, or scenery, on which performances occur.

Enter and take the escalator up one flight to the main lobby. Loiter until 7:07.

(2) At 7:07, start taking the escalator and elevators up one floor, to the wraparound railing overlooking the lobby. Stand around it, looking down. Fan out to cover as much of the railing as possible. If asked why you are there, point down to the lobby and say, "Look."

(3) At 7:12, begin applauding. Applaud for fifteen seconds, then disperse in an orderly fashion *(Note: the exit on that floor is not a pedestrian exit.)*.(Danzig)

Seen:

Figure 1

Figure 2

Figure 3

Figure 4

Introduction

Consider, for a moment, Figures 1 and 3. Figure 1 depicts multiple flashmobbers gathered against the hotel railing, gazing down upon the lobby, as instructed. Many, although not all, appear to be with friends or loved ones, evidenced by arms around shoulders and other close, open body language. In the hallway, a singular individual in a suit walks by, casting what one can only assume to be a bewildered sideways glance at the flashmobbers lining the balcony. Perhaps this individual wonders at what they are all staring. According to Figures 2 and 4,

which depict the empty atrium lobby below, they were an audience for nothing. Now look at Figure 3. Two individuals – perhaps friends, perhaps strangers – stare down into the lobby like all the other flashmobbers. However, the angle from which this photo is shot intrigues. The photographer of Figure 3 seems interested in capturing at least two things: first, the similarity of the two individuals in the forefront, whose skin color may differ, but whose clothing and body positions seem to almost mirror one another; and second, the picture of what falls in these individuals' direct line of sight – other flashmobbers on the opposite side of the balcony, engaged in the exact same activity (staring down into the empty lobby below). In a sense, these flashmobbers at the far opposite end of the atrium balcony serve as another reflection, or mirror, of the two in the forefront. One begins to realize, or merely infer, that this flash mob – maybe even all Wasik's flash mobs – are not simply about the absurdity of the act, but also the communal nature of the action. Wasik himself supports such a claim, in his description of Mob #3, depicted above:

> Then, all at once, we rode the elevators and escalators up to the mezzanine and wordlessly lined the banister. The handful of hotel guests were still there, alone again, except now they were confronted with a hundreds-strong armada of hipsters overhead, arrayed shoulder to shoulder, staring silently down. But intimidation was not the point; we were staring down at **where we had just been**, and also across at one another, two hundred artist-spectators commandeering an atrium on Forty-second Street as a coliseum-style theater of self-regard. After five minutes of staring, the ring erupted into precisely fifteen seconds of tumultuous applause – for itself – after which it scattered back downstairs and out the door, just as the police cruisers were rolling up, flashers on. (58)

Three of Wasik's comments in this account stand out as strikingly important, and heretofore unexamined. First, Wasik takes care to point out one unifying characteristic of the flashmobbers: their shared status as members of the hipster subculture. Second, Wasik specifically mentions the scenic or spatial element of this particular mob whose goal was to "commandeer" a space in two different ways. In so doing, he highlights the different nature of this mob from most, if not

all, of the other seven, as a non-verbal performance event. Mob #3 was physical in nature, its directive being to move bodies around in a space and have those bodies engage in a shared act, applause, before dispersing out of the space. Finally, Wasik's use of language points toward the communal or community-building nature of this mob. Wasik's mob participants look across "at one another" and his mob applauds "itself," acknowledging the "we" of community created in the act of participation.

When viewed within the larger context of all eight mobs, Mob #3 gains added significance as the last of Wasik's highly self-reflexive first three mobs. Mobs 1-3 focus largely on the mobbers themselves – they are the accessories (Mob 1), they are a commune (Mob 2), they applaud themselves (Mob 3). After Mob #3, Wasik's mob project turns toward the other, if only in jest. The performers play with tourists (Mob 4), nature (Mob 5), religion (Mob 6), and culture (Mob 7). Wasik's final mob shifts the game completely by telling his performers, the flashmobbers, to serve simply as an "enthusiastic audience" for a sidewalk performer (Bemis). The move from self to other seems more than coincidence. I believe Wasik used his first three mobs to create a scene, and in so doing, created a community, a powerful "we" whose influence and membership expands to this very day.

Crucial to the creation of Wasik's scene was the socio-cultural and historic climates of New York City in a post-9/11 era, as well as the spatial layout of the city itself. These material and political realities created the environment, or scene, where Wasik's acts took place. Drawing upon Kenneth Burke's dramatistic theory, I argue that the scenic element – more than anything else – allowed for the act (the creation of Wasik's flash mobs) to occur. In addition, two other heretofore unexamined elements – Wasik's agents, the hipster subculture, and his primary agency, cellular phone technology – function as tangential, necessary elements in the

more dominant scene. I first examine these secondary components and ultimately end with an extensive discussion of scene and its relationship to culture and community in the flash mob.

Agent

Noted literary critic, philosopher, and rhetorician Kenneth Burke expanded the fields of contemporary rhetoric and performance studies exponentially through his Pentad, created as a method for divining rhetorical motives out of literary dramas. According to Burke, in order to understand motives, one must begin by identifying and examining the five elements (or questions) of his Pentad: "what was done (act), when or where it was done (scene), who did it (agent), how he did it (agency), and why (purpose)" (xv). Contemporary rhetoricians use Burke to examine not only literary dramas, but also those occurring in politics, media, and society. Performance teachers often use Burke in their introductory classes as a way to teach students how to examine and perform literature. Taking cues from both, I expand and apply Burke's Pentad to the flash mob, a contemporary performance event, to identify the flash mob's components and examine the relationship between them.

In simplest terms, the agents of the eight original flash mobs in this study are New York City hipsters of 2003. Although one might argue Wasik, as originator of the idea of the flash mob and sender of the invitational e-mails, is the primary agent of the flash mob, he places himself within the larger group of actors by retaining his anonymity and e-mailing his original and subsequent invitations not only to his friends, but also to himself.[14] As such, anyone who shows up and takes part in one of these flash mobs becomes an agent of the act. Before examining the particular makeup of the New York hipster culture of 2003, further elaboration on Burke's theory of the Pentad is necessary.

[14] In a 2004 interview with LA Weekly, Wasik states, "I e-mailed the invitation to myself, then forwarded it from my own account to about 50 people."

Identifying the five elements of the Pentad in regard to a particular act is the first step in determining its motives. The second, and ultimately more important, step examines the relationship between each of the parts. Burke labels this relationship their ratios or "principles of determination" (15). In other words, Burke highlights the intermingling between elements, those points where one part of the Pentad merges with or strongly differentiates itself from another. Within these ratios, Burke locates the dramatic tensions that reveal the motivations behind particular rhetorical strategies. Burke identifies and discusses ten possible ratios arising from his Pentad; I focus on two: scene-agent and scene-agency. These two ratios, unlike the other seven, directly address the subjects of this chapter: the scene, agent, and agency of Wasik's flash mobs, as well as the dominant relationship existing between them.

Burke describes the scene-agent ratio as a "synecdochic relation . . . between person and place" (7) or perhaps more simply as the "container and thing contained" (3). The container referred to here is the scene and the agent the thing contained. Burke provides literary examples for this ratio; however, as I am expanding Burke's analysis outside of the literary realm into contemporary culture, I suggest a more apt example from the days following Hurricane Katrina in 2005. The scene left by Katrina was one of utter devastation and destruction for the residents of New Orleans and south Louisiana. Although many agents engaged in various acts, the entire nation looked toward one agent in particular: President George W. Bush. The scene of Katrina called for a response of urgency on the part of the President, the expression of concern, perhaps even a disheveled physical appearance as evidence of long nights spent working on solutions to such devastation. As such, the scene controls, or dictates, the requirements of its agent and act. President Bush's initial act – the flyover of the area days after the hurricane – inspired outrage

among residents because it appeared more the act of a curious tourist than of a concerned President. In other words, the agent did not suit the scene.

I argue that the agents of the original eight flash mobs do suit the scene. Modern hipster subculture emerges out of a distinct and particular socio-cultural and historical scene, which I discuss in the final section of this chapter. Furthermore, Wasik states that the entire impetus for flash mobs came out of his and his friends' own fascination with being a part of "the scene":

> . . . seeing how all culture in New York was demonstrably commingled with *scenesterism*, the appeal of concerts and plays and readings and gallery shows deriving less from the work itself than from the social opportunities the work might engender, it should theoretically be possible to create an art project consisting of *pure scene* – meaning the scene would be the entire point of the work, and indeed would itself constitute the work. (58)

In short, the very essence of the modern hipster lies in her association with and participation in the scene. However, before I address the scene-agent ratio in the flash mob fully, let me return to the question of the modern hipster – who is she and how does she differ from other historical "hipsters"?

The term "hip" most often connotes youth culture and the materials associated with it (e.g., the new, often wacky clothes, music, and books that the youth of America deem fashionable at any given moment). New York Times reporter John Leland's recent Hip: The History explains the connection between youth and hip, arguing that "hip is a culture of the young because they have the least investment in the status quo" (22). Hip, then, is often something new or different from the everyday. But where did hip come from? While acknowledging the cultural influences of the European avant-garde, Leland locates hip in the Americas, emanating along with the African slave trade. In his opinion, hip originates out of the exchange of African and European cultures on the plantation, with each group taking bits of the other's culture and accumulating (and often refashioning) those bits into their own. For Leland,

hip originates in America, particularly in the acquisition of African culture, without which he argues, "there is no hip" (18).

Following Leland, one's hipness appears rooted in her knowledge of African-American culture. The term "hip" itself is often attributed to be a derivative of the African word *hipi*, which loosely translates as "to open one's eyes" (Fletcher).[15] Our modern understanding of hip and hipsters, however, arises out of the jazz and art scene of America in the 1930s and '40s. Jazz, a distinctly American musical blend of African and European styles, produced a unique subculture among its largely black musicians, one which middle-class white youths found fascinating and ultimately sought to emulate. Shortly after World War II, rising young authors such as Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg sang the praises of the burgeoning hip/jazz scene in their novels and poems, becoming the faces of hipster culture. Norman Mailer, American playwright and novelist, sought to define the movement and its members, famously referring to them in his essay "The White Negro: Superficial Reflections on the Hipster."

Mailer's essay extends the notion of hip beyond an adoption of black culture by highlighting the existential nature of the youth within the subculture. According to Mailer, young people strongly affected by both fear of the atomic bomb and loathing of conformity in middle America sought escape (and possibly rebellion) through their association with jazz and black America as well as their idealism of vagabond travelers such as Kerouac's Dean Moriarty. A similar desire to escape the middle class and associate the self with the other or the unknown is evident in both the hippie and punk subcultures of the 1960s, '70s, and '80s.

However, the hipsters who chase hip are more than just vanguard thinkers and lovers of difference; they are also trendsetters. Hip perseveres because hip sells itself to the mainstream.

[15] Others locate the origin of the term in "hop," a slang term for opium, placing hip's origins within both drug and Eastern culture (Fletcher).

In Hip: The History, Leland writes "where religion creates workers, hip creates consumers" (342). Hip is not simply a fascination with the dark other, or a reaction to the time in which one lives; it is a product to be sold. For Wasik's New York hipsters of 2003, hip certainly involved all three.

Wasik's hipster, or the modern hipster, is almost always defined by her appearance. Some writers focus on the hipsters' physical appearance, describing them as:

> . . . fashion-conscious twentysomethings hanging about and sporting a number of predictable stylistic trademarks: skinny jeans, cotton spandex leggings, fixed-gear bikes, vintage flannel, fake eyeglasses and a keffiyeh. (Haddow)

Other journalists focus their depictions on the hipster's psychological stance, arguing that "everything about them is exactingly constructed to give off the vibe that they just don't care" (Fletcher). Some take these psychological descriptions a step further, creating categories of hipster psychosis:

> We know that there are Sweet hipsters, who practice the sort of irony you can take home to meet the parents, and there are those Vicious hipsters, who practice the form of not-quite-passive aggression called snark. (Lorentzen)

Critics often deride the modern hipster's ironic stance and particular fashion sense as empty trademarks pointing towards a hollow society or as some say, "the dead end of Western civilization" (Fletcher). Such remarks usually stem from the modern hipster's fashion sense, one that, according to columnists like Christian Lorentzen, "fetishizes the authentic and regurgitates it with a winking inauthenticity." In this reiterated fashion, the modern hipster, although a definite product of her time (both historically and capitally), distinguishes herself from her predecessors. Whereas 20th century hipsters borrowed from contemporaneous aspects of the other's culture – such as jazz – to create their fashion, or simply created their own – as in punk – the 21st century hipster recycles the fashion of her predecessors.

Some of these reclamations appear to serve as acts of identification, others as desperate attempts to collage a new identity out of an older, more established one. An example of the former appropriation is the keffiyeh – a scarf originally worn by Jewish students and Western protestors as a symbol of support for Palestinians – now sold in a variety of colors and patterns to teenagers at the local Target. Douglas Haddow, cultural critic, provides further examples:

> The American Apparel v-neck shirt, Pabst Blue Ribbon beer and Parliament cigarettes are symbols and icons of working or revolutionary classes that have been appropriated by hipsterdom and drained of meaning. . . . such things have become shameless clichés of individuals that seek to escape their own wealth and privilege by immersing themselves in the aesthetic of the working class. (1)

These appropriations differ from those of early 20th century American teenagers wearing black turtlenecks and berets. The modern hipster revisits the past in search of authenticity, instead of looking around in the present for inventions of new meaning. Although one might argue such scavenging and re-assembling serves as a form of invention, many reporters and cultural critics view this desire to forage the past and assemble some sort of new meaning from its symbols and trends a cannibalistic act:

> Those 18-to-34-year-olds called hipsters have defanged, skinned and consumed the fringe movements of the postwar era – Beat, hippie, punk, even grunge. Hungry for more, and sick with the anxiety of influence, they feed as well from the trough of the uncool, turning white trash chic, and gouging the husks of long-expired subcultures – vaudeville, burlesque, cowboys and pirates. . . . Simlarly, they devour gay style. . . . these aesthetics are assimilated – cannibalized – into a repertoire of meaninglessness, from which the hipster can construct an identity in the manner of a collage, or a shuffled playlist on an iPod. (Lorentzen)

Whether cannibalistic or inventive, the modern hipster sets herself apart as more of a historian and collage artist than an adventurer or explorer.

In 2009, music and entertainment magazine Paste published a two-page photo spread portraying "The Evolution of the Hipster 2000-2009" (Kiefer). Serving as an ironic timeline of the modern hipster's appearance and perseverance on the cultural scene, Paste's evolution points

out many of the modern hipster's recycled identifications in the names given to each year's hipster: The Twee, The Fauxhemian, The Mountain Man, The Vintage Queen, The Meta-Nerd (Kiefer). Paste titles Wasik's hipster, the hipster of 2003, "The Scenester," writing "a gaudy tattoo appears on her chest, and she is never spotted without her iPod" (Kiefer). While this iPod is the only description in Paste's entire evolution that references modern technology of any sort, the title "Scenester" excites me most. This label validates my contention that Wasik's hipster of 2003 emerged not only as a product of her historical and socio-cultural scene, but also defined herself by participation in *the scene* of her own hipster subculture. Stated differently, Wasik's hipster not only wore the proper clothes, acquired the newest gadgets, and cultivated the proper attitude of ironic distance and nonchalance, she desired to be a part of something, to be seen in the scene.

In 2003, Wasik, out of a desire to comment upon the prevalence of scenesterism within his own New York hipster subculture, created the flash mob, and inadvertently, produced the newest scene of which to be a part. In the e-mail for Wasik's first mob, he provides a frequently asked questions section. He answers the first question, "Why would I want to join an inexplicable mob?" with evidence of the scenester nature of the mob, stating, "Tons of other people are doing it" (Wasik 57). While this might explain why participants took part in the first two or three of Wasik's mobs, it fails to provide an answer for why the mobs became so popular, not only within the New York hipster subculture, but within youth culture at-large. Perhaps the most important question we can ask of the flash mob's hipster is not why she showed up, but why she kept coming back?

To answer such a question, I turn to the historical hip predecessors mentioned earlier – the beats, the hippies, and the punks. Each of these subcultures united themselves in fashion as

well as in artistic taste, much like Wasik's hipster. However, aside from a love of the same music, the same books, the same clothes, or the same art, something else also united each of these groups: participation in the scene of their particular era, a participation that yielded a feeling of separation from the mainstream, but togetherness with one another; a feeling Victor Turner labeled "communitas." The term refers to a feeling of shared togetherness or communal spirit. One might achieve such a feeling by hanging out within the scene of a particular subculture; however, one is much more likely to experience communitas, at least according to Turner, if she engages in communal activities. Beats traveled together, hippies protested en masse, and punks raged as one. Modern hipsters, at least up until Wasik's flash mob, failed to engage in any sort of communal activity outside of hanging out and traveling within their own scene – attending the same concerts, gallery openings, book signings, etc. What Wasik, unknowingly in my opinion, provided was a communal act: the flash mob.

Turner believed in a dialectic existing between ritualized, highly structured social forms of behavior, such as religious rites, and playful, anti-structural forms of behavior, such as festivals and celebrations. Communitas exists within both realms of performative behavior. In other words, one might experience communitas while holding her hand to her heart and singing the national anthem alongside thousands of other fans in a sports stadium as well as begging for beads with fellow Mardi Gras revelers. With the flash mob, Wasik inadvertently provided a feeling of communitas between strangers engaged in a shared activity. If Wasik's goal was to create an art project that mocked his own community's lack of substance – the fact that they were "scenesters" appearing at the same spots just to be a part of the scene, not out of a love of the art within it – he probably did not plan on the power of such a "scene," its ability to bring strangers together through shared physical activity:

> You didn't have to feel like you were cool. . . . It got a lot of people to do something . . . just because they thought it was a clever idea and they wanted to see what would happen. . . . but while a Web page can give you some notion of being part of a group, it's very different to then find yourself in a physical space with all those people. It's a virtual community made literal. Again, these weren't people who knew each other. It wasn't an established group who decided to put on an action. Whoever got the e-mail would attend, and they represented the interconnectedness of people in a city. (Bemis 4)

Wasik's particular choices of place for the flash mobs also added to this communal feeling. Wasik purposefully chose small places in which the flash mob – even if it only consisted of a hundred people – appeared large and powerful. Furthermore, the flash mobs contributed to a feeling of hipster communitas by creating a performance in which hipsters highlighted their own "otherness" through showcasing traits such as their ironic humor and technological savvy. In sum, flash mobs were created by hipsters, for hipsters, or as Wasik reasons, "flash mobs were gatherings of *insiders*, and as such, could hardly communicate to those who did not already belong" (64).

By emphasizing the communal nature of the flash mob, I hope to draw attention toward the mob's role as an influential performative act, undertaken by agents out of both curiosity and a desire for community. In so doing, I want to provide an alternative narrative of the flash mob, one in which the flash mob exists as more than the fad of a post-hip generation, a narrative which unfortunately tends to prevail among scholars of "hip:"

> Urban anthropologists can spot post-hip by its prefixes and quotation marks, a politically incorrect mix of neo-shitkicker, neuvo-blaxploitation, and kimchi kitsch. To the above inventory, add metrosexuality, *McSweeney's*, Vicodin, flash mobs, smart mobs, thumb tribes, "extreme" everything, free folk and the return of no wave (Leland 340).

The above definition and others like it relegate the flash mob to the category of trend and the modern hipster to the realm of ironic collage artist, assertions which are both somewhat unfair. Wasik's flash mobs definitely excited many as the next new thing; however, their spread, continuation, and refashioning into new performance styles over the following seven years speak

to their power as more than mere trend. As for the modern hipster, she may indeed be post-hip – fractured, wandering, in search of a center – however, if so, she is only a product of her time, a thing contained by a larger container which she did not make. In sum, she is a product of her scene, shaped by its structure and influenced by its technology.

Agency

At present, a decade into the twenty-first century, one easily forgets the truly radical nature of the mobile phone and its offspring, text messaging. Take someone's mobile phone away for a day, however, and she begins to remember. Recently, I went without my mobile or "cell" phone for two days, and after the first hour of sheer panic, I recalled what life was like before the cell phone. I racked my brain for the phone numbers of my friends and family, all of which were stored in the memory of my phone, and realized I only remembered two. I phoned these two numbers from a family member's archaic 'land' line and realized the need to introduce myself to the person on the other end of the line – something I rarely do these days, as my phone's caller identification system usually does this for me. Finally, as I spent a whole two days without my cell phone, anxiously wondering who had called and/or texted, I slowly realized the power my cell phone possessed. I wondered what Donna Haraway would think of me – a cyborg, yes, perhaps, yet also a woman relying upon Steve Jobs' software to act as memory bank and personal identifier in her stead. Losing my mobile phone highlighted how essential a part of me it had become.

Haraway's theory of the cyborg offers an insightful view into the relationship between humankind and the tools we create. Haraway, a feminist philosopher and biologist, defined the cyborg in her seminal "A Cyborg Manifesto" as "a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction" (149). Haraway used her

fictional and ironic cyborg manifesto to comment on both feminist theory and the technophobia she found arising in the latter part of the twentieth century. Her theory provides an understanding of the relationship between human and machine that is neither diametrically opposed nor completely fused, but rather based in an exploration of boundaries and borderlands. As Haraway herself reasons:

> Cyborg imagery can help express two crucial arguments . . . : first, the production of universal, totalizing theory is a major mistake that misses most of reality . . . ; and second, taking responsibility for the social relations of science and technology means refusing an anti-science metaphysics, a demonology of technology, and so means embracing the skilful task of reconstructing the boundaries of daily life, in partial connection with others, in communication with all of our parts. . . . Cyborg imagery can suggest a way out of the maze of dualisms in which we have explained our bodies and our tools to ourselves. This is a dream not of a common language, but of a powerful infidel heteroglossia. . . . It means both building and destroying machines, identities, categories, relationships, space stories. (181)

Haraway's manifesto allows scholars to shift from an assessment of the power relations between a woman and her machine to an acknowledgement of the assemblage they jointly create. In Wasik's flash mob, such an assemblage functioned as the primary agency (or means of production) of the act.

When Wasik's flash mobs first appeared in 2003, most journalists linked their appearance more to the internet than to mobile phones, reporting that flash mobs were "arranged via Web sites and e-mails" or the even more vague description that they "organized anonymously through the internet" (Shmueli, Johnson). While true, to a certain extent, such reports fail to address the mobile nature of Wasik's communiqué. A year earlier, in 2002, two mobile phones appeared on the market containing a surprising new feature – a full QWERTY keyboard – allowing for the rapid expansion and proliferation of one of the mobile phone companies' pre-existing technologies, text messaging. One of these phones, the Blackberry 5810 (labeled "Crackberry" by many due to its addictive nature) contained an additional advantage: the combination of

Blackberry's existing e-mail, organizer and keyboard technologies with voice (or cell phone) capabilities. In so doing, Blackberry created the ideal conditions for the advent of Wasik's flash mobs – mobile mass communication.

Communication scholar Judith Nicholson addresses this change in her article "Flash Mobs in the Age of Mobile Connectivity." Nicholson argues:

> Flash mobbing shaped and was shaped by a worldwide shift in mobile phone use from private communication characterized primarily by mobile phoning in the 1980s and 90s to more collective uses dominated by mobile texting in the late 1990s and early 2000s. This shift was evident in a corresponding change in sentiments and concerns regarding direct one-to-one mobile phone use versus indirect one-to-many mobile phone use. (2)

Nicholson's quote acknowledges the symbiotic relationship between the flash mob and the mobile phone, noting that each shaped the other. Mobile phone technologies, such as texting and e-mail, allowed for the rapid forwarding of Wasik's initial e-mail, as his "inexplicable mob" invitation quickly bounced from one individual's contact list to another's. In turn, the advent of Wasik's flash mob as a pop culture phenomenon spread widely around the world showcased the possibilities for mobile mass communication contained in new mobile phone technologies.

As scholars such as Nicholson and Howard Rheingold point out, however, the powerful nature of mobile mass communication appeared on the public's radar as early as the late 1990s, due to its use in the anti-globalization movement's protests, most notably those of the World Trade Organization protestors in Seattle in 1999. Rheingold also describes the use of text-messaging and SMS (Short Message Service) technology to organize protests calling for the resignation of President Estrada in the Philippines in 2001. More recently, the world not only bore witness, but took part in the 2009 Iranian election protests via the so-called "Twitter Revolution" rapidly re-tweeting the updates of Iranian protestors under attack by the government. The mobile phone's proliferation, along with its portability and advanced

technological capabilities, contributes to its dominance as the preferred medium of one-to-many mass communication – not only for activists and politicians, but for anyone with a regularly updated Twitter account.

Unlike the Philippine revolution and WTO protests, flash mobs, as an elaborate inside joke enacted upon the city of New York, promote play, and as such, stand out as one of the first uses of mobile phone technology and one-to-many mass communication used to stage a public performance without an overt political agenda. The idea of the flash mob, as Chapter Two hopefully reveals, is nothing really new. However, the speed and ease of the flash mob separates it from its predecessors. I do not want to suggest some inextricable link between the flash mob's popularity and the rise of mobile mass communication. Rather, like Bill Wasik, I believe the flash mob's appeal to be rooted more in its creation of community than in its use of technology. As Wasik writes, "I myself believe that the technology played only a minor role. The emails went out a week before each event, after all; one could have passed around flyers on the street, I think, to roughly similar effect" (58). Wasik and his flash mobbers used modern mobile mass communication technologies not so much because they were hip or trendy, but because they were readily available.

Kenneth Burke's work supports the above. In Grammar of Motives, he writes, "pragmatist philosophies are generated by the featuring of the term, Agency" (275). In other words, when making a choice between one form of agency and another, agents tend to choose that which is practical. Sending an email appeared more practical to Wasik than passing out fliers. Forwarding that email via their mobile phones seemed more practical for his flashmobbers than relaying the message in person. Consequently, I argue that the agency of the flash mob arose out of the technocultural scene in which it occurred, one which made mobile

phones the easiest and most practical method of communication between Wasik and his attendees. Scene dominated and contained the flash mob's agency, mobile mass communication, as powerfully as it contained its agent, the modern hipster.

Scene

On September 11, 2001, two hijacked airplanes crashed into the World Trade Center, one hijacked airplane crashed into the outer barrier of the Pentagon, and a fourth airplane crashed on a field in Pennsylvania, after passengers valiantly fought back against the terrorist hijackers intent on crashing it into the White House. As the first attack on American soil since the Japanese invasion of Pearl Harbor, the events of 9/11 changed America forever. For the first time in over sixty years, Americans lived in fear of outside invaders and of an enemy who might strike at any moment. As a response, Congress passed the USA PATRIOT Act in October of 2002, dramatically reducing the restrictions placed upon law enforcement regarding the surveillance of American citizens deemed to be terrorist suspects, as well as increasing law enforcement officials' ability to detain and deport suspected terrorist immigrants. A few months earlier, in March of 2002, the Homeland Security Advisory System emerged as the result of a Presidential directive. The system consisted of a color-coded scale, used to inform Americans of the specific threat level of terrorist attacks: severe (red), high (orange), elevated (yellow), guarded (blue), or low (green). Each day, Americans could turn on their televisions to their morning talk shows, or be advised via radio or internet broadcasts, of the specific threat level of terrorist attacks, one which usually lingered between yellow and orange, the elevated or high end of the scale. The Department of Homeland Security, a new government agency designed to combine and focus the attempts of the FBI, CIA, and other intelligence agencies, debuted in November of 2002 as the result of the passage of the Homeland Security Act. Finally, on March

19, 2003, President George W. Bush appeared on television to declare war on Iraq, providing Americans with a visible and known enemy in the heretofore vaguely-worded war on "terror" itself. Two months later, President Bush appeared again, landing in full pilot combat gear on an aircraft carrier full of soldiers, to announce (somewhat prematurely) America's mission accomplished, and declare an end to major combat in Iraq. One month later, on June 3, 2003, Bill Wasik attempted his first flash mob at a Claire's accessory store in New York City's Astor Place, a primary shopping center and hangout spot of the hip, neo-bohemian East Village.

By aligning these events, I do not wish to assert that Wasik's mobs were a reaction to 9/11. Instead, I argue that Wasik's mobs are products of their time, reactions to a heightened level of surveillance, a desire for community, and perhaps, even to the President's admonitions for Americans to get back to normal by going shopping.[16] In this section, I seek to address both the historic and socio-cultural scene described above, as well as the physical scenes chosen by Wasik for his eight flash mobs. In so doing, I hope to provide an understanding of the flash mob in relation to its context, and draw attention to the fact that the scene, or container, is often more important than the things it contains: acts, agents, and agency.

Nicholson alludes to the effect of context upon the mob when she queries, "can flash mobbing . . . be considered a response to the social and political conditions of 2003, particularly conditions that existed in New York where the trend was started?" (11). According to Christian Lorentzen, cultural critic and writer for Time Out New York, the answer is yes. In his infamous *"*Why the hipster must die*"* article, Lorentzen points to the loss of menace among the modern hipster subculture, arguing:

[16] In his first official address to the nation following the attacks of 9/11, President Bush made a point of encouraging Americans to continue supporting the economy. Media outlets created a number of news stories focusing on this admonishment, which I discuss in detail later in this chapter.

> [Norman] Mailer, who traced hipster psychosis to the Holocaust and the atom bomb, would likely point to September 11 as the event that left hordes of twentysomethings whispering, "We would be safe." (1)

For Lorentzen, the recycling of trends among hipsters and lack of an overt agenda in the flash mob point toward the effects of fear upon the youth of America following the events of 9/11. Others disagree, locating the power of the flash mob within its very existence in a post 9/11, hyper-secure society. In a 2003 article for the Chicago Tribune, reporter Maureen Ryan quotes the words of one particular flash mob participant:

> Honestly, it seems like a way to tweak the nose of those responsible for security, since things have gotten so tense since Sept. 11, flash mobber Eric Longman said via e-mail, Remember, the 1st Amendment specifically protects the right of the people to peaceably Assemble. (1)

Whether the flash mob is a safe, sterile event created by the modern hipster out of a desire for safe artistic play/transgression, or the slightly more risky tantrum of a surveillance-weary youth culture, it undoubtedly exists as a product of its historical time, specifically of the events of 9/11. As such, the flash mob sits as a marker of its time, a monument to the effects of 9/11 upon the consciousness of America and its youth.

Douglas Haddow, writing for Adbusters in 2008, ends his article entitled, "Hipster: The Dead End of Civilization" with the following:

> We are a lost generation, desperately clinging to anything that feels real, but too afraid to become it ourselves. We are a defeated generation, resigned to the hypocrisy of those before us, who once sang songs of rebellion and now sell them back to us. We are the last generation, a culmination of all previous things, destroyed by the vapidity that surrounds us. The hipster represents the end of Western civilization – a culture so detached and disconnected that it has stopped giving birth to anything new. (1)

Haddow's rant, while somewhat melodramatic, speaks to the socio-cultural scene of the flash mob. At the dawn of a new millennia, the modern hipster finds herself the focal point of a generation trying desperately to find itself. Amidst a terror-stricken and surveillance-laden

backdrop, she turns towards conspicuous consumption, as so many youths before her have done. However, even here, she finds no novelty, only recycled artifacts of older generations readily available for ironic display. She frequents those establishments full of like-minded and similarly dressed souls, purchasing communion through participation in the so-called scene. Her rebellion consists of a well-rehearsed posture of ironic distance – an ability to mock the mainstream, as well as her own scene, instead of seeking to change it.

Wasik's flash mob also mocks the mainstream, as well as the hipster subculture from which it is constructed. However, the physical nature of the mob – its ability to appear and hold dominion over an actual space, if only for a moment – provides the modern hipster something new: the ability to act out. While full of self-reflexivity and ironic commentary on its own participants, the flash mob also acts as a form of cultural noise: the tantrum of a childish subculture against the authoritarian structure(s) monitoring its every move. When viewed in such a light, one begins to see the flash mob as more than mere prank. Instead, the flash mob appears as a slightly subversive, and also somewhat safe, playful form of cultural critique.

As a reminder, Wasik chose retail stores as sites for four of his eight mobs: Claire's Accessories, Macy's, Otto Tootsi Plohound, Toy's R Us. These choices might lead the critic to believe Wasik wanted to make some commentary on capitalist culture in America. Perhaps. However, when viewed within the broader historical timeframe, another distinct possibility appears. In his address to the nation on September 21, 2001, President Bush took special care to ask Americans for their "continued participation and confidence in the American economy" (1). Although Bush's request was rather typical, in light of the fact that the attacks of September 11th as well as the destruction of the World Trade Center created a slump in both the stock market and general economic activity, the media reacted rather strongly to his request. Headlines such

as “If in doubt, go shopping” and quotes such as “And for God’s sake keep shopping!”, flooded the newspapers and magazines, and even led to critiques by both Barack Obama and John McCain in the 2008 Presidential election (Riddell; Pellegrini). As candidate Obama once quipped, “Instead of a call to service, we were asked to go shopping” (Ferguson). When read in such a light, one might argue Wasik’s flash mobs take on the role of cultural critique. Nicholson, when discussing the sites of Wasik’s eight mobs, suggests “these sites were potentially made even more significant to Americans in light of George Bush’s plea to get back to normal living following the 9/11 attacks by going shopping” (9). Against the backdrop of earlier generations who supported their war efforts through rationing and volunteerism, the directive to conspicuously consume given to the millennial generation may have felt like a slap in the face – a dismissal of their abilities due to their inexperience. After such dismissal, one naturally seeks to act out.

Wasik, however, offers a different perspective on his choice of locations for the mobs. According to him, the scenes of his inexplicable mobs served two purposes: first, to comment on the changing nature of public space in America; and second, to “create an illusion of superior strength” (Wasik 65). Although in most early interviews Wasik denies the existence of any political aim at work in the flash mob, by 2004 he admits to at least one, the liberation of public space. In an interview with LA Weekly, Wasik acknowledges:

> . . . the more I did them, the more I realized the mobs actually did have a deeply political value. The nature of public space in America today has changed. It’s shopping malls, large chain stores, that kind of thing. The presumption is that you’re going to purchase something, but once you try to express yourself in any other way, suddenly you’re trespassing. New York City is blessed with a bunch of real public spaces, but at this point, if you’re young in America, chances are you have grown up without authentic public space. I discovered it was political to go into one of those stores. (Bemis)

In this sense, one might argue that the sites of the flash mob, at least to some extent, are dictated by the overarching historic and socio-cultural scene. These dictates may be obvious and apparent, such as the shift in location from Grand Central Station to the Grand Hyatt Hotel due to increased security threat levels mentioned earlier in this chapter. Others may be more subtle, such as the use of mass shopping in the Macy's and Otto Tootsi Plohound mobs to highlight the overarching spread of corporate or retail space and the diminishing of space in which we can freely exercise our right to assemble. I explore whether or not Wasik and his flashmobbers purposefully sought to communicate such sentiments in Chapter Four. Regardless of intent, Wasik's mobs emphasized the changing nature of public space in America, thereby contributing to the production of the larger socio-cultural scene while simultaneously existing as one of its productions.

Necessity also contributed to Wasik's choice of venue. In order to create the feeling of a group of insiders – a community – Wasik needed to make the mob feel powerful. As he takes care to remind the reader, flash mobs "drew their energies not from impressing outsiders or freaking them out but from showing them utter disregard, from using the outside world as merely a terrain for private games" (65). Although often prodded by bloggers and other mob participants to hold mobs in more open spaces, where more than a few employees and passersby could witness their "game," Wasik sternly refused. In Wasik's opinion, in order to make the mob feel big, he had to choose venues which were small, and easily overpowered by a few hundred participants. To do otherwise, and set the mob inside a large, open space, would only serve to highlight its frailty – its rather small size of participants. Wasik elucidates on this aspect of the mob in his 2006 coming-out article:

> I never held mobs in the open . . . but this was entirely purposeful on my part, for like Colin Powell I hewed to the doctrine of *overwhelming force*. Only in enclosed spaces

> could the mob generate the necessary self-awe; to allow the mob to feel small would have been to destroy it. (65)

Wasik uses Howard Dean's rapid rise and decline in popularity during the 2004 election as an example.

Prior to the Iowa caucuses, Dean's campaign appeared at the forefront, thanks in part to a virtual community of chat rooms, bloggers, and other online web supporters. According to Wasik, before the caucuses, Dean supporters were on the rise, due to the confined communal nature of Dean's online virtual community, which led supporters to believe they were part of Dean's faceless, "seemingly numberless throng" (65). However, when a paltry number of Dean volunteers showed up on-site in Iowa to travel door-to-door and wrangle support before the caucus, the Dean campaign allowed itself to feel small and outnumbered, thereby, at least in Wasik's opinion, destroying its chances at success. For Wasik, small, enclosed venues were imperative to the success of the flash mob, for without such sites participants would not feel part of a powerful, "hip" game, but rather mere participants of a silly and unsuccessful prank. As such, Wasik used the scenes (physical sites) of his flash mobs to create a feeling of scene (in a socio-cultural sense) within his flash mob.

Finally, the flash mob managed to create a scene entirely of its own by employing carnivalesque tactics to dominate and transform physical space. By employing these tactics and creating a carnival-like atmosphere of fun and frivolity that simultaneously provided participants with an opportunity to blow off steam, flash mobs unknowingly seduced a larger audience, that of the public and world at large. After all, who doesn't enjoy a little transgression, a little reversion, a little carnival now and then?

Flash mobs share a number of similarities with aspects of carnival emphasized by Russian literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin in Rabelais and His World. To begin, the choice of a

public forum, such as a department store or downtown city street, as opposed to a more traditional theatrical venue, situates the flash mob as "a play without footlights" (Bakhtin "Rabelais" 235). One of the foundational aspects of Bakhtin's carnival is that it occurs in the marketplace – the public forum – and thereby erases the usual boundaries between spectators and participants. As anyone who has attended a Mardi Gras festival can tell you, no one simply watches a carnival. Even those who choose not to participate in the throwing/catching of beads and excessive eating/drinking still participate in the carnival. This is primarily because carnival time is a specific sort of time – one which is calendrically regulated and set apart as distinct. Therefore, even the solitary citizen who does nothing during carnival season but sit inside his house and peer out the window at the activities below is a participant, as he is not living life as usual, but as though on vacation from the normative behaviors and structures of society. In much the same manner, the flash mob operates under a distinct set of temporal rules that allow for an inversion of typical structural patterns.

The strictly regulated ten-minute time period of the flash mob allows the rapid formation of a like-minded mass or mob out of a throng of distinct, singular identities. During the brief interval in which the mob swarms a specific site, it is able to disrupt the site's typical operating patterns of behavior. An example of this disruption and inversion can be found in Bill Wasik's sixth mob in 2003. In Mob #6, Wasik instructed participants to gather in front of a robotic dinosaur in the Times Square Toys 'R Us and – on cue – fall to their knees and cower before the dinosaur for a set time before leaving. This cowering of the participants took the form of individuals sitting on their knees, arms extended above their heads and repetitively bowing to the floor. In the normative, rule-based act of consumption typical of such a corporate, public space, consumers arrive at a site (such as Toys 'R Us), peruse the products for sale, perhaps asking for

help, and then carry their chosen purchase to a cash register where they pay for their goods and exit. Consumers are not supposed to fall to the floor and raise their arms in adoration or capitulation to an item on display, such as the robotic dinosaur. When employees of the Toys 'R Us witnessed this behavior, they were unsure of how to respond, and although the mob participants were doing nothing illegal, they quickly called the cops who managed to turn off the dinosaur just as the mob was dispersing. Other spectators – such as out of town tourists shopping in the Toys 'R Us that day – were compelled to stop their normal behaviors (shopping) and engaged in extraordinary behaviors (such as taking pictures of the mobbers). In these small ways, both store employees and random customers were forced to acknowledge an inversion of structure and react to it, thereby becoming participants in the carnival-like atmosphere the mob created.

Although flash mobs portray a number of the characteristics of carnival outlined by Bakhtin – the inversion of hierarchical norms, an emphasis on the marketplace or public square, the formation of a large crowd of like-minded individuals, and the display of silly, somewhat foolish behavior – the flash mob is not a carnival. Rather, the flash mob should be discussed as a carnivalesque form of performance, referring to its carnival-like properties, yet distinguishing between this fractured form of a carnival and the carnivals of the medieval period to which Bakhtin devotes most of his attention. Bahktin explains that despite the efforts of bourgeois culture to stifle carnival and its forms, carnival did not die, rather, "it was merely narrowed down" ("Rabelais" 276). Peter Stallybrass and Allon White detail this narrowing down of carnival as a four-part process in The Politics and Poetics of Transgression. According to the authors, institutions of law and order sought to wipe out carnival and festivity from European life between the 17th and 20th centuries. All sorts of ritualistic and carnival behaviors came under

attack – feasting, fairs, processions, rowdy spectacles – and were suddenly subject to strategic forms of surveillance and control via the state. However, the rising nation states sought to co-opt carnival for their own purposes, reinventing it as military parades and national holidays.

Other factors, such as the rise of industrialism and the movement of people from rural country areas to large cities, where squares were quickly replaced by business districts, also contributed to the so-called disappearance of carnival. However, as Stallybrass and White remind us, carnival did not disappear. It managed to be both everywhere and nowhere at the same time. The first process involved in the breakup of carnival is fragmentation. Certain elements of carnival began to be separated from others, in an attempt to maintain a more regulated control over the participants' actions. For example, feasting becomes separated from performance, spectacle from procession, etc. Simultaneously, carnival became marginalized, both in terms of social class and geographical location. Until the 19th century, carnival was something in which all social classes participated, and it was only with the rise of the bourgeois as a class that carnival became seen as part of the culture of the Other – the uneducated, unrefined, improper other of the lower classes. Similarly, carnival, which had historically run rampant throughout entire towns, began to be pushed out of wealthy districts and neighborhoods, and eventually out of the town itself into the countryside or coastal locations.

The third process involved in the narrowing down of carnival is sublimation. Carnival behaviors involving excess and the grotesque become sublimated into the private terrors of the isolated bourgeois individual. In other words, those excessive appetites and grotesque bodily functions celebrated in carnival – feasting, drinking heavily, defecation, and waste – become the very things bourgeois members of society find repulsive and seek to hide from others. Finally, the behavior of the bourgeois body – particularly the female body – and not only its desires

becomes controlled during the fourth part of the process: repression. In carnival, the grotesque body of the people is articulated as both social pleasure and celebration. Literally placed outside and apart from the carnival body, the female bourgeois body which longs to take part in the festivity creates a pathological phobia of being associated with the carnival body, knowing that if she were to give into her desires and join in, her status as different and therefore proper would be lost. This behavior is typical of the entire bourgeois class of the 19th century, who might allow the existence of fragmented, marginalized forms of carnival out of a sentimentality for the past, but could never fully engage with it. Rather, they were forced to remain inside and apart, thereby defining their status as other and more proper against it.

Flash mobs, then, are a carnivalesque type of performance born from the fragmentation of carnival. In our post 9/11, terror-filled global society, one does not come across too many manifestations of the carnivalesque. As the 1999 Seattle World Trade Organization protests taught us, crowds are often viewed as threatening, even when their actions may be non-violent in nature. Furthermore, a seemingly purposeless gathering of people engaged in silly sorts of actions stands out in our often humorless society. When faced with a performance such as the flash mob, one is forced to question what the purpose or goal of such a carnivalesque form of action might be. An initial answer lies in the realm of laughter, which Bakhtin reminds us is liberatory in and of itself. Although fragmented and incomplete, notes written by Bakhtin towards the end of his life seem focused on the unique and powerful potential of laughter:

> Irony (and laughter) as a means for transcending a situation, rising above it. Only dogmatic and authoritarian cultures are one-sidedly serious. Violence does not know laughter. . . . The sense of anonymous threat in the tone of an announcer who is transmitting important communications. Seriousness burdens us with hopeless situations, but laughter lifts us above them and delivers us from them. Laughter does not encumber man, it liberates him. ("Speech Genres" 134)

If laughter is liberatory, then in the case of the flash mob, from what exactly are both its participants and observers liberated? I address this question in Chapter Four, examining the potential motivations (or purposes) of the flash mob through the philosophies of Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze, and Felix Guattari.

Conclusion

Flash floods, like the flash mob, distinguish themselves by their rapid appearance, dissemination, and domination/destruction of low-lying areas. They emerge on the scene without warning and within a matter of hours change its familiar appearance and function completely. Usually, after the rain stops falling, the flood disappears, or dries up, often disappearing as quickly as it developed. Flash floods, like flash mobs, suprise us because they are unexpected, and as such, tend to leave us at a loss for what to do, other than notify the authorities of their occurrence.

In the introduction to Perform or Else, Jon McKenzie locates and describes performance as the "embodied enactment of cultural forces" (8). Although I disagree with many of McKenzie's arguments, I find this definition of performance to be of use when considering both the scene as well as the purpose of the flash mob. Like most performances, Wasik's eight flash mobs, as well as their subsequent offspring, provide their participants an opportunity for the physical expression of cultural fears, desires, and tensions. Through careful analysis of their various components, we discover the objects of those fears, desires, and tensions: surveillance, community, space, and power.

Chapter Four explores these topics through the lens of continental philosophy. In doing so, I seek an understanding of the fifth and final element of Kenneth Burke's Pentad, purpose. As the study moves into this examination of motives, I not only question why people participated

in flash mobs, but I remember the particularities of the flash mob outlined thus far. Chapter One discussed the unique attributes, actions, and locations of each of Wasik's eight flash mobs. Chapter Two situated these mobs as performative acts located within a rich history of similar performances. In this Chapter, I outlined the specific attributes of Wasik's flash mobs' agent (the modern hipster), agency (mobile mass communication), and scene (small, enclosed pseudo-public spaces in New York City's post 9/11 society). I also discussed the dominant nature of the flash mob's scene as the overarching container of its agent and agency, as well as the possibility for community-building and communitas existent in the actions of the flash mob. Keeping these discussions in mind, Chapter Five's investigation of purpose focuses not simply on why, but rather, why this particular type of performance, at this particular time, in these particular places, through these particular means, and perhaps most importantly, for this particular audience? Such questions, serve as signposts leading to this study's ultimate goal: discovering what Wasik's eight original flash mobs communicate.

CHAPTER FOUR
FLASHES: SPECTACLE, SURVEILLANCE, AND POLITICS IN THE MOB

The art of 'pulling tricks' involves of a sense of the opportunities afforded by a particular occasion . . . a tactic boldly juxtaposes diverse elements in order to suddenly produce a ***flash*** shedding a different light on the language of a place and to strike the hearer. (de Certeau 37-38; bold and italics added)

A Story

Sometime around my fifth or sixth year of existence, my brother, four and a half years my senior, pulled a nasty trick on me. This particular trick, by no means the only one of its kind, stands out in my memory for its cunning, danger, and illumination of my brother's character. Like many younger siblings, up until this point in my life, I viewed my older brother as my personal teacher, sharer of family and neighborhood secrets, and purveyor of real, honest to God, capital "T" Truth. So it should come as no surprise that on one particular spring day, when my mother was out of the house and my father otherwise disposed in the den, my brother convinced me to climb inside our 1970s, avocado-green Hotpoint style dryer and take a ride. He did so by proclaiming, "It's just like a roller coaster."

After a very short, noisy, and painful ride in the dryer, I emerged, crestfallen and suspicious. I wondered, "Was the dryer really like a roller coaster ride?" If so, these roller coasters certainly failed to meet my expectations. Had my brother lied to me? This seemed more likely; however, his reasons for doing so made no sense to my small mind. Why put me in the dryer? Did he desire to hurt me? Did he simply want to see what would happen? Or was it the pleasure of pulling one over on me, of accomplishing one of his first tricks?

A good trick, as the de Certeau quote above notes, relies upon the trickster's ability to seize the unique opportunities afforded by specific occasions. In the case of my brother, his trick relied upon the convergence of three separate points: my mother's absence from the house, my

blind faith in whatever he said, and a recent family trip to a theme park with roller coasters where, unlike my brother, I had been too terrified to take a ride. Realizing the unique opportunity afforded by such a convergence, my brother jumped upon the chance to pull one over on his sister. What he failed to foresee was the enlightenment such a trick produced in my young self. In a flash, I realized my brother could not always be trusted and that his motivations were not necessarily good. Such a realization did indeed, as de Certeau suggests, shed a different light on the situation.

Flash mobs also operate as tricks. Whether created as complex communal in-jokes or a modern form of cultural critique, flash mobs act as elaborate pranks played out within the quasi-public realm of the capitalist city, exposing its heretofore unrealized methods of operation. These methods of operation, both of the capitalist city and of the flash mob, serve as the focus of this chapter. In the following pages, I analyze the ability of Wasik's flash mobs to highlight the dominant strategies of surveillance, standardization, and structure operating within the capitalist system. In so doing, I explore the tactical nature of the flash mob as a performance event. I conduct this analysis and exploration through a critical application of the theories of philosophers Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, as well as the aforementioned Michel de Certeau. My ultimate goal in this analysis is an exploration of the fifth and final element of Kenneth Burke's Pentad, that of Purpose. Although a number of motivations for participation in Wasik's flash mob surfaced in previous chapters, I have yet to explore these options at length. Furthermore, while primarily focused on questions of aim and intent, this chapter also considers the often disregarded question of audience. After all, within the larger examination of Wasik's flash mobs as communicative events, one must not pay so much

attention to the sender of the message (or for that matter the time, place, content, and context) that she forgets the importance of the receiver.

Introduction

He hardly noticed the displacement booths. They were part of the background. The displacement booths were the most important part of a newstaper's life, and still he hardly noticed their existence. Until the day they turned on him. – Larry Niven, "Flash Crowd" (1)

In The Practice of Everyday Life, Michel de Certeau discusses the methods for creative work within a highly structured capitalist society. According to de Certeau, capitalism casts individuals either in roles of consumers of merchandise, or as the employee-workers producing goods for sale. Within such a system, one might feel the absence of any space for truly creative endeavors – those undertaken without a profit in mind. As de Certeau suggests, however, such spaces for creativity do exist, primarily within the ways we refashion and remodel the leftovers of capital, as well as the items we purchase:

> The 'making' in question is a production, a poiesis – but a hidden one, because it is scattered over areas defined and occupied by systems of 'production' . . . and because the steadily increasing expansion of these systems no longer leaves 'consumers' any *place* in which they can indicate what they *make* or *do* with the products of these systems. (xii)

Published in 1984, de Certeau's argument sounds strikingly similar to those expressed by Bill Wasik thirty years later regarding the lack of truly public space. Furthermore, the hidden poeisis outlined by de Certeau reminds one not only of the Situationist's detournement, but also of the modern hipster's cultural aesthetic – reclamations of old, existing products of a capitalist system, remade into symbols of fashionable youth culture. Simply put, de Certeau was right: as capitalism's control over society and social space grew, it did not manage to wipe out, sterilize, or stratify creative endeavors by turning everything into an object for purchase. Rather, such endeavors simply changed tactics, operating within the system as well as without, disguising

themselves behind the wigs of ordinary conspicuous consumption and production. [17] In the following pages, I contend that the flash mob is one such endeavor.

Rather than remaking an object though, Wasik's eight original flash mobs refashioned both the spaces of capitalism as well as its structures, if only for a moment. The flash mob reveals the sometimes hidden power relations inherent in the capitalist model, through its tactical takeovers and makeovers of capitalism's pseudo-public space. Drawing upon the work of French philosophers Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, I argue that flash mobs are a type of performative resistance to what Foucault labels governmentality, existing within what Deleuze and Guattari deem a control society.[18] I construct this argument in three parts, focusing first on the makeup and power relations of the flash mob, followed by a discussion of surveillance and visibility, and ending by outlining the specific tactics of the flash mob as a form of resistance. Throughout this discussion I urge the reader to recall de Certeau's opening comments regarding the art of pulling tricks: "a tactic boldly juxtaposes diverse elements in order to suddenly produce a flash shedding a different light on the language of a place (37-38)." I hope this chapter, like the flash mob itself, produces such a flash.

Assemblage and Power Relations: Flash Mob as a War Machine

As products of the digital age, flash mobs require a certain level of technological advancement to form, namely e-mail and text message technology created in the latter part of the 20th century. Every flash mob begins with an e-mail announcing the date and time of

[17] de Certeau defines la perruque, or the wig, as "the workers own work disguised as work for his employer" which "actually diverts time . . . from the factory for work that is free, creative, and precisely not directed toward profit" (25).

[18] Deleuze argued that with the advent of new technologies, most notably the computer, one no longer seeks control over individual bodies, but over networks and populations. To achieve such control, individual forms of testing and labeling that were typical of the disciplinary society, such as the examination, are replaced with more continuous forms of control, such as perpetual training. In other words, one does not move from one institution to another, as in the disciplinary society. Rather, "one is never finished with anything" but always co-existing between institutions, whose controls are manifested as slight modulations or adjustments (1).

occurrence, along with either a set of instructions for action or the promise of instructions to be delivered on site. Recipients then forward this e-mail to others in cyberspace through computers and cell phones, forming the mob (or at least its virtual potential) with each successive email or text message. The relationship between man and tool, or participant and computer/cell phone, allowing for the origination of flash mobs is an assemblage. Individual and technology work together in this assemblage to create the virtual potential of the mob, in cyberspace, which is then actualized in reality at the mob site the day of the performance.

The flash mob itself, however, also forms an assemblage, with what Deleuze and Guattari would call the corporation machine. I offer an example and a few definitions to begin. First, the prison system offers the best example of the machinic assemblage. To start, one must view the prison system as a machine made up of multiple parts working together; examples of these parts include a safe, well-constructed building, well-trained guards, well-behaved prisoners, and a desire within society to rehabilitate those prisoners. For the theorists, every social machine – such as the prison machine – operates on two levels: one of content and one of expression. In other words, when examining how a machine such as the prison functions, one must look at both the components of that machine (content) as well as the discourse surrounding it (expression). According to Deleuze and Guattari, these two levels of content and expression (both of which operate simultaneously) form what they refer to as a double articulation of stratification. The term "stratification" here is used in the sociological sense, to refer to a way of dividing based on the rank, or hierarchy, within a particular category. For example, within our society, caviar appears at a higher level, or layer, of strata than shrimp cocktail. Social machines such as the prison machine form a **double** articulation of stratification because each articulation – that of content as well as that of expression – has a specific form and substance. Consequently, every

social machine (such as the prison machine) contains a form of content and substance of content, as well as a form of expression and substance of expression. For instance, one can discuss the material makeup of a machine's components as its substance of content, while also discussing the way those components are organized/arranged as the machine's form of content.

Deleuze and Guattari argue that behind every machinic assemblage, such as the corporation machine or the prison machine, lies an abstract machine seeking to find a function for the matter with which it is concerned – a pack of human bodies. The prison machine's function is to discipline the pack, to render them docile and therefore useful. In order to do so, the machine of the prison is created. In other words, it is abstract machines, always concerned with finding functions for human bodies, that lead to the creation of social machines like the prison or corporation.

In the prison machine, at the level of content, the first articulation of stratification, lies a homogenized group of human bodies that serves as the substance of content: the prisoners. In other words, prisoners are the primary material content with which the larger prison system is concerned. What Deleuze and Guattari refer to as the form of content is the ordering of those bodies by a particular code – in this case, the prison building would serve as the form of content, as the layout of the building itself serves as a method for separating prisoners and restricting their movements, similar in form to the way iambic pentameter controls the form of a Shakespearean sonnet. The prison building (or form of content) is then doubly articulated at the level of expression. In the case of the prison machine, the form of expression is the criminological discourse about delinquency. In other words, just as the layout of the prison building (form of content) controls the manner in which prisoners (substance of content) move and interact, the scientific study/discussion of criminal offenders and their rehabilitation (form of expression)

shapes the way our society views and relates to the prison (substance of expression). In the present scenario, the substance of expression produces what Foucault would call a "carceral society," one in which classrooms and cities are organized upon the model of the prison.

To study the flash mob, I move from a discussion of the prison machine to the corporation machine. In this type of machinic assemblage, the substance of content would be the consumers of the various products it produces, and the form of content would be the store or marketplace in which those products are sold. Consumption is the only allowed form of expression in the corporation machine, which is normative and based on a set of rules, albeit unspoken. The substance of expression, therefore, would be the capitalist society in which we find ourselves. The flash mob, by joining with the corporation machine to create a new assemblage, offers its participants a new form of expression (what Deleuze and Guattari refer to as a potential "line of flight") from the previously mentioned form of expression – normative rule-based conspicuous consumption. This line of flight serves as an experimental pathway of deterritorialization, or a change in habit, allowing participants to explore alternate possibilities emergent in their daily lives and actions.

According to Delezue and Guattari, deterritorialization occurs when old habits of behavior are broken, and new habits are formed. A person's typical morning routine can be thought of as a territorialization, or set of habits: wake up, make coffee, feed the pet, read the paper, shower, and dress. An act as simple as changing this routine can be thought of as a deterritorialization: wake up, shower, dress, and drink juice instead of caffeine. Such a simple change can affect our perception and encounters throughout the day, therefore opening us up to new possibilities of connection. In addition, if we adopt this **new** routine and habitually begin to enact it each morning, a reterritorialization would occur. In the flash mob, the behavioral norms

of conspicuous consumption are deterritorialized into a new form of expression based upon a playful (or false) mass capitulation. I return to Wasik's original eight mobs for an example.

In Mob #6, Wasik instructed his participants to gather in front of a robotic dinosaur in the Times Square Toys 'R Us and – on cue – fall to their knees and cower before the dinosaur for a set time before leaving. Figure 5 captures the scene.

Figure 5

When a customer likes something for sale in a store, she typically picks up the item, brings it to a cashier, pays for the item, and leaves. This is the typical form of expression one finds in the capitalist marketplace. Expressions of praise, worship, and submission, such as those in Figure 5, are atypical of the average retail store. Rather, one expects to find such behavior in a charismatic church, where parishioners prostrate themselves before an iconic image or manifestation of their God. By taking the behaviors typical (or habitual) of the church environment and making them the behaviors of the department store, participants in Mob #6 successfully deterritorialized their traditional form of expression – conspicuous consumption – and replaced it with a playful (or false) act of capitulation, or worship. Through this act of deterritorialization, the flash mob participants make themselves and any other customers who happen to be in the store at the time of the mob aware of the unspoken rules or codes of normative behavior, as well as the possibilities lying beyond those normative boundaries.

Deterritorializations such as these, however, are typically not appreciated by the machines whose hegemonic, normative forms of expression they dissect and interrogate. During the Toys 'R Us flash mob, the actions of the participants were dangerous enough to prompt store employees and managers to call the police, who arrived just as the mob participants were leaving. Acts of deterritorialization are dangerous to those who could potentially lose power or profits were such behaviors to catch on in the population as a whole. Therefore, social machines like the corporation machine typically feel an immediate need to re-territorialize and thereby reassert their power and dominance when such actions take place. Multiple strategies exist for such re-assertions. Before I discuss these strategies, I return to the work of Michel Focault on power for a fuller understanding of the issues at hand.

Foucault defines power as the action on the field of possible actions of another (Foucault "Power" 340). In this sense, power is not inherently bad or good, but rather "dangerous" (Foucault "Michel Foucault" 231-2). Although power can be used to limit another's actions, and in some cases dominate or control, power for Foucault is not simply repressive; it is often productive. Limiting one's possible actions by forcing her to sit quietly in a schoolroom or spend an hour every morning in the gym can push that person closer to a desired goal of knowledge or physical prowess. Power relations, for Foucault, occur when two free subjects engage in a relationship alternating between domination and struggle. Power relations are not found in situations of complete domination, such as in the relationship of slave and master. Conversely, power relations are also not found when two equal adversaries confront one another, for the relationship between the two becomes that of a static equilibrium. Rather, power relations exist in the push-and-pull exchange between two free subjects whose exercise of power alternates.

Three primary sets of power relations operate in the flash mob. The first exists in the relationship between the mob organizer and the mob participants. The mob organizer seeks to control and organize the actions of the mob participants by instructing them on where to congregate, what to do, and when to leave. The mob participants agree to this temporary direction of their actions in order to amass a large mob that can act upon the governmentalized institution represented by the mob site. The use of the term "governmentalized institution" here refers to the fact that each of these sites can be viewed as an institution which has unwritten rules of conduct and behavior which we as citizens abide by in order to get what we desire from that institution. Even more compelling, this first power relationship occurs almost completely within cyberspace. As Bill Wasik explains, often the originator of the mob sends out the call to organize as a forwarded message – in other words, a message that the organizer sent from an unrecognizable e-mail account to his own phone in the form of a text message – in order to "conceal my identity as its original author" (Wasik 57). Due to this anonymity, no outlet for discussion or negotiation exists between a potential mob participant and the mob organizer regarding the particular actions of the mob. In truth, the only way to act against the mob organizer is not to attend the mob. For those who do wish to take part in the mob, the entire process of acquiescing to the mob organizer's invitation/command takes place in the realm of cyberspace. Furthermore, upon arrival at the scene of the mob, participants often receive further instructions from someone other than the mob organizer, as another means of retaining the mob organizer's anonymity. At this point, the participant's only options are once again either to refuse to participate (either by staying behind or by not acting in concert with other mobbers), or to take part in the mob by following the instructions of an unknown leader.

The second power relationship found in the flash mob is that between the mob and the governmentalized institution serving as the site of the mob. Take, for example, the average retail store, the site of Wasik's second mob in April 2003. Typically, in order to procure desired goods from a retail store, we acquiesce to certain rules regarding our behavior (possible actions) while shopping – we shop alone, or in small groups; we wait patiently in line in order to check out and pay for our goods; we refrain from throwing clothes on the floor, singing at the top of our lungs and dancing through the aisles. In this manner, we act in accordance with the normative patterns of our socialization; in order to shop in an orderly manner and feel safe while doing so, we agree to control our behavior to a certain extent.

During the flash mob, however, the mob's mere presence begins to frustrate these rules, as in Mob #2. Two hundred participants suddenly swarmed the rug department of a Macy's department store and, as instructed, informed the clerks that they were looking for a "love rug" for their commune in Long Island City (Wasik 57). The befuddled clerks, unsure of what to do when the mob arrived, called the police. They did so not because Wasik's mobbers did anything truly out of the ordinary – after all they were only shopping – but because they were shopping **en masse**, which was simply not normal. Often, mob participants engage in actions atypical of the site they descend on and this abnormal behavior leads business owners to call the police, unsure of what to do with so many people breaking the (unspoken yet always observed) rules. In this manner, the actions of the mob not only frustrate the rules of particular institutions, but actually violate them as well. In order to regain power, representatives of the institution (employees) call the police in an attempt to maintain control. In this case, Wasik's flash mob participants never broke any spoken or posted laws. Therefore, the use of the police as a control mechanism supports Foucault's assertion in Discipline and Punishment that the police serve a dual role in

society – both to enforce the law and to enforce social norms. The mob participants, on the other hand, maintain power by leaving before the police arrive, an objective at which they typically succeed due to their ten-minute time constraint.

Finally, a unique power relationship operates between the flash mob and its audience, consisting of both those people who work at the site of the mob, as well as any other individuals at the site when the mob occurs. The mob's presence frustrates the expectations of this audience, and they must choose between acquiescing to the presence of the mob by simply watching it unfold, refusing to acknowledge the mob's presence by continuing with their regular routine, or by actively fighting back. One group who chooses to engage in the lattermost sort of action are the self-identified "flashmuggers." This particular group of audience members hijack flash mobs by secretly showing up at the site of a mob and handing out false directions, or by actually mugging flash mob participants and stealing their valuables. In so doing, the flashmuggers move from unaware and passive audience members to active participants in a larger performance. Albeit by suspect means, the flashmuggers seek to regain their agency through hijacking the mob, and often its participants, perhaps in an effort to remind flash mobbers that they too can be rendered audience members to a different sort of performance at a moment's notice.

While multiple levels of power relations operate in the flash mob, the relationship between the flash mob and the corporation machine (who owns the site upon which the mob acts) often dominates popular discourse. After all, these individuals (employees) must decide what to do: laugh, call the police, or run and hide. Their decisions are the decisions not of an individual, but of the machinic assemblage to which they belong – what I refer to as the corporation machine. Stated differently, employees at the site of a flash mob must ask themselves, "What would my employer do?" not "What would I do?" Calling the police,

however, is not the corporation machine's only alternative, as evidenced in the case of the flash mob. Another strategy is that of co-optation: stealing the deterritorializing tactics of the aberrant, diverse, and disparate population in the flash mob and using them to re-territorialize a preferred set of actions – that of conspicuous consumption – as well as to re-define the population in a unified manner. In 2005, in an effort to regain and reassert power lost to the flash mob, the corporation machine undertook both these goals.

As Wasik recounts in his coming-out article, in the summer of 2005, Ford Motor Company sought to co-opt the tactics and techniques of the flash mob in an effort to appeal to its newest targeted customer; the coveted twenty to thirty-something hipster crowd, whose preferences dominate trends in conspicuous consumption. Ford wanted to sell their newest product – the Ford Fusion – to this group of individuals, and they thought the flash mob the best way to do so. Ford strategically announced a series of "Fusion Flash Concerts," via e-mail advertisements, in the hopes of "appropriating the trend . . . in order to make a product seem cool" (Wasik 61). Compared to Wasik's flash mobs, these concerts failed completely. E-mails that typically arrived last minute in a regular flash mob, went out six days prior to the event, and radio stations and newspapers promoted the "secret" concerts with advertisements. The actual events, or concerts, were sparsely attended and lasted much longer than ten minutes. However, Ford's co-optation of the flash mob managed to succeed as an attempt at re-territorialization. By associating themselves (a huge corporation) with the flash mob, Ford successfully made flash mobs passé in the eyes of the general public, thereby emptying out the potential of the flash mob (at least in its original form) for creating future deterritorializations in the eyes of the nation's youth. To put it simply, Ford captured the flash mob, made it uncool, and stuck it on the shelf. This desire of the corporation machine to re-territorialize, both through the display of the police

and the Ford Fusion Concert, stands as a testament of the flash mob's deterritorializing power during its initial enactment in 2003.

Multiplicity and Visibility: The Becoming-Animal of the Mob

Flash mobs, as stated in Chapter Three, offered Wasik's hipsters the chance to act in concert, to merge themselves into a large, communal mass of like-minded compatriots. Stated differently, flash mobs join large masses of documented, individualized, and highly visible bodies together into one large mob. In this act of conversion, individual visibility vanishes, while a sort of collective visibility emerges in its place. Furthermore, due to the anonymity of the mob organizer, flash mobs operate with a pack mentality pointing once again toward the somewhat democratizing collective visibility established. It is this pack mentality, different from that of the average crowd or mob, that Deleuze and Guattari refer to as a multiplicity. Wasik himself seems fascinated with this desire to blend in and become part of the herd, what he referred to as the "joining urge, a drive toward deindividuation easily discernible in the New York hipster population" (58).

Moreover, Wasik desired to create an art project based purely on the notion of scene, not to play fascist dictator to his friends and acquaintances. What appears to fascinate Wasik is the fact that people not only answered his e-mails and showed up, but that they forwarded them on to their friends and acquaintances, thereby creating the large amounts of people that gathered on site to form the mob. These individuals did not attend and participate in the mob out of a desire to show off their talents, intellect, or any other special skill. Instead, they wished to be part of the scene – hip enough to know what all the other young hipsters were doing, and doing it themselves. When they arrived at the mob, their goal was not to stand out as special or unique, but to blend into the pack and become a part of the overall herd of bodies. In other words, they

gladly shed any identifiers of their distinct individuality in order to be part of a community of bodies acting as one.

This distinction is important for a number of reasons. First it shows us that the flash mob is not an unruly, disorganized crowd comprised of anarchical bodies, wishing to wreak havoc and create chaos in the city merely for chaos' sake. The flash mob is also not a mindless mass following the whims of a dictator or leader of some sort. Rather, it operates as a pack – a formation of like-minded individuals who either see or feel a kinship with one another and come together to act as one. Elias Canetti, writing on the distinction between crowds and packs in his Crowds and Power, states that for the pack – unlike the crowd – "equality and direction really exist. The first thing that strikes one about the pack is its unswerving direction; equality is expressed in the fact that all are obsessed by the same goal" (Canetti 93). Although Canetti would probably classify the flash mob as a crowd, based on its large size, one cannot deny that the mob meets his criteria for the pack. The flash mob forms quickly and solely for the purpose of creating a scene by swarming upon a pre-determined site, and then leaves after a ten-minute interval. Unlike Canetti's crowd, the flash mob's direction is unswerving – participants do not move outside the boundaries of the pre-determined site, and they do not linger after the conclusion of the mob. Furthermore, this concerted effort to act as one body in the act of arrival, departure, and the performance of an action is the sole goal of the mob. As such, the flash mob meets Canetti's second requirement for a pack: the expression of equality through the shared obsession of a particular goal.

Working from Canetti, Deleuze and Guattari make a further distinction between those who lead packs and those who lead groups. According to the authors:

> the leader of the pack or the band plays move by move, must wager everything on hand, whereas the group or mass leader consolidates or capitalizes on past gains. The pack,

> even on its own turf, is constituted by a line of flight or of deterritorialization that is a component part of it, and to which it accredits a high positive value, whereas masses only integrate these lines in order to segment them, obstruct them, ascribe them a negative sign. (Deleuze and Guattari 33)

For Deleuze and Guattari then, the leader of a group or mass (a crowd) maintains an outside position from which she commands, capitalizes, and consolidates. The leader of a pack, however, remains inside, acting more as a sort of tribal chief who persuades, mobilizes, and catalyzes the other members. Wasik chose the latter of these two options, acting as the leader of a pack more so than that of a crowd or mass. To begin, Wasik took part in each of the eight New York City mobs he created, never revealing his identity as "Bob," the author of the original e-mails. By maintaining an interior position, Wasik easily provoked and catalyzed action within the crowd, by passing out instructions (along with other pre-determined participants) and prompting the mobbers to begin performing the actions listed on their instruction cards or e-mails by acting them out himself. Furthermore, due to his interior as opposed to exterior position, Wasik played "move by move" (Deleuze and Guattari 33). Although all Wasik's flash mobs deviated from their printed rules, Mob #8 blatantly highlights their pack mentality.

In Mob #8, participants were told to gather in a concrete alcove on Forty-second Street and follow the instructions coming from "the performer," a portable boom box.[19] Mobbers arrived at the scene ready to follow instructions, however their collective cheering became so loud it drowned out the instructions emanating from the boom box. Around this time, one individual participant opened a briefcase containing a glowing neon sign, and then held up two fingers. Upon seeing this, the mob assumed this participant (and not the boom box) to be "the performer" providing instruction and collectively began chanting "Peace!" As Wasik states, "the project had been hijacked by a figure more charismatic than myself" (Wasik 60). Hijacking, in

[19] The following description is taken from Wasik's own account of the eighth and final mob he created, as described in his article of March 2006.

my opinion, is not the right word to describe what happened in Wasik's eighth mob. I believe the mob, acting as a pack or multiplicity, displayed its own mind/will and began to follow its own movements and desires, rather than those predetermined by Wasik. Wasik, at that moment, had to choose between stepping outside the bounds of the pack and asserting his own voice/role as a leader-commander, or remaining within the bounds of the pack and following their wishes. Obviously, he chose the latter.

Another interesting aspect of the flash mob as a multiplicity lies in what Deleuze and Guattari call a distinction between molar and molecular populations. Molar populations are those that are treated as one, or as a unity. One of the most familiar molar distinctions used in our society is that made between men and women. Our societal status quo bases this distinction on genitalia – men have penises, women have vaginas. In contrast, a molecular conception of the human population treats humankind as a multiplicity – one that consists not just of men with penises and women with vaginas, but men who feel like women sometimes, and women who feel like men – allowing the creation of a broad array of spaces for the multitude of minute and distinct nuances that one finds on the spectrum of sexuality.

At first glance, Wasik's flash mobs appear as molar populations. In other words, we treat the flash mobs as a unified whole, as one. However, as the flash mobs themselves often point out, the mob is not unified. Mob #4 serves as an excellent example. In this mob, participants gathered at a Manhattan shoe store and were instructed to pretend they "were on a bus tour from Maryland. You are excited but also bewildered. It is as if the shoes were made in outer space" (Mike "Mob #4"). Such instructions leave much room for interpretation. As I imagine it, the shoe store contained two hundred flash mobbers, all expressing their bewildered excitement over those extra-terrestrial shoes in a unique way. In this manner, the flash mob became a molecular

population, allowing for as many possible expressions of bewildered excitement over shoes as there are on the spectrum of sexuality mentioned earlier. Still, one might argue, the flash mob acted as one body – arriving, acting bewildered, and exiting as one. I do not disagree. The goal of Deleuze and Guattari's discourse is not to categorize and thereby stratify a performance like the flash mob by correctly identifying it as one of two possible types (molar and molecular) of populations. Rather, they highlight multiple avenues of articulation, or ways of seeing, the flash mob. Therefore, while it is possible, and sometimes productive, to treat the flash mob as a molar population, to always do so would be as short-sighted as reducing sexuality to genitalia. Furthermore, acknowledging the flash mob as a molecular population begs the question, what happens when that population acts within a corporate, pseudo-public space? Why did Wasik consistently choose such spaces, and what were he and his flash mobbers trying to say?[20]

To explore this question further, I return to the work of Foucault, this time focusing on his discussions of power and visibility. According to Foucault, the examination operates as a power/knowledge mechanism.[21] As he states in Discipline and Punishment, "in this slender technique are to be found a whole domain of knowledge, a whole type of power" (185). Examinations produce knowledge but how does this knowledge produce power? To begin, the examination reverses the economy of visibility, thereby turning it into an exercise of power. Prior to the use of the examination as a means of disciplinary training, power was something that was defined by its visibility in the juridical society. Kings, noblemen and national heroes (or at least their images) could be found everywhere, from the highly visible form of the parade, to the slightly less visible records of written documentation – personal histories, mythological

[20] Five of Wasik's eight flash mobs took place in privately-owned public spaces where a capitalist model of consumption reigned – a Claire's Accessories store (Mob #1), a Macy's department store (Mob #2), a hotel (Mob #3), a shoe store (Mob #4), and a Toys 'R Us (Mob #6).

[21] By examination, Foucault refers to the variety of methods used in testing the proficiency of individuals at a particular task (e.g., written exams, oral exams, physical exams).

narratives – down to the national currency on which the King's image was invariably stamped. With the onslaught of the examination, a change occurred. Suddenly, every body was worthy of notation; every thought and action worthy of documentation in the new disciplinary society. Those who previously enjoyed the luxury of remaining unknown in a crowd, were now examined, documented, and categorized in order to produce a knowledge useful to the powerful.

Concurrently, those with large amounts of money or power used these gifts to hide themselves from scrutiny, refusing to be subjected to the rigors of the examinations enforced upon the commonwealth. Today, such reversals of the economy of visibility still exist. The awarding of honorary doctorates to people of prestige in American society serves as an example. Instead of submitting to many years of examination and testing in the collegiate system, Presidents, rock stars, actors, and wealthy philanthropists who donate large sums of money to a university often receive honorary doctorates while visiting or speaking at university ceremonies. This illustrates the fact that while the ordinary citizen must earn a degree through the process of continuous examination, wealthy and powerful citizens buy a degree with their fame and fortunes, evading examination altogether.

Returning to the flash mob, note that the mob turns the usually invisible audience, who historically sits at the back of a darkened theatre and watches with a degree of invisibility, into a consciously recognized visible set of onlookers. Something about the flash mob shouts, "We know you are watching us daily and that you want to watch something, so let us give you something to watch." For example, in Wasik's Toy's R Us flash mob, one might argue this particular mob speaks back to the retail giant or even Times Square itself. The mob highlights, albeit in a parodic fashion, our own culpability in our consumer culture – our readiness to lie down and prostrate ourselves before the corporate dinosaurs that examine us daily, seeking to

appeal to our every need. As one reporter who took part in the mob and subsequently covered it wrote, "I heard more than one person claim that the 'best part' had been watching the confused expressions on staff members' faces" (Berens 112). In this reversal of visibility, the flash mob turns the camera back onto the corporations, the industrial complexes, and the surveillers who intently watch our everyday lives. The mobbers move from acts of obedience – typical of our control society – to acts of performance, intended for an audience that prior to the mob thought themselves powerful and secure in their invisibility. The flash mob, in essence, taunts the tower guard in the panoptic prison, giving him much more to watch than he bargained. The performance of the mob participants, although dependent on a form of discipline, uses that discipline to reverse the power structures inherent in the economy of visibility. In other words, the mobbers use discipline against itself, in an effort to reverse the gaze. This co-optation of disciplinary strategies operates as a repetition with a difference, intended to create a new form of resistance. Stated differently, the flash mob not only taunts the watcher, but pulls back the curtain on the wizard to reveal his true identity.

Tactics and Resistance: Smooth Space and Swarming

When the aim of the flash mob is to confuse and therefore reveal the power structures that operate in our daily lives, to call the flash mob a form of resistance may seem strange. However, if one views the flash mob not in terms of a war model of power, in which one side is attempting to defeat another and take power, but rather in a more Arendtian sense of power as "the human ability not just to act but to act in concert" then one begins to understand the type of performative resistance taking place in the flash mob (Arendt 44). What does a flash mob resist? As a rule, flash mobs espouse no political or social agenda. Rather, flash mobs work against what Foucault referred to as governmentality, or the conduct of the conduct of others. For

Foucault, governmentality presents itself in those unspoken laws of normative behavior that prevent us from singing at work or dancing in the classroom. Furthermore, recalling Deleuze's idea of the control society as one in which we are never done with examination and training, one begins to see such governmentality all around. For example, every morning when I log on to my computer and my homepage website appears, so do two or three articles outlining six to ten strategies for how I can better communicate with my boss, make myself attractive to the opposite sex, and avoid those holiday calories. These articles work off an assumption of an ideal norm for physical appearance, attractive behavior, and assertive communication strategies. As such, they operate as reminders of the rules of normative behavior, communication, and appearance that media, society, teachers, family, and friends shared and instructed me in since birth. Ultimately, the pressure to live up to these ideals, as well as the onslaught of surveillance and other disciplinary measures, creates an unconscious acceptance or docility within most people. After all, such pressures and ideals are only **normal**. Flash mobs seek to transgress against and expose this form of control – this conduct of our conduct. In a flash mob, mob participants break the norms of acceptable behavior and by doing so perform the dual function of: (1) waking up their own participant bodies to the idea that other options for behavior exist, as well as (2) reminding the audience of the mob of the absurd and arbitrary nature of so-called "normal" behavior. In other words, the flash mob reminds us that we actually have a choice.

This idea may not seem radical, let alone dangerous enough to be viewed as a form of resistance to governmentality. However, something about the mob is dangerous, as evidenced in the common reaction of employees working at a site where a mob takes place calling the police. The mob is frightening. Their actions are confusing. Their lack of docility threatens the established power structures. Furthermore, their large, visible status makes them prone to media

coverage, promoting their resistance, albeit in a dismissive manner. This fact is important, for as Neve Gordon reminds us, "any form of resistance is also dependent on visibility, on the ability of people to see and hear defiant acts. Without visibility, all confrontations are meaningless" (137). Police successfully shut down Wasik's first mob after receiving a tip from an invitee regarding its occurrence. Participants arrived at the scene, a Claire's Boutique accessory store, to find police barricading the door. Mob #3 ended just as police cruisers were pulling up to the doors of the Grand Hyatt Hotel. In Wasik's Toys 'R Us mob, police arrived at the scene in time to escort mob participants out of the building. In each mob, participants were not breaking any legal rules – they were fully clothed, they did not steal or damage merchandise, or even harass other customers. Instead, they showed up en masse and performed some action entirely out of the ordinary, which apparently made them extremely dangerous individuals. Mobs of any sort frighten the rulers of a control society. One cannot account for individual behavior, or control the cooperative will and desires of the mob, a fact Bill Wasik discovered during Mob #8. This lack of control over the mob's behavior, however, affords the flash mob its unique and particular strength. To understand this strength, as well as its tactical nature, I return to the work of philosophers Deleuze and Guattari.

In A Thousand Plateaus, Deleuze and Guattari outline two types of space: smooth space and striated space. Often misunderstood as designations for particular types of places existing in the world, the terms "smooth" and "striated" actually describe processes or methods of occupying space. Striated space exists when specific points or locations are designated and people are assigned to occupy them. The authors use a chess game as an example – each piece has a particular spot from which it must start the game, as well as a particular set of rules pertaining to how the piece can be moved, which is related to its identity as defined by the game

– a knight, a pawn, a queen. Conversely, in smooth space people who occupy the space are not assigned a particular position, but rather can show up at any time and at any point in the space. Deleuze and Guattari's use the game Go as an example, in which the pieces themselves, unlike in chess, are not identifiable as distinct, separate units. Rather, they are small round pellets or disks that are uniform in nature, and could represent a multitude of different subjectivities. Furthermore, although Go and chess are both games of battle and conquest, the battle in Go is not coded by specific rules regarding movement and function of the pieces; rather the object of the game is to use the pieces in such a way as to border, encircle, or shatter the opponent's strategy. As Deleuze and Guattari state:

> In Go, it is a question of arraying oneself in an open space, of holding space, of maintaining the possibility of springing up at any point: the movement is not from one point to another, but becomes perpetual, without aim or destination, without departure or arrival. The "smooth" space of Go, as against the "striated" space of chess. (353)

A further important distinction clarifies the difference between movement and speed, as related to smooth and striated space. For Deleuze and Guattari, speed is an intensive property, found amongst the movements of a body or bodies in smooth space, whereas movement is an extensive quality operating in the traveling of a body from one point to another, within striated space. For example, one moves in particular, controlled patterns through the striated space of a planned garden. Even if one moves very quickly through this space, they still do not have speed, according to Deleuze and Guattari. This is due to the fact that, typically, one moves throughout and occupies the space of a garden by traveling from point to point – turn right on this path, left on that lane, etc. A person moving through a garden feels she is meant to occupy some parts of the space – such as the path – but not others, such as the grass or hedges. However, if one were to treat the garden as an open space, like a field, and ignore those pathways then that person may travel throughout the garden however she sees fit. Regardless of how quickly or slowly she

moves, she still moves at a particular speed, one that allows her to spring up anywhere, at anytime. Speed and movement are terms applicable to collective, wholly unified bodies or a multiplicity of bodies – such as the flash mob – and neither term contains a connotation of a faster or slower type of travel. Rather, the distinction regards the type of space traversed – smooth or striated – as well as the perception of the combined body traveling across it – that of a unified, collective whole, or that of a body consisting of irreducible parts, the multiplicity. The multiplicity moves in smooth space through the use of speed. The collective travels in striated space through movements from one point to another.

The body of the flash mob is a multiplicity, which realizes its potential during its formation in cyberspace – through e-mail and text messaging transmissions – and then actualizes that potential on the day of the mob at the mob site. The flash mob's use of technology creates an instant mobilization mechanism that allows individuals to turn up at any time in space, thereby escaping – if only for the brief ten minute time period of the mob – the striated, or stratified space they are typically assigned to occupy. Stated differently, the flash mob swarms a site, arriving from multiple locations and points in space to occupy one particular space (the mob site), typically in a method against that of the normative codes of society. In this manner, the mob occupies a smooth space, existing in an intensive zone, where Deleuze and Guattari are quick to remind us, even the smallest change in speed – the slightest sort of movement – produces a qualitative change in the final, actualized production. To elaborate upon this final point, I return to a few specific examples drawn from the literature and commentaries on the mobs themselves.

Recalling Mob #8, discussed earlier, one sees how a slight shift in behavior in a smooth space radically changes the results of an actualized product such as the flash mob. In Mob #8,

Wasik intended for his participants to gather in an alcove and follow the instructions blaring at them from a boom box. However, when the mob's own chants became so loud they could not hear the boom box, the mobbers looked within themselves for instructions to follow regarding their behavior. They found those instructions in the person of the unidentified man with the briefcase, who was a participant in the mob with no apparent intention of taking over or directing any other participant's behavior. Nevertheless, caught up (perhaps) in the expression of joy and the swell of positive affect amongst the participants, he held up his hands in a two-fingered peace sign, and suddenly all the other participants saw him as a leader and began chanting "Peace!" in response.

Another example of how a slight change in the structure or behavior of the mob while in the smooth space of the intensive zone leads to a radically different product originates in the actions of the Ford Motor Company. Ford sought to co-opt the techniques of the flash mob to sell their Ford Fusion to a target audience of hipster young adults. However, Ford failed to follow the outlines or rules governing the occurrence of the mob. To begin, Ford publicized these concerts via radio and print advertisements days, sometimes weeks, in advance. Furthermore, Ford's events lasted much longer than ten minutes – the typical and often most defining characteristic of any flash mob – thereby taking away the sense of urgency and play found in Wasik's original eight mobs. As a result, Ford's attempts at co-optation failed from a strategic marketing angle. By changing the structure of the mob, as well as the rules for movement and participation within it, Ford created an entirely new product – somewhere between an auto show and a flash mob – that hipster young adults for whom that product was intended were apparently not buying.

Still, such changes or modulations do not always result in failure. Although one is hard pressed to find a true flash mob today, a number of flash mob offspring survive and flourish. These offspring, such as zombie mobs, pillow fight mobs, and dance mobs, tactically manage to operate within a smooth space similar to that of Wasik's original flash mob, albeit with the addition of a few significant changes (such as enforced dress codes or previously learned dance routines). These changes, like those of Ford Motor Company, alter the mob's purpose and effect. Unlike Ford Motor Company however, what they fail to alter is the mob's act of resistance.

Certainly, the mob is uncontrollable beyond a certain point, which is part of its danger. However, this lack of control acts as a fundamental part of the mob's resistance to the complete control found in the daily exercise of governmentality. Two important facts reiterate the flash mob as a form of resistance. First, the flash mob is a form of resistance operating within the realm of discipline, not outside of it. Without disciplined bodies – that is, bodies used to answering calls and doing what they are told – the mob could not assemble into a large collective body. Second, the resistance found in the flash mob acts as a type of critical performance, similar to notions found in Judith Butler's discussions of performativity. Butler speaks of performativity as repetition with a difference, as outlined in Chapter One. Discipline, as a method, is based on repetitions, which over time produce docile and productive bodies. The flash mob uses these disciplined bodies to its advantage, asking them to repeat with a difference, to use their particular disciplined body in concert with other disciplined bodies as a way to act back upon the disciplinary structure of society as a whole without stepping outside of its confines.

Conclusion

"Well, nobody's been hurt, last I heard. And they aren't breaking things. It's not that kind of crowd, and there's nothing to steal but sand, anyway. It's a happy riot, Jansen. There's just a bitch of a lot of people."

"Another flash crowd. It figures, " said Jerryberry. "You can get a flash crowd anywhere there are displacement booths." – Larry Niven, "Flash Crowd" (1)

No definitive answer exists to the question of why individuals participate in a flash mob. However, after undertaking an analysis of the various documentations of flash mobs, their participants and their creator, one does arrive at a few relatively stable revelations. Many people, around the world, have participated in a flash mob at one point in time. In those cases, police and other local authorities were often called in to disperse the large crowds of people forming the mob just as the mob participants were starting to leave a site. Finally, in the case of most mobs, participants did exactly as they were instructed, without much deviation from the apparent rules of the game. Each of these statements begs the question: "Why?" Why did people take part in the flash mobs? Why did people feel the need to call the police when a mob occurred in a public place such as a city street or a department store? And furthermore, why did mob participants do as they were told?

While many people think of the flash mob phenomenon as a short-lived, silly exercise in either futility or scenesterism, I offer an alternative in this chapter. Although elements of playfulness, anarchy, and de-subjectification do exist within the flash mob, these are not the sole or defining characteristics of such a performance. Rather, one might view flash mobs through the lens of Deleuze and Guattari as the operation of a war machine, whose smoothing of previously striated space lends itself to a playful deterritorialization of the normative habits of behavior found in our capitalist society. As Bill Wasik, the flash mob originator once said:

> It's spectacle for spectacle's sake – which is silly, but is also, as I've discovered somewhat to my surprise, genuinely transgressive, which is part of its appeal . . . People

> feel like there's nothing but order everywhere, and so they love to be a part of just one thing that nobody was expecting. (Hewitt 1-2)

In addition, flash mobs stand as an interesting example of the type of resistance Foucault advocated. They function as a mode of resistance operating within our discipline-based control society and seek to expose and frustrate society's power structures rather than overturn them. An inherent political statement exists in the flash mob's transgression against the typical order and normative structures of society. The flash mob then, is not simply a silly exercise or fad, but a purposeful performance designed to impact change on its audience, even if that change is only an acknowledgement of the aesthetic possibility of our everyday lives, similar in some aspects to the goals of the Situationists, Dadaists, or Happenings artists.

However, according to most journalists as well as Bill Wasik, flash mobs are a dead art form. Wasik points toward the hipster culture that primarily attended the mobs, as well as the co-optation of the mob's strategies and vocabulary by corporate America as the primary reason. He states:

> In fact the flash mob, which dates back only to June 2003, had almost entirely died out by that same winter, despite its having spread during those few months to all the world's continents save Antarctica. . . . it was, in its very form (pointless aggregation and then dispersal), intended as a metaphor for the hollow hipster culture that spawned it. (Wasik 56)

If Wasik is correct, and the flash mob truly is dead, then what might we learn from it? Primarily, I argue we learn how governmentality operates in our daily lives. The mob exposes the unwritten and unspoken rules that govern our daily behavior which we rarely acknowledge, let alone question. Furthermore, the flash mob reminds us of the power of the mob or swarm as an acting body. As Rheingold, speaking to CNN in 2003 pointed out, "All mobs have the potential for danger" (Shmueli 2). To pinpoint the danger present in Wasik's eight flash mobs, one must ask, "What was at risk?". I offer that all of the following: the specific locations, the

modern hipster identity, the status quo, and the individual liberties of the mob participants, were at risk.

Finally, the flash mob teaches us that new technologies offer new strategies for exposing and even fighting power, in a myriad of different forms. However, flash mobs do not teach a new political program that promotes a better way to govern our society; the flash mob is not the answer to our current frustrations with our system. In this aspect, the lessons of the flash mob phenomenon are very similar to those of Foucault, in refusing to advocate a particular substantive political program. Instead, the mob reminds us the power we have at our disposal – in our ability to gather as a mass through the use of our new technologies – while acknowledging, often in silly, humorous ways, that this new power is neither good nor bad, merely dangerous.

In his 1973 short story, "Flash Crowd," Larry Niven depicts a future where teleportation exists as the primary mode of travel from place to place. Invented sometime in the early 1970s, teleportation takes over short-distance bus and car travel, leaving empty highways in its wake. About twenty years later, long-distance teleportation booths are invented, replacing airplanes. In this futuristic world, the power of the teleportation booth is brought into question. Although teleportation allows for easy and convenient travel without any reliance on foreign oil, such power leads to other issues, both environmental and social. Niven's short story focuses on the latter.

In the tale, Niven's protagonist, a newstaper (as opposed to newspaper) man named Jerryberry Jansen finds himself at the scene of an argument between an elderly female shoplifter and a policeman outside of a mall. Quickly, a crowd forms around the policeman and the angry woman, turning into a full-fledged riot within minutes, perhaps because of the presence of Jansen

and other newstapers – reporters who capture everything right away on film for the local news affiliates thanks to teleportation. Once footage of the riot is shown – virtually as it is occurring – people begin quickly teleporting to the site, making the riot ever larger in size and strength. The formation of such a large crowd is referred to as a "flash crowd," due to the crowd's ability to form almost instantaneously, or in flash.

In the story, people teleport to the riot for various reasons: some are merely curious, others (including a young female celebrity) want to be seen on television, and some come to take advantage of the criminal possibilities the riot affords. After being accused by the national news anchor of creating the riot by the pointing of his camera, Jansen, who believes teleportation is much more at fault than the media, sets out to discover exactly how the teleportation booths work and were invented. Meanwhile, the riot in question has grown in size and begun roving from place to place, wreaking havoc. By the time Jansen gathers his facts and meets the national news anchor for an evening interview – a mere twelve hours from the point at which both the story and the riot began – he is informed that he is no longer news. Apparently, Jerryberry and his ideas regarding how to stop riot formation and save teleportation are no longer relevant. This is mainly due to the apprehension of the original elderly shoplifter, as well as the formation of a new riot at the beach stemming from a television show guest's anecdotal mention of the site.

Thirty-seven years after Niven published his tale, we may not have teleportation booths, but our society is certainly no stranger to twenty-four news cycles and instantaneous forms of communication. In "Flash Crowd," the primary fear discussed is that of an ever-roving, perpetual riot. Although the lack of teleportation prevents us from sharing such fears, we do have similar fears of our own advances in technology – both at present and throughout history. After all, when the internet debuted many feared the spread of information as strongly as those in

power feared the invention of the printing press. Certainly many fears exist, thanks to our new technologies: the rapid spread of child pornography online, fake or faux news outlets with twenty-four hour coverage, terror cells with guerilla tactics, and an ever present war on drugs. The root of such fears lies in our lack of control. As members of Deleuze's control society, we should not be so surprised.

Flash mobs, like Niven's flash crowds, frighten us because they can pop up anywhere, at any time, and often in a new, unexpected form we have yet to understand or experience. As such, those at the top as well as the bulk of us at the bottom of society do not know how to deal with them. Even attempts to recapture the flash mob (such as those of the Ford Motor Company with its Ford Flash Fusion Concerts) only result in the invention of new tactics of performative resistance – be they the freeze, the dance mob, the zombie mob, or some other hybridization. Like their predecessor, these new offspring of the flash mob act as forms of resistance to the stifling normative codes of behavior and control found throughout all our modern institutions – art, education, business, and government being just a few. Through the combination of technological tools, performative bodies, and social machines, they form new assemblages offering new methods of living, performing, and communicating within society. In so doing, flash mobs make visible patterns of control and behavior overlooked and ignored by many. Operating as swarms moving within smooth space, flash mobs pop up unexpectedly, often in some new variation of Wasik's formula, provoking fear, delight, and confusion in their audiences. Just as de Certeau suggested, by "shedding a different light on the language of a place," or pulling one over on us all, these new flashes grab our undivided attention (37-38).

Chapter Five concludes my larger project by discussing these alternative forms, which I view as offspring of Wasik's original eight flash mobs. In so doing, I seek to outline avenues for

future research, both into Wasik's original eight mobs as well as the multitude of similar performances that followed. Additionally, I close the study by turning the focus away from Wasik's mob and onto myself, focusing on my experience as a participant in two flash mob derivatives. Through this turn, I hope to offer the reader something I have heretofore overlooked – the physiological experience of participating in a flash mob, or one of its offspring. As stated earlier, I hope such discussions produce that flash of light described by Michel de Certeau in this chapter's opening quotation, one which alerts the reader not only to the fact that she has been tricked into taking a ride in an avocado-green dryer, but also to the specific ways in which she might get her Big Brother back for such a dirty, dirty deed.

CHAPTER FIVE
FLASH! A-AH! HE'LL SAVE EVERY ONE OF US!

Noted director and theorist Anne Bogart writes, "We all tremble before the impossibility of beginning" (9). Bogart's recognition of the uncertainty and fear of starting a new directing project mirrors my own when embarking upon new performance and research endeavors. Thus, I often stumble my way through the beginning into a middle where I find myself creating something of worth. The act involves a certain amount of risk. After the middle of the work is complete, uncertainty and fear approaches at the inevitability of the end. If one trembles before the impossibility of beginning, then certainly one should twitch uncomfortably before the inevitability of an ending. Don't get me wrong. Endings can be immensely satisfying. I understand the ending's functionality and necessity as a narrative device. I crave a good ending just as much as anyone else. Yes, that's it. I crave a **good** ending. But how? Let the twitching begin.

After making claims about the flash mob's historical, cultural, and political power, I outline a trajectory for future study based on the flash mob's evolution since 2003. I also promise to get my hands a little dirty, so to speak, by laying my own body on the line and describing my own experiences of participating in a flash mob. But before I discuss these experiences, I need to get something out of my head and onto the page. This thing is not an argument, but rather, a loop, a repetition I feel stuck inside, an overwhelming and powerful refrain. So please, indulge me.

On the Refrain: Flash Gordon

Flash a-ah
Savior of the Universe
Flash a-ah
He'll save every one of us
– Queen

For as long as I worked on this project, the lines above reverberated like a refrain in my head. Of course, they already were a refrain – Queen's refrain for their theme song for the1980 Flash Gordon film. But these lines became my personal refrain during this study, and as time went by, these lines ultimately served as the refrain of my entire project.

Refrains, of course, are moments returned to over and over again, either in song or verse. Generally, refrains are moments of repetition, repetition of words as well as musical notes. The refrain is a moment of stability, calm in an otherwise unruly storm of words and notes, thoughts and feelings. In A Thousand Plateaus, Deleuze and Guattari note this particular power of the refrain as a force of recapture and reterritorialization in music. I also see the refrain as a place of refuge, a signpost or point of orientation when one becomes lost inside too many particularities. As a researcher, I often find myself lost within particular tracks of investigation, unable to recall where I was going, or where I began. Until I hear the refrain.

My refrain emanates from a 1980s pop tune written by the band Queen for a science-fiction action-adventure film based on the 1930s comic book character Flash Gordon. I first heard the song, and the refrain, while watching the film for which it was written – Flash Gordon. In the opening of the film, Flash Gordon, quarterback for the New York Jets, and his female companion, Dale Arden, survive a plane crash caused by a mysterious meteor shower. They crash near the laboratory of the slightly unstable Dr. Zarkov, who proceeds to save/kidnap them by placing Flash and Dale aboard his newly invented rocket ship. This ship, similar to a NASA rocket, travels to the planet Mongo, from which Dr. Zarkov believes the meteor shower emanated. Once there, the three travelers discover that Ming the Merciless, ruler of Mongo, deployed the meteors as weapons to destroy the Earth. Ming quickly captures the three humans.

Flash manages to escape and spends the rest of the film finding friends in this strange universe who help him rescue Dale and the Doctor and destroy Ming.

My memory is a little fuzzy, but I believe I first saw the film sometime in the mid 1980s when it appeared on Saturday afternoon television. A child of eight or nine, I was immediately drawn into the fantastical science-fiction theme as well as the saucy attitude of Dale Arden. However, the theme song, Queen's "Flash's Theme," remains most prevalent in my memory. The song plays as the opening credits roll, and the refrain recurs often throughout the film, culminating in the song's full return during Flash's final assault on Ming. While I do not remember much of the actual film, whenever I hear the refrain or hum its lines, I envision the final showdown scene where Flash recklessly drives a spaceship into Ming's palace. Or something akin to that. Like I said, my memory is a little fuzzy.

Unlike many other superheroes, Flash Gordon lacks any special super power(s) or amazing Batman-esque gadgets. Flash does possess a certain swiftness, hence his moniker, but he does not possess supernatural speed. Instead, Flash uses what he knows – football in the 1980s film, his knowledge as a track star and polo player in earlier incarnations – to fight back against Ming's tyranny. Throughout the comic book, television, and film series, Flash also learns that he cannot save Dale on his own. He requires comrades, such as Dr. Zarkov, whom he finds throughout the various realms of the planet Mongo. Finally, Flash also relies on his flashiness, by which I mean his charm, irreverence for authority, knack for surprise assaults, and overall underdog sensibility.

Throughout this project, the refrain of Queen's "Flash's Theme" repeated in my mind, although I was often unsure of the reason. Ultimately, "Flash's Theme" became my inspiration for the chapter titles as well as for a few of the arguments in Chapter Four. Perhaps more

importantly, "Flash's Theme" and Flash Gordon began to serve as metaphors for the flash mob itself. Flash mobs, like Flash Gordon, are irreverent in nature and have the element of surprise at their advantage, as demonstrated in Chapters One and Two. Furthermore, just as Flash cannot fight Ming alone, neither can a sole individual create a flash mob. For a flash mob to be successful, people need to work together (as comrades), and by doing so, community is built and protected, as discussed in Chapter Three. Moreover, if flash mobs protest against governmentality/control, as argued in Chapter Four, then the flash mobbers fight back with what they know – technology, childhood games, songs, and dance moves from the 1980s. The flash mobbers do so because, like Flash Gordon, they have no particular super power, only a particular knowledge of the things they know and love. Such tactics also allow flash mobs, like Flash Gordon, to avoid capture by constantly changing things up and coming up with new game plays, so to speak.

Finally, although Queen's "Flash's Theme" served as my personal research refrain, the flash mob serves an opposite purpose from that of the refrain. Rather than acting as a reminder of past performances and strategies, the flash mob propels us forward – as communities, as a society, and as a body politic. In so doing, the flash mob does not repeat and calm, but rather frustrates and excites its audience, forcing them to deal with heretofore unheard of and unrecognizable patterns of human behavior. Like its historical predecessors in the avant-garde, the flash mob is on the front line. It is not a chorus; it is the next verse.

What It Feels Like to Freeze: A Confession

Let me begin by admitting I'm a chicken. I wore sunglasses. I had a book. Also, I'm lazy. I was flat on my stomach, lying on the ground, knees bent to support my raised and crossed legs. This is not a difficult position to hold for five minutes, especially with a book to focus on

and sunglasses which allow simultaneous hiding and spying. I want to begin with this one disclosure. I am a lazy chicken.

At precisely 1:33 pm on February 19, 2009, I and about two-hundred and fifty other students froze the quad, a central outdoor meeting area and green space on Louisiana State University's campus. The event was organized and promoted largely via an event page on the social networking website facebook. This webpage was created by the recently formed Kicks and Giggles, a performance art/141ansas141 group interested in pulling off large-scale pranks and performance events like the on-campus freeze. Kicks and Giggles cites Improv Everywhere, the New York based improvisational troupe, as their inspiration. As discussed earlier in this project, Improv Everywhere began pulling elaborate pranks throughout the city of New York in 2002 about a year before Bill Wasik's first flash mob. To this day the group staunchly refutes the assertion that any of their pranks are actual flash mobs.

Nevertheless, in 2009, six years after Wasik's flash mobs swarmed New York City, the freeze was firmly established as a prevalent offspring of the flash mob. Apart from an annual zombie mob that invaded LSU's campus on Halloween night, the freeze was the only flash mob style performance event ever to occur on campus, at least in early 2009. So when I received an invitation to the Kicks and Giggles event page for Freeze the Quad, I readily accepted.

About an hour before the scheduled time, I became excited. I thought about practicing poses, or freezes, but decided to just do whatever came naturally. My friends and I found a spot on the lawn of the quad about twenty minutes before the freeze occurred. I chose the spot. I wanted to stretch out, and I needed a good vantage point to spy on other flash mobbers and their unsuspecting audience. My spot was excellent for such a job, my chosen frozen pose on the other hand, was not. I began to pretend to read my book about five minutes before the mob

began, as my friends and I guessed which students were most likely flash mob participants and which were just hanging out. At the appointed time, something like an air-horn sounded, which was helpful as I'm sure most people would have failed to synchronize their watches correctly. A smile spread wide across my face, full of adrenaline and excitement, I stared directly at my book and froze.

Almost immediately, sounds of surprise could be heard. Phrases such as "What the hell?" were common, as well as a short silence, perhaps of confusion and awe, followed by a person on a phone saying something like, "Hey, you gotta get over here. I was just walking through the quad and there are tons of people frozen. Yeah. I mean **not moving**. It's wild." Soon after cell phones and cameras were pulled out and almost every observer with a camera began taking pictures. Shortly after the initial shock – I would guess about a minute and a half had gone by – I realized how awful my position was. I could hear a lot, yet all I could see were people's lower halves. Even those at a distance were obscured by other frozen bodies. This stunk. I knew I wanted to write about this experience eventually, but how was I to do so if I couldn't see what was happening all around me? As I pondered what to do, I began to be aware of my body.

Freezing is a delicate and difficult art. In a scenario such as the flash mob, most people are amateurs at freezing their movement and holding a position. After all, how many times in daily life do we sit frozen, and immobile, for more than a few seconds? We sit still, but we are not immobile. To freeze properly, one must **not move**. I, of course, was aware of this. After all, I was no amateur. I am a performance studies scholar, and as such, I not only talk about performance, but I also regularly engage in it, as actor, director, student, and teacher. I build entire assignments around incorporating a freeze into a performance. I am no amateur. And yet,

I acted like one. Excited about being in the mob and so certain of my ability to hold a pose for five minutes, I forgot about my body, to a large extent, until it began talking back to me. My legs hurt. The lower half of my legs, from the knees to the feet, were extended in the air, and crossed. As the freeze began, I was so excited I became full of adrenaline and all the muscles in my body tensed. After a while, I relaxed the tension – everywhere – but in my legs. To do so, I feared, would mean moving or dropping them to the ground. Thus, as minute two crawled toward minute three, my legs grew heavier and heavier. I tried to shut out this pain by focusing on the reactions of the audience – those individuals who happened to be in the quad when the freeze began, as well as those who discovered it shortly after by entering the quad.

The comments of the onlookers/audience soon turned from confusion to praise. People remarked about how "cool" or "pretty" the freeze was. Around three and a half minutes, groups of audience members began to coagulate around particular frozen clumps of individuals and interact with them. By interact, I mean the "audience" tried to get the "performers" to drop their frozen poses. They did this by waving hands in front of frozen faces, poking at them, or if they knew the flash mobbers, by teasing them personally. I found this interaction fascinating, so I did something I swore to myself that I wouldn't – I moved. Not much, mind you, but I tilted my head ever so slightly upward, so as to gain a better view of the scene.

I could really still only see those people closest to me, as I was at ground level, but I must say I was struck. The freeze was beautiful. It looked like a moment in time someone had stopped, and it was even more interesting to see "the audience" walk around in this moment. The scene reminded me of an episode from Out of This World, the 1980s television show whose main character, Evie, was a half-alien who had the special ability to stop time by putting her two index fingers together. The moment felt magic. I was especially delighted by the choice of

poses – intricate, detailed, humorous, and varied. As minute four turned into minute five, my legs dropped about an inch – another cheated movement – and I stared at the interactions between frozen bodies and mobile ones. A few seconds later, a second horn sounded and simultaneously every frozen body came back to life and continued upon its chosen course of action. This moment inspired a similar feel of magic within me. If you haven't, dear reader, stop right now and google "Grand Central Station Freeze" and you will observe the sort of magic I describe.

At the sound of the horn, I rolled over, relieved to be able to let my legs drop to the ground finally and release the tension in my muscles. My friends and I began laughing and talking about the different comments we overheard while frozen, and we exchanged gripes and brags about the difficulty of our chosen bodily positions. For a few minutes, I sat there on the ground, staring at the aftermath of the freeze. Everywhere people were laughing, sharing stories and pictures, a few even mimicking the poses they had seen others hold. As the minutes ticked by, people began moving off toward their classrooms, but the general feeling of festivity seemed to follow them on their path. As I stood up and followed my friends back towards our building, I was struck by the simplicity of the scene. The quadrangle at LSU had been successfully swarmed, occupied, and frozen for five minutes, yet no evidence of this occupation remained. Rather, three simple elements seemed to linger in the air: surprise, art, and joy.

The Monster at the End of this Book: Offspring of the Flash Mob

The Monster at the End of this Book is a children's book written by Jon Stone and published in 1971 by Golden Books. It was also one of my favorite stories as a child. The tale is told by Sesame Street's Grover, a beloved furry blue Muppet from the famous television show. Grover spends the book talking directly to the reader, asking her not to turn the pages any further

because as the title warned, there is a monster at the end of the book. After breaking past Grover's blockades of rope, wood, and bricks the reader arrives at the penultimate page of the book, only to discover that Grover himself is the monster at the end of the book: loveable, furry, blue, and nothing much to be afraid of, something Grover admits on the final page when he mutters, "Oh, I am so embarrassed."

There is a monster at the end of this book as well. My monster is the offspring the flash mob produced: zombie mobs, pillow fight mobs, freezes, dance mobs, techno mobs, musical mobs, song and dance mobs, political mobs, political musical song and dance mobs, and a myriad of other hybridizations of flash mobs, as well as a few flash mob-like performances I have no idea what to name. I avoided talking about this monster because as soon as I bring it up, returning to Wasik's eight original mobs becomes difficult, and I wanted this research to focus specifically on those mobs. During my years of researching flash mobs, hundreds of people approached me in person or via the internet wishing to discuss and hear my opinions about a particular mob they had seen, read about, or watched a video of on the internet. Every time, the individual referred to what she had seen as a flash mob. Often, I replied, "No, I don't think that is a flash mob." Or, "I think that's an offshoot of a flash mob." Every time, the person looked at me, both curious and annoyed, as to why I wouldn't call her mob a flash mob. After all, everyone else did – reporters, journalists, television characters.

The problem, I soon realized, was that no one had any idea where these "flash mobs" originated, although they seemed to like them and the new term. I realized at this point how important this research was, for ultimately, many types of flash mobs exist, and we can't know what makes each one particular or unique without knowing the characteristics they all share, and from where they originated. Of course, I believe Wasik's mobs were the first flash mobs,

although both they and their predecessors were heavily influenced by their historical precursors, both in the ancient and not-too-distant past. As such, an understanding of Wasik's original eight mobs, as well as their subsequent proliferation, needs to exist before we begin to typologize the so-called "flash mobs" happening today. In the previous four chapters, I provided a detailed historical, social, cultural, and philosophical understanding of Wasik's original eight mobs. In my future research, I hope to provide similarly detailed understandings of the assorted variety of flash mobs performed today.

However, since we are here at the end and since everyone, especially you and me, dear reader, has a favorite monster she can't wait to see at the end of this book, let me outline those categories of flash mob offspring I find most prevalent and interesting. I'll limit the discussion to eight categories of flash mob offspring: the zombie mob, the game mob, the freeze, the dance mob, the musical mob, the political mob, the techno mob, and hybrid mobs. Such a typology is not meant to be authoritative or final, only to distinguish between those subsequent mobs whose characteristics closely resembled Wasik's and those which, while sharing similarities, differed enough to merit a singular and separate status.

I should also note that in 2009 Harvard sociologist Dr. Virag Molnar outlined the first official typology or categorization of flash mobs, at least to my knowledge. Molnar lists five types of mobs: "atomized" flash mobs, interactive flash mobs, performance flash mobs, political flash mobs, and advertising flash mobs. Molnar's list appears organized around goal or intent, whereas mine focuses on the activity performed by the flash mobbers. Unlike Molnar, I see **all** of these events as performances that achieve a variety of goals for the mob and its individual participants. Still, Molnar's list is useful, particularly for those concerned with identifying the flash mob's purpose and function within our global society. For my purposes, however, I find it

more beneficial to categorize the mob offspring based upon praxis. I ask, "What do the people in them do?"

The Zombie Mob

The earliest recorded zombie mob was actually billed as a "Zombie Parade," or what many might call a zombie walk, and it occurred on August 19, 2001 in Sacramento, California. The Zombie Parade was actually an innovative marketing strategy dreamed up by a friend of the organizers of The Trash Film Orgy, a film festival celebrating gory and slapstick horror films. The Trash Film Orgy was known for live performance elements that occurred during the films – think The Rocky Horror Picture Show experience – so the idea of using a Zombie Parade to market their midnight film festival of zombie movies was not that far of a stretch. Participants dressed up as zombies and paraded through the main streets of Sacramento, searching for brains. The parade of zombies became an annual event.

The first non-advertorial zombie gathering, called a "zombie walk," occurred in Toronto, Ontario in October of 2003, a month after Wasik's final flash mob hit New York City. Organized by a local movie fan, this initial zombie walk had only six participants, although in subsequent years the event grew to have hundreds of participants and the idea of a zombie walk, or mob of zombies invading through town spread throughout Canada and the United States like a virus. Like Wasik's flash mobs, zombie mobs form in cyberspace and spread through the use of website, e-mail, cellular phone, and text messaging technology. Unlike Wasik's mobs, participants in a zombie mob plan to converge upon a specified site for a few short minutes before moving on to their next stop. In other words, the zombie mob acts upon multiple sites, moving like the roving flash crowd of Larry Niven's science fiction fantasy. Furthermore, participants in a zombie mob perform character-driven roles, by dressing as zombies in torn

clothes and bloody makeup. During the mob, these participants swarm a site and simulate a zombie attack by running up to people at the site and acting as if they are going to eat their brains. Aside from musical mobs where participants may dress and act as pop starts or fictional television and film characters, zombie mobs are the only mobs where participants dress in full costume and play traditional character roles.

Zombie mobs mirror flash mobs in their cyber-based construction and dissemination, as well as their communal structure. Typically, people who participate in a zombie mob are people who love zombies and zombie movies, and therefore relish the chance to dress up like one and swarm a city. In so doing, they are just like Wasik's hipsters, constructing an elaborate prank or in-joke played out on the city streets. Whether or not zombie mobs are reactions to governmentality or the lack of public space is highly questionable; however, one must admit the prevalence of these performances highlights society's fascination with the zombie. Although zombies or zombie mythology has existed for many years, in the last ten to fifteen a revival of zombie lore began in literature, television, and film. Something about the zombie appeals to the citizens of our new millennia. Zombie mobs, then, seem a natural progression, arising both out of the flash mob's spread as new performance tactic and a desire to explore the zombie character in all forms of art – literature, television, film, and live performance. For a full understanding of the zombie mob's roots, purpose, and effect, further study is needed.

The Game Mob

Game mobs are a type of flash mob where participants gather at a site en masse, play a physical game of some sort, and then disperse. Although one might argue that the flash mob itself is a game, regardless of its particular actions, these mobs stand out for their performance of particular games or forms of play enacted in childhood. The most notable type of game mob is

the pillow fight mob, a mob organized similarly to a flash mob where participants gather at a predetermined site (pillow in hand) and take part in a massive pillow fight with other participants for a specific amount of time before leaving the site and ending the mob.

Pillow fight flash mobs occurred around the world between the years 2006 and 2010, and today Pillow Fight Clubs (groups that engage in massive pillow fights following the rules of fighting outlined in the movie Fight Club) exist in cities such as London and Vancouver. Future research will likely show that the pillow fight flash mob, and many other game mobs, occurred earlier than 2006. I first became aware of the game mob upon reading an article in The Dallas Morning News, sometime around 2004, about participants who gathered in an abandoned parking lot to play a large-scale game of red-rover. The News labeled the event a flash mob, as it formed quickly, engaged in its action, and then dispersed. Game mobs are similar to what Molnar refers to as interactive mobs in her flash mob typology, as they involve more elaborate interactions amongst participants than other forms of flash mobs. Aside from Red Rover and pillow fights, flash mobbers engaged in other rule-based childhood games throughout the last decade, such as Follow the Leader and Capture the Flag.

A large part of the appeal of such flash mobs appears to stem from the use of the city as a sort of playground. In this manner, participants in a game mob engage in an active reclamation of public space, if only for a short time. Furthermore, the choice of childhood games makes one wonder about the general state of play in today's society. Although I grew up in the suburbs in the mid 1970s, I still spent much more time outside roaming the streets alone or with my friends than children do these days. In fact, many of those who played outside at length, roaming about freely keep their own children indoors these days, or on highly supervised outdoor play-dates in controlled environments like playgrounds, due to heightened fears of abduction and a desire to

keep children safe. As such, parents these days exercise much more control over their children's play behaviors. Perhaps the game mob is a reaction to such control, or simply a whimsical nostalgia for the more carefree days of yore. Performance studies scholars, like myself, believe that play is serious business, a way to blow off steam as well as practice and hone our skills for future roles and performances – we play dolls and house as children as a way of practicing the roles of wife and mother, for example. Viewed in this light, all flash mobs, particularly the game mobs, require further study so that we might understand more fully the nature of the flash mob game.

The Freeze

Freezes, as mentioned earlier, are flash mob style performances where participants (organized via web-based technologies) gather upon a site and at an appointed time freeze in an immobile position for (usually) three to five minutes before becoming mobile again and leaving the site. Although the origins of the freeze are somewhat unclear, the relatively new form of flash mob originated sometime in the latter half of the last decade, probably around 2007. The freeze became popular after the advent of Improv Everywhere's Grand Central Station Freeze in 2008. Improv Everywhere, an improvisational theatre troupe that staunchly denies they create flash mobs but rather pranks and missions aimed at causing "scenes of joy and chaos in public places" planned the elaborate "freezing" of Grand Central Station after recognizing the impact of a freeze during an earlier 2006 stunt (Todd). In the previous "mission" Improv Everywhere members gathered at the Home Depot on 23rd Street in Manhattan for a mission involving both slow motion shopping movement followed by a freeze. According to their website report, although slow motion shopping was not that impressive, the freeze had a strong impact upon the other shoppers and employees (Todd "Slo-Mo"). The success of the freeze as a stunt led to a

desire among Improv Everywhere's members to pull off a successful freeze in a larger venue, such as Grand Central Station.

The freeze in New York's famous train station occurred in January of 2008 and involved 207 participants. Over the next month, a video of the freeze began spreading across the internet, or "going viral," making the freeze a well-known and must-see event. Bloggers referred to the event as a frozen flash mob ("Grand Central"). Despite Improv Everywhere's desire to distance their pranks from Wasik's flash mobs, the freeze (like many other Improv Everywhere stunts) follows a similar formula. The performance is organized online or through word of mouth, and participants gather at a pre-ordained site to receive instructions and synchronize their watches. Then, en masse, they converge upon a site and act out their instructions (or mission) before disseminating. Freezes also maintain a short (ten-minute or less) time period.

The rapid dissemination of the Grand Central Station video led to a plethora of subsequent freezes, occurring in public spaces as well as many universities across the country/globe in the following two year period. As stated earlier, a freeze creates a certain magic that makes it unique. It also creates a level of vulnerability. Unlike other flash mobs where the large number of participants acting in concert tends to overwhelm a site and its caretakers, the freeze is quieter in nature. Typically we fear crowds or mobs because we are unsure of what they might do next and this leaves open a possibility for violent or harmful action. The freeze, although large in scale and impressive to behold, does not inspire this sort of fear, at least in my experience. Rather, after an initial shock, people move in closer to the frozen individuals, examining them like one might examine a statue in a museum. Those who find themselves amidst a freeze may be awestruck perhaps, but not afraid.

Furthermore, the freeze, unlike the other categories in my list, exists within certain limits. Sure, one may update the general idea of a freeze by varying the body position(s) or the site in which it occurs, but unlike a song, dance, game, or zombie, the possibilities do not appear as limitless. Based upon this fact, I question the freeze's ability to sustain itself as a regularly-practiced and performed form of flash mob. To be fair, my knowledge of the freeze is limited, and the future always unknown, so once again further research as well as the advent of time is required before making any solid conclusions. Regardless, at this particular point in time, the freeze is a prevalent enough type of flash mob that it merits its own category.

The Dance Mob

Perhaps the public's favorite type of flash mob, dance mobs are simply mobs in which participants gather at a site and dance – either to their own rhythms, or more commonly, to a highly-choreographed routine accompanied by music. The earliest type of dance mob is the freestyle dance mob, also referred to as an ipod dance mob, mobile clubbing, or library raves. These mobs are organized in a similar style to Wasik's flash mobs and last about as long. Participants swarm a site and dance for a short period – either to music playing on their ipods that only they can hear, or to music playing over a loudspeaker, as in the library raves. In 2004, Hard Dance London, a website following the London dance/club scene, reported that mobile clubbing was replacing flash mobs (Good). Since September of 2003, Londoners had been gathering at train stations for mobile clubbing, or large dance parties where each participant provided her own music on a personal mp3 player of some sort with headphones. Similar events soon happened in the United States and other countries around the globe.

Toward the latter end of the decade, a new type of dance mob known as the flashmob rave, library rave, or library dance mob began occurring at college campuses across the United

States from Chapel Hill to Kentucky. These events usually occurred during finals week and were intended to be a way for students to blow off steam and release some stress. Students gathered at the university library en masse and with the help of portable stereos or even by co-opting the sound system blasted the sort of electronic dance music typical of 1990s era raves. These sort of dance mobs are still popular today, apparently earning a place in university history similar to that of the annual naked runs discussed briefly in Chapter Two.

The second variety of dance mob is the choreographed dance mob, where participants gather on-site to perform a popular, well-known, or highly-choreographed dance of some sort in a public space to an accompanying soundtrack. The obvious difference between this sort of dance mob and freestyle dance mobs is the rehearsal and preparation necessary for pulling off such a choreographed performance. As such, this type of flash mob differs greatly from those types previously discussed as the participants must meet in advance to learn the dance moves as well as their place in the larger group of performers – their spot on stage, if you will. One might rehearse her zombie walk or frozen pose; however, such rehearsals can be done alone and without the involvement of all the other mob participants. In a choreographed dance mob, much like in a choreographed stage dance, it is important for participants to know both the right moves and the locations of other dancers.

Perhaps the most famous choreographed dance mob is the Antwerp Central Station Sound of Music dance mob in 2009. As of December 2010, the video of this mob on the website Youtube.com has been played over sixteen million times. In this dance mob, after two previous rehearsals, participants gathered in the Belgian train station awaiting their cue: the broadcasting of Julie Andrew's "Do-Re-Mi" song from the film The Sound of Music over the train station's speakers. As soon as the recording began, a small group of individuals began dancing, followed

by more and more participants until over two hundred people flooded the floor of the station. The choreography mirrored dance moves from the film, however, a number of other more updated dance moves were also included. As soon as the song ends, participants disperse and the train station seems to return to business as usual. At present, one post of the video on the YouTube website states that the flash mob was, "a promotion stunt for a Belgian television program, where they are looking for someone to play the leading role, in the musical of "The Sound of Music" (Matthias).

Another interesting series of dance flash mobs occurred throughout the summer of 2009, following the surprising death of pop star Michael Jackson. On July 5th, 2009, in Stockholm, 300 dancers gathered an hour prior to their performance and learned the choreography from Jackson's "Beat It" music video. Shortly after, they surprised festival-goers at an outdoor music festival with a dance mob re-enacting the famous dance moves. The flash mob was deemed a tribute to the recently deceased Jackson. Similar mobs occurred throughout the summer, incorporating "Beat It" as well as a number of other Jackson hit songs and famous dance moves. What I find striking about this particular series of dance mobs is their desire to use the flash mob as an act of memorialization.

Since that time, a plethora of choreographed dance mobs occurred around the globe. In fact, many people associate the term "flash mob" primarily with these sorts of mobs, as evidenced by their popularity, viral video sharing, and the use of this type of mob in television shows over the last year such as Glee and Modern Family. Even Oprah was surprised by a choreographed dance mob in 2009, with the help of the pop band The Black Eyed Peas and thousands of fans gathered along Chicago's Magnificent Mile (Riley). A study of the emergence of the dance mob, in all its forms, would provoke interesting debate regarding the convergence

of culture, performance, and technology in the modern world. What is it about these particular types of flash mobs that resonates so strongly with most of us? Are we delighted simply by the joy of watching such spontaneous yet well-rehearsed public performances, or are we, like our medieval predecessors, caught up in the mania of the dance?

The Musical Mob

The strictly musical flash mob, or singing flash mob, is a relatively new development, unlike its previously discussed counterparts. The earliest versions of this type of flash mob of which I am aware occurred mid-2009. On June 11, 2009, people gathered in San Francisco's Union Square to sing a loud and gloriously out-of-tune rendition of The Beatles hit song "With a Little Help from My Friends" (Steve). On November 10th of the same year, students at Queens University in Australia gathered in one of the cafeterias to sing along with a video of The Backstreet Boys' pop ballad "I Want It That Way" (Ferguson). These mobs, unlike other types, are notable for their singular action – singing. No one danced or performed choreographed moves while singing, swaying back and forth with a few fellow flashmobbers appears to be the height of any movement.

Similar to the trajectory of the dance mob, these non-choreographed and unrehearsed musical mobs reappeared just a few months ago with the advent of the Christian holiday season. In malls across America, members of different local choirs gathered in department stores and food courts to surprise shoppers with rousing renditions of Handel's "Hallelujah Chorus" (Hathaway, Hettrick). Most notable for its viral video status is one such rendition that took place in a Macy's department store in Philadelphia on October 30th, 2010. This singing mob involved over 650 participants, all members of local choirs, from church choirs to the Philadelphia Opera Company to the Philadelphia Gay Men's Chorus. I remember receiving the

video from a friend and being struck by a number of elements. First, the event took place in a Macy's department store, just like Wasik's second and first successful flash mob. Second, the mob seemed to have the support of Macy's, as it used a large pipe organ located at the center of the store as background music. Third, while watching the video I noticed that most if not all of the flash mobbers wore buttons identifying themselves as participants. These buttons, as well as some signs held up at the conclusion of the song, stated, "you've just experienced a Random Act of Culture" and contained a website address for the Knight Foundation. According to the description of the mob posted along with the video:

> This event is one of 1,000 "Random Acts of Culture" to be funded by the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation over the next three years. The initiative transports the classical arts out of the concert halls and opera houses and into our communities to enrich our everyday lives. . . . This event was planned to coincide with the first day of National Opera Week. (Opera Company of Philadelphia)

Such a description makes one hesitant to label the event a flash mob, yet, that is exactly what the media did ("Watch," "Hallelujah"). In the following weeks and months, similar mobs involving the participation of trained singers performing the Hallelujah chorus occurred in a Seattle Nordstrom's department store, the Orlando International Airport, Cleveland, Ohio's West Side Market, and a mall food court near Niagara Falls.

I have no problem calling these singing events flash mobs, as they fit Wasik's model, albeit with a few changes, most notably some rehearsal. Participants swarm a site, perform their action, and leave, just as in Wasik's mobs.[22] The association with advertorial campaigns or large-scale artistic endeavors is another departure from Wasik's original formula; however almost all the mobs discussed in this typology have instances of such collaboration.

[22] My primary reason for including these mobs into the typology is the fact that they adhere to a similar time structure as Wasik's original mob. Were they to be longer, more detailed performances, than I would refrain from labeling them flash mobs and refer to them as something akin to a pop-up concert or surprise opera, such as the somewhat famous "Flash Mob: The Opera" performed in a London train station in 2004.

Furthermore, while the Philadelphia Macy's mob may have simply been a 'random act of culture' aimed at promoting the arts, the proliferation of copycat Hallelujah chorus mobs during the holiday season creates some speculation as to the intent of such performances. In other words, I wonder if there is some sort of co-optation of the flash mob and its tactics taking place here to promote Christianity, or the "reason for the season." I say this after reading comment sections posted below online stories or video postings of such mobs, where religious debates tend to occur. Many people post their admiration for the event, saying things like "finally, a flash mob that means something" or "praise Jesus," while others express their outrage over what amounts to (in their opinion) Christians forcing their beliefs upon unsuspecting shoppers and bystanders. Such debates point toward the sticky slope that is an assumption of intent upon the creators of flash mobs – after all, even if one might say why she planned a flash mob, who can say why each and every individual took part in one? For this reason, my typology, unlike Molnar's, focuses on observable actions as opposed to intents. Regardless of such debates, the prevalence and popularity of the Hallelujah chorus singing mob points toward an intersection between culture, religion, and performance that merits future study.

The Political Mob

In this category, I place those mobs which, unlike Wasik's or any of the abovementioned types, promote an overt political agenda. Futhermore, these mobs promote this agenda through the use of tactics akin to Wasik's flash mob formula – organized via internet and cellular technology, swarming of a specific site, and a short ten-minute or less time period. Finally, for a mob to sit comfortably within this category, I argue it should not share characteristics with any of the aforementioned types, such as the inclusion of a song, dance, or zombie costume. I will place such mobs in my final category, hybrid mobs.

Political uses of similar technologies and tactics pre-date the flash mob. An excellent description of the various methods of harnessing mobile communication technologies for political ends is outlined in Howard Rheingold's book Smart Mobs. Rather than review Rheingold's research, I will focus on two examples of a strictly political flash mob, both created and participated in by university students: first, two lectures of the University for Strategic Optimism in the United Kingdom, and second, a flash mob protesting arts and education budget cuts in Louisiana.

Dr. Etienne Lantier gave the first lecture of the University for Strategic Optimism on November 24, 2010, after he and his "students" swarmed Lloyds Bank on High Borough Street in London. While bank tellers and other employees looked on, Etienne stood before a lectern fashioned out of cardboard, with a banner announcing "The University for Strategic Optimism" and a sign stating "five minute lecture" surrounding him, to deliver a five-minute lecture outlining the University's principles of free and open education, a return of politics to the public, and the politicization of public space (UfSOLondon "University"). Although they encountered resistance from bank employees asking them to leave before they called the police, this professor and his students continued until the lecture was finished, at which point they left the site. A few days later, on November 30, the second lecture of the University for Strategic Optimism was delivered by Dr. Dora Kaliayev standing before a similar cardboard lectern in the aisles of Tesco Superstore, a local supermarket chain, on Old Kent Road (UfSOLondon "Second"). The participants in these flash mobs appear to be university students frustrated with the current education policies and tuition hikes, though I admit this is only an assumption.

Although they lack the large numbers of participants of Wasik's original mobs, these political flash mobs follow the same formula, and at times, even the same tactics as Wasik. The

Lloyd's bank site, viewed on video, is tiny enough that a handful of twenty to thirty students easily overpowers and dominates the space, akin to Wasik's "doctrine of overwhelming force" (Wasik 65). The supermarket, while larger, is chosen specifically for its purpose as a site where goods are sold. Throughout her lecture, Dr. Kaliayev offers degrees and lectures for sale in these same aisles. In essence, the University for Strategic Optimism, in its reclamation of politics and public space, seems to be stating that if the United Kingdom is going to prevent equal access to public education through its upcoming tuition hikes, then they (The University for Strategic Optimism) will fix this problem by offering their own lectures in public spaces for free. In so doing, and with every obstacle they encounter from retailers, police, and employees, these political flash mobbers indicate the lack of truly public space, as opposed to privately-owned public space in modern society. Unlike Wasik's mobs which only made visible such truths, these flash mobs overtly fight back and seek to reclaim such spaces.

A second example of this political type of flash mob stems from Louisiana State University in the fall of 2010. Outraged over the ever-growing budget cuts to the University as well as statewide arts and education programs, students in a Communication Studies course entitled "Performance in Everyday Life" organized a flash mob to be held in the aforementioned LSU quadrangle, protesting the cuts and also meeting their project assignment requirements. This particular flash mob involved the use of fake dollar bills bearing Louisiana governor Bobby Jindal's face and either asking questions such as "Where is the money going?" or asking people to come to the State Capitol the next day for a Legislature Budget Meeting (Wesalexbar). In other words, this particular flash mob acted not only as a class assignment and political protest, but also as a means of rallying support for a more traditional form of political protest the following day.

The Budget Cuts flash mob involved students gathering in the quadrangle, tossing these fake dollar bills into the air and even fighting to grab them from one another, while a series of songs played over loud speakers. Most songs involved money themes, and often took a shot at the State Legislature's policy on arts and education budget cuts. Examples of these songs range from Pink Floyd's "Money," and Sheryl Crow's "The First Cut is the Deepest" to "Take the Money and Run" by the Steve Miller Band. Other songs had more activist orientations such as Rage Against the Machine's "Take the Power Back." Students from the class dressed in business suits and grabbed up trash bags full of money while others asked questions like "Where's the money?," and "Where's it going?" After the allotted time, students from the class cleaned up any remaining faux dollar bills littering the quadrangle and dispersed.

Such stunts do not differ widely from earlier forms of political protests, such as those of the Yippies. However, these performances are labeled flash mobs by those who organize and enact them. They also follow a similar formula to Wasik's original mobs (organized online, swarming and dispersing, short time limit) albeit with an overt political agenda. As such, I find them to be explicitly political uses of the flash mob construct. These mobs fascinate me as they inhabit a spot in the political realm outside of the normative constructs of protest marches or sit-ins. Rather they have an artistic slant like their predecessors in the Situationist movement, albeit updated to incorporate the use of modern technologies. I am certain we will see more of these political flash mobs in the future and look forward to studying them in detail.

The Techno Mob

All flash mobs are technology-based mobs, but in certain mobs, the primary mobbing, or swarming, of a site happens online. The best example of this sort of mob is the foursquare mob. Foursquare is an application available on mobile phones and devices allowing users to "check-

in" online and report their location. Originally conceived as a way to communicate with a mobile network of friends and family one's present location, foursquare also has a secondary component: badges. Foursquare users who check in at particular locations – such as the Macy's Day Parade – can receive a "badge," a small, round colorful icon to adorn their foursquare application page. Think of these online icons as merit badges for the digital age. Badges are earned based upon location but also upon repeat frequenting of particular types of locations, such as the "Animal House" badge, earned for checking in at over three establishments tagged to be "frat boy" locales.

Foursquare mobs originated out of a desire among foursquare users to earn "Swarm" badges. This badge requires that a user check in at a site where fifty or more other people also check in within a limited three-hour time period. Out of a desire to earn these badges, as well as to meet other foursquare users in their area, people began organizing foursquare mobs, aimed at swarming a site. Today, other derivatives of the original Swarm badge exist: The Super Swarm (earned for getting 250+ users to check-in at a site within three hours), Super Duper Swarm (500+ users), and Epic Swarm (1000+ users). Now, a website, 4sqmobs.com, announces and promotes upcoming foursquare mobs. In one section of this site a definition of the foursquare mob is given, "A Foursquare Flashmob is when several Foursquare users decide to check in at a venue at the same time. This is often organized to unlock a swarm badge, but above all to get to know other members" (Felipe). Foursquare mobs then, have two goals: first, to create enough online activity to receive a swarm badge, and second, to meet other foursquare users in person at the site.

The Hybrid Mob

My final category, hybrid flash mobs, reserves a space for those flash mobs that combine components of the aforementioned groups. One could easily, for example, organize a zombie game mob, where participants dressed as zombies and on a lookout for brains take a break to have a zombie-style pillow fight. Perhaps the most prevalent examples of hybrid mobs are those that combine the overt politics of a political flash mob with the playful tactics of earlier categories: dance mobs, musical mobs, and even techno mobs. Although thousands of hybrid mob formats exist and occurred over the years since Wasik's original flash mobs of 2003, let me discuss one particular and recent hybrid: the musical-political mob.

September 26, 2009: Protestors angered by Whole Foods CEO John Mackey's statements regarding the national health care bill (mainly that health care, in Mackey's opinion, was no more an intrinsic right than food or shelter), gather in a park outside Oakland to rehearse a song and dance version of Toni Basil's 1980s pop tune "Hey Mickey," although with new words. This new version, "Hey Mackey," calls out Mackey for his stance on the health care bill with lyrics like, "Oh Mackey you're a swine, you're a swine you blow my mind, Hey Mackey." The group included amateur musicians creating a sort of de facto marching band as well as other singing and dancing participants. A few hours of practice later, the group heads over to a local Whole Foods and successfully pulls off their flash mob by posing as shoppers until the opportune moment arrives. At this point, the band plays and mobbers gather alongside frozen foods to perform their new version of "Hey Mackey." A security guard calls the police, but the mobbers succeed in performing two rounds of their song before exiting the store and thereby escaping arrest. Apparently, according to protestors their actions were "inspired by their conservative counterparts who have been dramatizing the health care debate" (Preuitt).

August 14, 2010: Frustrated Seattle residents surprise employees and shoppers at a local Target store around lunchtime with their own makeshift band and dancers, performing a rewritten version of Depeche Mode's "People Are People." In the new version, the lyrics ask "Target ain't people so why should it be/allowed to play around with our democracy?" The mob followed a call for a Target boycott by MoveOn.org, a left-leaning political website. Earlier in 2010 the Supreme Court ruled corporations could donate unlimited amounts to political campaigns, and in July Target donated $150,000 to Minnesota gubernatorial candidate Tom Emmer, an anti-labor and outspoken anti-gay marriage Republican. Fueled by the MoveOn.org boycott, these Seattle flash mobbers were members of AGIT-POP Communications, a "subvertising agency" offering "cutting edge videos, widgets, and boots-on-the-ground guerilla marketing to progressive campaigns" (Boyd and Sellers).

Both of these mobs represent a new hybridized version of flash mob: a musical-political mob or even musical-political-dance mob. While easily labeled image events, in the vein of Kevin Michael DeLuca, these performances are unique for their use of the flash mob formula (organized online, swarming of a site, short time period) as well as for their fusion of multiple flash mob formats – singing, dance, and overt politics. Such conjunctions are inevitable products of the flash mob's popularity and proliferation. These hybrids also act as fertile soil for the development of new, heretofore unheard of types of performance.

My goal in this section has been to outline an action-based typology of flash mobs and to highlight the differences in behavior as well as functionality amongst these forms. This typology is not meant to be definitive. In time, I am certain a myriad of new categories of flash mob will emerge, as well as new research leading to richer understandings and organization of flash mob performances. Despite the various goals of these flash mob offspring, they all contain similar

components that link them to Wasik's eight original flash mobs. These elements – a short time span, online organization, and swarming of a pre-determined site – connect these various manifestations of performance as flash mobs, despite their differences. Without these unifying elements, I resist referring to a particular event as a flash mob, despite one's inclination to do so. We exist in a new age of digital performance, and the flash mob, while part of that age, should not operate as the de-facto name of all emerging performance events. Hopefully my typology not only identifies what is, as well as what is not, a flash mob, but also helps differentiate and categorize the variety of new performance formats emerging based on an understanding of their particularities, as opposed to the simpler yet dangerous impulse to label everything we come across a "flash mob."

Failures, Fiascos, and Future Inquiries: Out of Order's "UNT Air Raid"

What if you threw a flash mob and nobody came? I'm serious. In September 2009, I witnessed just such an event. I had recently moved back to Texas and found a job teaching at the University of North Texas, my alma mater. After learning of my research interest in flash mobs during an introductory talk, a student suggested I check out a facebook page for Out of Order, an improvisational prank group on campus. I took said student's advice and visited the webpage. Upon arriving I saw an advertisement for an upcoming event labeled "UNT Air Raid."

Every month, the university tests its weather sirens. For those unaware of this practice, hearing the sirens for the first time can be a rather jarring event. Often in September, when the first monthly test occurs, incoming freshmen, as well as new students, faculty, and employees, are alarmed upon hearing the sirens, and tend to gaze about wondering what to do or even begin to run for cover until more experienced peers explain the situation. The "UNT Air Raid" operated around this principle. The format was similar to that of Wasik's original flash mobs.

Participating flashmobbers would swarm a particular outdoor area of campus and upon hearing the sirens, fling themselves to the ground with hands over their heads in a "duck and cover" type of way. Planned as a monthly event, the decision to hold the first "UNT Air Raid" in September most likely coincided with the planners' desire to catch a few new students off-guard, if only for a moment. After a short time, students would stand up and continue on their way as if nothing had happened.

Happening so quickly upon the opportunity to observe a flash mob excited me. I arrived early on the day of the event at the general outdoor area where the mob was to occur, in order to locate a good vantage point from which to observe everything. After my experience with a limited field of vision in the LSU Freeze, I was determined not to make a similar mistake. Although the locus of the mob was a bronze statue of an eagle, the school's mascot, located just outside the University Union, Out of Order's facebook page directed students to position themselves anywhere between this area and a much larger greenspace southeast of the statue. This raised concerns for me because the greenspace was a large space, too large for a flash mob of fifty or so participants (my expectation for the event) to have much impact. I immediately thought of Wasik's refusal to hold a mob in Times Square or the large open areas of Central Park, out of fear of the mobsters realizing their relatively small numbers and therefore having little impact upon the site. However, as I had observed a rise in flash mobs of all types across college campuses in the United States, I set aside my fears, hoping that the students would surprise me with a large turnout. I found an excellent spot, sat down with some paper on which to record my observations, readied my camera, and waited.

At the appointed time, the sirens sounded but no one in the large greenspace fell to the ground. I quickly turned to my right, toward the eagle statue, and saw about ten people on the

ground. As I moved closer to observe these individuals, I realized with dismay that only fifteen to twenty lay on the ground as participants. An equal, if not larger number, stood in the general vicinity of the statue looking at the mob, and I soon realized these people had been waiting for the mob to occur for the last ten minutes. In other words, more people showed up to watch the mob than to take part. I also realized that aside from these "in-the-know" audience members, most other people did not stop to observe the mob. They shook their heads and walked by, treating the flashmobbers like sorority or fraternity pledges involved in some sort of rush-week prank. They dismissed the flashmobbers, and in doing so, dismissed the flash mob as irrelevant. After the allotted time the air raid participants stood up and either vacated the site or joined friendly groups of onlookers. I returned to my chosen spot and ended my notetaking on the event with the following query, "What if you threw a flash mob and nobody came?"

Since then, this question, along with a few others, kept popping up in the back of my mind. What makes a flash mob a success? Why do people prefer certain types of flash mobs over other ones? What happens to guerilla-style performance when people would rather watch than participate? Are such questions hypocritical for a researcher, like myself, who observes, reports, and discusses such events more often than she participates in them? As I arrive at the conclusion of this research, I admit that along with all my theories and answers, there are always more questions. For a scholar, such questions do not frighten. After all, like the multiple new manifestations of the flash mob since 2003, they are not a repetitive refrain, but rather the beginning of the next verse.

Twitching Towards the Finish Line: An Ending

In March of 2010, Newsweek published an article whose title asked the question, "Did Black Kids Ruin Flash Mobs?" In the article, Raina Kelley calls out the media for its "continued

use of the 'flash mobs used to be great until black kids ruined them with violence' narrative" (1). Kelley's article references three Philadelphia events occurring in early 2010, the first of which occurred in February. Initially planned as a massive snowball fight, participants gathered outside of a Center City Macy's store. The fight ensued, but at some point mobbers broke into the Macy's and began fighting and looting. In the following weeks, similar gatherings turned riots occurred along South Street in Philadelphia, prompting police action. In these South Street riots, stores located on the street locked customers inside to protect them during the event. African-American teenagers composed the overwhelming majority of participants in these so-called 'violent flash mobs' or 'flash mob riots' (Masterson, Dearing).

Kelley's answer to the article's headline question is no, black kids did not ruin flash mobs. Rather, she insists the media "got the story wrong" and that their coverage "relies on those same automatic assumptions about young black people and will only further perpetuate the popular, but unfair, racial stereotype of black men as sociopathic thugs" (1). I agree. The Philadelphia mobs were not the first flash mobs to turn violent – a number of earlier pillow fight mobs actually resulted in a similar destruction of city property (Rosenfeld). In fact, as early as 2004, only a year after Wasik's initial eight mobs, the idea of a flash mob turned deadly served as a storyline for a CSI Miami episode titled "Murder in a Flash." This fear of flash mobs, or mobs in general, is nothing new, particularly as they grow more and more prevalent.

These days, flash mobs are very popular. As mentioned earlier, there were dance flash mobs featured in episodes of two popular television comedies during the autumn of 2010 – Glee and Modern Family. In March, gossip sites spread rumors suggesting that a possible dance flash mob show, with Paula Abdul at its helm was in the works, although this ultimately turned out to be false (Hanek). Such reports leave me wondering what Bill Wasik thinks about all this co-

optation. Certainly he has to admit he was wrong about flash mobs – they didn't die. However, they have definitely been co-opted by advertisers and mainstream America, something which likely brings a sneer to the face of Wasik and his hipster friends.

The prevalence of flash mobs points to the fact that these new styles of performance are more than some meaningless fad, an "empty meditation on emptiness" (Wasik 66). Whether used to memorialize the death of a cultural icon such as Michael Jackson or to celebrate the particularities of the horror movie subculture, such as in the zombie mobs, flash mobs are here to stay. The sheer variety of offspring, as well as our delight upon witnessing their occurrence (whether on video or in person), speaks to their power as a prevalent form of performance.

Inevitably, however, everything reaches an end, including the flash mob. As I struggled to find a way to end this chapter, I returned to my research Bible, a tattered copy of Bill Wasik's coming-out article in Harper's Magazine from 2006. As I re-read Wasik's words, searching for a way out of my inevitable yet unfathomable ending, I came across the following:

> The mob was all about the herd instinct, I reasoned, about the desire not to be left out of the latest fad; logically, then, it should grow as quickly as possible and then – this seemed obvious – buckle under the weight of its own popularity. I developed a single maxim for myself, as custodian of the mob: "Anything that grows the mob is pro-mob" (58).

Anything that grows the mob is pro-mob. Anything that grows the research is pro-research. Anything that grows the performance is pro-performance. Anything that grows the communication is pro-communication. Anything that grows the community is pro-community. Anything that grows the resistance is pro-resistance. I want to believe each of these statements. We live in an age where more people watch reality television than attend live performance. We log on daily to online social communities while we neglect our neighbors right next door. We spend more time watching pundits play at politics in the mainstream media than actively

engaging in them on our city streets. In light of all this, the flash mob feels like a breath of fresh air. Flash! A-ah! Maybe, just maybe, he will save every one of us after all.

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VITA

Rebecca Walker spent her childhood on the east coast, in the town of Crofton, Maryland. At the age of thirteen, she moved to Texas where she spent her formative teen years. She graduated from Edward S. Marcus high school in 1994, and began work on a Bachelor of Arts Degree at the University of North Texas, which she received in 1998. After graduation, Rebecca spent a few years traveling the world as an event planner before returning to graduate school as a full-time student in 2001. She received her Master of Arts degree in Communication Studies from the University of North Texas in 2004. While working on her Master's degree, Rebecca discovered a love of teaching and creating performance. At the urging of her professors, she decided to pursue a doctoral degree at Louisiana State University.

Rebecca began her doctoral coursework at LSU in the spring of 2005. While there, she taught classes on the performance of literature, public speaking, interpersonal communication, and the performance of everyday life. In the summer of 2009, after completing her coursework, Rebecca moved back to Texas to write her dissertation while serving as an Instructor and Undergraduate Advisor in the Communication Studies Department of her alma mater, the University of North Texas. She teaches courses on storytelling, group performance, performance of literature, and the history of performance studies. Her primary research interests lie in the intersection(s) of performance, culture, and technology. Aside from flash mobs and other types of viral performance, Rebecca Walker is also interested in the study of tourism and the performances which surround it. Particularly, she investigates how sites perform and maintain identity through their tourism practices. After graduating in the spring of 2011, Rebecca plans to continue working as an instructor, researcher, and director in the field of performance studies.