

Why so serious? Framing comedies of recognition and repertoires of tactical frivolity within social movements

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Abstract

What makes something funny? That depends. When it comes to humour, we are all experts. We know what we find funny. Such ambiguity is one of the central reasons a phenomenological analysis of humour as a means for radical political subject formations has been neglected within the study of social movements. Yet in many contexts a joke can represent liberation from pressure, rebellion against authority, a subversive political performance. We might even say that given common social norms and linguistic signifiers, joke telling can tear holes in our usual predictions about the empirical world by creating disjunctions between actuality and representation. After all, those in power have little recourse against mockery. Responding harshly to silence humorous actions tends to in fact increase the laughter. As such, humour must be appreciated not just as comic relief, but as a form of ideological emancipation, a means of deconstructing our social realities, and at the same time, imagining and proposing alternative ones.

By informing this notion of humour as subversive political performance with one of the most instrumental approaches to social movement studies, Charles Tilly's repertoires of contention, this paper begins by framing the dangers of comedic containment, before theorising the creative and electronic turns in social movement studies through a lens of rebellious humour as a post-political act. The paper emphasises these contributions with two unique explorations of political humour: 1970s' radio frivolity by the post-Marxist Italian Autonomous movement, and present day Internet frivolousness by the hacktivist collective Anonymous. The paper then brings these interventions together to make the case that while humour can indeed serve as a control function, providing temporary recognition that disarms potentially conflictive situations and naturalises prejudice by denigrating certain marginalised groups within society, the authentic rage that humour expresses also has the potential to be transformed into meaningful acts of socio-political dissension.

Keywords

tactical frivolity; comedies of recognition; repertoires of creative contention; Autonomia; Radio Alice; Anonymous; subversive humour; the post-political; comedic containment

Introduction

A real comedian, that's a daring [wo]man. [S]he dares to see what h[er] listeners shy away from, fear to express. And what [s]he sees is a sort of truth about people, about their situation, about what hurts or terrifies them, about what's hard, above all, about what they want. A joke releases the tension, says the unsayable, any joke pretty well. But a true joke, a comedian's joke, has to do more than release tension, it has to liberate the will and the desire, it has to change the situation, (Trevor Griffiths, 1976, p.20).

In a 1945 essay, 'Funny, but not Vulgar,' George Orwell wrote: "A thing is funny when—in some way that is not actually offensive or frightening—it upsets the established order. Every joke is a tiny revolution." For Orwell, to be funny was to be subversive, to upset the established order: "You cannot be really funny if your main aim is to flatter the comfortable classes: it means leaving out too much. To be funny, indeed, you have got to be serious." Orwell saw humour as much more than a superfluous pastime of the working classes, in certain circumstances, being funny was a political performance, a way to challenge the structures of power in pervasively seditious ways. Yet this begs the question: *What exactly makes something funny?* When it comes to humour, we are all authorities, experts in the field. We know what we find funny. And perhaps this universal claim to tacit knowledge is the reason the phenomenological analysis of humour as a means for radical political subject formations seems to be neglected as a field of study.

In order to address this gap in the social movement literature, this paper will build its analysis starting from the notion of what Charles Tilly (1995) refers to as *repertoires of contention*—a set of protest-related tools utilised by social movements within a given timeframe that include assemblies, rallies, sit-ins, boycotts, strikes, as well as various artistic and performance manifestations—post-political acts that seek to upset the established order using radical, creative, and illicit means. It will engage both the creative and electronic turns in contentious frivolity through this lens of subversive humour in an attempt to address the central tensions, contradictions, and cohesions that have arisen in the turbulent relationship between comedic containment, dissident humour and radical politics. In doing so it will explore questions such as: *What are some historical precedents of political humour? How is humour an effective form of protest? What are some of its limitations? What groups have used humour in the post-political process? Why, in many cases, has humour been unsuccessful in inducing lasting change? Is it possible for radical, creative, and illicit forms of humour to uncover spaces outside the structures of power? And if so, what would these spaces even look like?*

This paper starts by introducing a phenomenology of humour through probing the origins of joke-telling, satirical politics, and the bilateral consequences of utilising hilarity to unite social groups. *Second*, it probes the limitations of humour today by exploring the insular, self-congratulatory connotations of

comedic processes of recognition and reconciliation as highly contingent, contextual, and cathartic territorialisations of radical political subjectivation.¹ *Third*, it addresses the origins of tactical frivolity, micropolitical subjectivity, and the creative use of avant-garde performance humour as an anarcho-political form of radical spectacle. *Fourth*, it discusses the 1970s Italian autonomists' utilisation of guerrilla communication, particularly *Radio Alice*, as a way to blend art, technology, humour, and radical post-politics. *Fifth*, it compares the mischievous hacks of Anonymous with previous groups and examines the electro-digital turn in the use of humour as protest in physical, and increasingly, virtual spaces. *Last*, it reflects upon the institutionalised responses to post-political performances of frivolity and explores some of the ways that radical social movements might use humour to invoke structural change. 'Why So Serious?' will do these things in an attempt to argue that while humour can be co-opted by the structures of neoliberal power through reenforcing the everyday subjectivities in which we find ourselves, humour is also a manifestation of post-political liberation, a carnivalesque realisation of our un-freedoms, a micropolitical changing of our ideological situation, which, given widespread persistency and continued neoliberal fatigue, has the potential to change our structural situation as well.²

A phenomenology of humorous politics

Simon Critchley (2002) coyly points out that a theoretical explanation of humour is not humorous.³ A joke explained is always a joke misunderstood. After all, joking is a specific and meaningful practice that requires a shared understanding regarding what linguistic or visual routines are funny—congruence between joke structure and social structure. As such, humour is strongly context-based, and what is considered funny will vary intersectionally across class, race, time, and gender. In performing a joke, we are always presupposing a social world that is shared, the forms of which the practice of joke telling are going to play with. We might even say that given common social norms and linguistic signifiers, joke telling can tear holes in our usual predictions about the empirical world by producing unexpected fissures between actuality and representation. Humour can rupture our everyday

¹ Territorialisation occurs in psychoanalytic theory to refer to fluid and dissipated (schizophrenic) nature of human subjectivity in contemporary capitalist cultures (Deleuze & Guattari, 1983). In relation to the process of neoliberal subjugation, it points to the ways in which critiques of power are de/reterritorialised or de/re-framed as commodified cultural artefacts—think of the means through which the guerrilla street artist 'Banksy' from brought from the alley to the art gallery.

² While still unequivocally dominant, the on-going financial crisis, waves of austerity, and general civil unrest speak to the fact that Western neoliberalism is beginning to show ideological stress.

³ While there are many ways to define humour, this paper invokes the theory of incongruity put forward by Beattie, Kant, Kierkegaard, Schopenhauer and others, arguing that humour emerges from the violation of what is expected or considered normal in given or familiar circumstances.

subjectivities by dislodging the reality in which we find ourselves. In this way, “humour...is a slap in the face of our pretentious lives in order to catch the attention of those capable of an expanding self-discovery,” (Marciniak, 2008, p.3). Humour is not just comic relief—it is a form of ideological liberation, a means of deconstructing our social realities, and, at the same time, creating, imagining, and proposing alternative ones.

“A true joke, a comedian’s joke, suddenly and explosively lets us see the familiar de-familiarised, the ordinary made extra-ordinary and the real rendered surreal, and we laugh in a physiological squeal of transient delight,” (Critchley 2002, p.10). Put another way, humour brings about a change of situation, an unanticipated surrealisation of what is seen as real. The constructedness of reality falls into the background of the everyday. For as Mary Douglas (1975, p.96) points out: “A joke is a play on form that affords an opportunity for realising that an accepted pattern has no necessity.” The jarring nature of a joke makes visible the sheer contingency or arbitrariness of the social rites in which we engage. And by producing what Arthur Berger (1996, p.16) calls “a counterforce to power,” humour can invoke a consciousness of contingency that can change the situation in which we find ourselves, and can even have a critical function with respect to society. Jokes can soften the audience and render listeners more amendable to a critical perspective. By laughing at power humour can expose its contingency, it can help us to realise that valorised structures which appear to be fixed, such as *neoliberal capitalism*, are in fact conditional, and just the sort of thing that should be mocked, ridiculed, and contested.

If, like Kant, Schopenhauer, and Critchley, we take humour to be a perception of what is incongruous, political humour can be understood as a communicative resource that highlights and challenges the incongruities that originate in political discourse and action. Since criticism expressed in a joking manner is more difficult to refute with ‘rationality,’ politically charged acts of subjective and collective frivolity can bring to the fore inconsistencies and inadequacies in the decisions and acts manifested by the incompetence, recklessness, and corruption of our social, political and economic leaders. Authority and power can be eroded, as the invitation to laugh with one another appeals to all-human feelings and breaks down ‘official’ barriers between ‘us and ‘them,’ (t’Hart, 2007). As such, humour is a key component of what James C. Scott (1985) refers to as everyday *weapons of the weak*: rumours, gossip, folktakes, songs, gestures, jokes, and theatre of the powerless that insinuate a critique of power while hiding behind anonymity and the innocuous understandings of their conduct.⁴ For Scott (1992, p.137), such institutions of frivolity are particularly effective in situations where violence is used to maintain the status quo as they facilitate, “a veiled discourse of dignity and self-assertion within the public

⁴ In his text, Scott argues that opposition and resistance are in constant flux, and by focusing on visible historic ‘events’ such as organised rebellions, we easily miss subtle but powerful forms of everyday resistance that challenge the powerful just beneath the surface, ‘hidden’ in plain sight.

transcript in which ideological resistance is disguised, muted, and veiled for safety's sake."

Of course, it is important to recognise that not all humour is of a critical nature; many popular jokes are reactionary and thus simply serve to reinforce the current social consensus. Although humour appears to be a radical alternative to 'serious' discourse in the sense that it is organised in terms of contrary discursive practices, certain comedies of recognition seem, in practice, to overwhelmingly support and reaffirm the established patterns of orderly, serious conduct. According to Critchley (2002), such reactionary humour does not seek to criticise the established order or change the situation; rather, it simply toys with existing social hierarchies in a charming but benign fashion that reflects popular political thought. Moreover, this sort of banal humour functions as a comedic containment that goes about reinforcing and naturalising neoliberal ideological beliefs by denigrating a certain sector of society, for example, sexist or racist humour that ridicules the alleged stupidity of a social outsider. Thus the political references employed for the production of humour can also alienate those who do not conform to the norms and values of a specific community, which heightens social boundaries between in-group and out-group members. In other words, as Diana Popa and Villy Tsakona (2011) point out, at times, political humour is a double-edged sword that simultaneously facilitates social bonding between interlocutors who agree on the content and targets of humour, and enhances the gap between speakers who do not adopt the same stance towards what exactly constitutes humorous themes and targets.

Due to the nature of this double move of simultaneous inclusion and exclusion, humour is not simply an empty vessel for emancipatory politics. Like any other political tool, its functionality depends on the ideology of the users. This is why, at times, humour can in fact constitute a control function, where resistance through joking provides a temporary relief that stabilises potentially conflictive situations, (Popa & Tsakona, 2011). As such, some social theorists on the political left regard certain forms of humour as an ineffective substitute for the political action necessary to dislodge the current structures of power, (Davis, 1993). Such ineffective substitutes are fruitfully theorised through an understanding of the colonial/neoliberal politics of recognition. For as Glen Coulthard (2014) points out, the political processes of recognition and accommodation—something given to an oppressed peoples by a dominant body—be it in a colonial space or comedic one (or both!), tends to be deployed in ways which leave the underlying socio-economic structures of power unchallenged.⁵ In other words, the ways in which a colonial government's

⁵ Coulthard's *Red Skin White Masks* (2014) argues that recognition is paternal and does not accord freedom in any meaningful forms. Following Frantz Fanon (1952), recognition functions as a field of power through which oppressive relations are produced and maintained. *Red Skin White Masks*'s central contention is that anti-colonial struggles must turn away from conciliatory liberal politics of recognition and, instead, seek freedom through a modular return to a politics of contention premised on self-actualisation, direct action, and the resurgence of

attempts to reconcile their violent histories by acknowledging any wrongdoings whilst simultaneously moving to 'appease' colonised populations through the recognition of land claims and the invitation of state-created 'self'-governments within the larger colonial system functions that perpetuate capitalism through a process that integrates/territorialises their critiques within the neoliberal framework of power: "the assumption that the flourishing of Indigenous peoples as distinct and self-determining entities is significantly dependent on their being afforded cultural recognition and institutional accommodation by a settler state apparatus" (2014, p.54).

Comedies of recognition as neoliberal subjugation

Seemingly progressive comedies of recognition function through a similar *reconciliatory logic of neoliberal subjugation*. Consider the political projects of American 'edgy-liberal' mainstays such as Jon Stewart (The Daily Show), Stephen Colbert (The Colbert Report), and John Oliver (Last Week Tonight). For a time during the presidency of George W. Bush, Stewart's Daily Show served as a bastion of satirical bite—undeniably at its best laying into the jingoistic lies of the Bush White House's "war on terror," the ludicrously botched case for the invasion of Iraq and the squalor of Bush domestic policy, from the workaday corruption of the Justice Department to the debacle of the federal response to Hurricane Katrina's destruction of New Orleans to the 2008 economic collapse. However, in the post-bush era, a liberal malaise set in. And while satirical targets during the Obama Administration have been no less plentiful—we have seen zero uptick in substantive economic reforms, a boom in fully unaccountable drone warfare, a steady metastasising of the national surveillance state, and a long-broken promise to close the detention centre at Guantánamo Bay—The Daily Show became increasingly rudderless and redundant as it turned towards a tv-friendly 'edginess' in its final years—demonstrating at worst an inability and at best an unwillingness to spew out a comparable amount of vitriolic, satirical, and unapologetic rigour when confronted with an equally repressive administration hailing from the other side of the aisle.

In a sense, the larger problem with such comedies of recognition is that they have breached the ill-defined boundary separating take-no-prisoners satire from the terminally chummy protocols of American celebrity culture. Instead of taking the political risks associated with laying into the hypocrisies and enforcement failures of, say, the Obama-era Securities and Exchange Commission, which is not likely to land you a gig as an amiable pitchman for a telecom ad campaign or your own cable-talk franchise, Stewart, Colbert, and Oliver continue to take shelter by relinquishing themselves to compulsively attacking their ideological opposite numbers in the compromised and truth-challenged sanctums of spaces like Fox News, (Popa & Tsakona, 2011). This is

cultural practices that are attentive to the subjective and structural composition of neoliberal subjugations.

easy sport and, perhaps more importantly, the quickest and most frictionless brand of watered-down 'edginess' on offer. After all, reactionary mainstays like Fox News are equally commercially invested in portraying enterprising Daily Show correspondents—together with their purported comrades in the mythical liberal media establishment—as irredeemable ideological hacks in their own right, so it's all one giant win-win in the market-savvy logic of celebrity branding. There are hidden costs to this re-enforcing and self-congratulatory liberal jesterdom. When someone like Stewart or Colbert manages to get a targeted interviewee like Condoleezza Rice—Bush's war and torture apologist Secretary of State—on their show, more often than not, they sit politely and obligingly idol, while Rice drones through the standard talking points on the 'gorgeous,' if at times messy, forward march of American-sponsored democracy in the Middle East.

Perhaps more reconciliatory than the self-congratulatory banter with Fox News or the lacklustre interviews with war criminals, the celebrity-satire nexus of Colbert and Stewart demonstrates an unquenchable elitist thirst for a fish-in-a-barrel blasting of the credulous plebs marooned in the hopelessly out-of-control American interior. This crude and at times ingenious comic tradition owes its most immediate roots to Sasha Baron Cohen's plodding practice of pseudo-documentary farce, but in recent years Daily Show correspondents have taken it up as their primary form of engagement. Apart from being self-referential and aristocratic-chic, the process has become tired, rote, and entirely formulaic: Assemble a group of buffoonish local culture crusaders (the more earnest and evangelical, the better) and ambush them with a fake-sympathetic interview that turns abruptly confrontational—subsequently edit deeply to achieve maximum humiliation for the interview subject and utmost smugness for their interviewer, repeat until all those who hold opposing views are entirely dejected, alienated, and othered by a conceited chorus of chuckles from the liberal intelligentsia. Of course as the countless interviews with Trump supporters have shown, such initiatives are richly mockable. Yet comedians like Eric Andre⁶ demonstrate that it is possible to deploy discourse in ways that do not simply reproduce an ideologically liberal position which cultivates difference, malfeasance, and discontent through the spewing of affluence. As such, it is important to ask: What sort of divisive agenda is initiated by relentlessly sending up the dimly lit worldviews of your self-designated cultural inferiors? The cumulative effect of these more broad-target broadcasts demonstrates the dividing and alienating processes of hegemonic comedies of recognition by reinforcing the ideological power and insular mindset of a self-aggrandised *civilised minority*—a permanently disenchanting elite of 'better-thinking'

⁶ On *The Eric Andre Show*, comedian 'nihilistic comedian' Eric Andre deploys deeply absurdist and surrealistic performances that paralyse the interviewee in a political moment. For example, in 2016, Andre attended both the Republican and Democratic National Conventions dressed in absurd, offensive costumes and confronted voters from both sides with jarring questions about race that served to both critique the interview process and electoral politics more generally.

Americans who claim to be assailed on all sides by the embarrassing crazes and religious crusades of the class of gullible dopes and hillbillies.

Such practices are part of an overarching strategy of *comedic containment*—an approach embodied best by the new poster child of comedy as recognition: John Oliver and his show ‘Last Week Tonight.’ Unlike Stewart or Colbert,⁷ Oliver has proven willing to take a side, to take the time to explain seemingly arcane political and economic topics and show their relevance to everyday life. As Thomas Crowley (2015) points out, Oliver and his team do impressive research, gleefully delving into the nuts and bolts of corporate malfeasance in order to directly call out big corporations: they have gone after the tobacco industry, the sugar industry, the test prep industry, the for-profit education industry, the prison system, and the military industrial complex, to name a few. However, like all forms of comedic containment, Oliver follows a formula: he notes the topic is dull but worth exploring. He then divulges into a detailed exploration of corporate greed by making explicit the human costs of companies’ insatiable thirst for profit. Despite the scale of the problems he has exposed, towards the end of the segment he steps back and suggests that these problems are specific to that industry. Furthermore, Oliver concludes by noting that said problems can be addressed with the proper blend of regulation and public outcry—segments on the police always end with calls for better training, more equipment, and the removal of ‘Bad Apples.’ As such, Oliver rarely raises the possibility that there may be a more systemic rot, even if that is what the sum of his episodes suggests. Like many other liberals held up by leftier-types as something more, Oliver’s politics, like Stewart and Colbert before him, represent a mainline centrism that is remade as radicalism through some empty signalling and a tough-talk exterior.

The Atlantic (2015) recently made the argument that comedians like Oliver are ‘the new public intellectuals.’ In light of this, we must ask: Whose interests does a development like this serve? If comedies of recognition have usurped the roll of public intellectuals, this means that instead of coming from academia or activism, the ‘truth-tellers’ who act as guides through our cultural moment will now go through countless stages of corporate vetting before they reach the public eye. When Coulthard (2014) criticises reconciliation efforts for leaving structural conditions intact, they depend on a false notion that the only change required is a narrowly symbolic/discursive shift. Comedic containment achieves this by creating a situation where all of those subjugated under neoliberalism develop faux-political attachments to the symbols of humorous cognition, the Stewarts’, the Colberts’, the Olivers’. Once political drives are co-opted through this process of internalisation—the ideological process through which we are led to believe that comedic recognition amounts to liberation—the structures of neoliberal subjugation need not undertake the actions required to transform the current institutional and social relationships. Humour rendered as a punching

⁷ Both Stewart and Colbert claim to be in the business of comedy, not politics, and therefore make clear that they do not want to take a side so much as restore sanity to the political debate—as Stewart and Colbert’s infamous 2010 ‘Rally to Restore Sanity and/or Fear,’ makes explicit.

bag which collects and dissipates all of our destabilising energies so that we can be lulled back into a deep sleep. However, with all this in mind the fact remains: humour is a multifaceted process. Think of the deeply inter-subjective nature of giggling, laughter is contagious. And while we must always keep in mind the ways in which comedies of recognition operate as zones of containment, the simple telling of a joke can recall us to what is shared in our everyday practices, making explicit the enormous commonality that is implicit in social life. As such, by linking interests to action through the practice of what Marjolein t'Hart (2007) refers to as framing,⁸ various social movements have successfully deployed humour as a means of bringing power relations to the surface, and this allows actors within anti-capitalist movements to seize comedy from the reconciliatory control functions of the state, and turn frivolity to a subversive repertoire of contention.

Tactical frivolity as a repertoire of creative contention

Pushing far beyond the hegemonic framework of comedic containment, insurgents have employed *wit as a weapon* throughout history because jokes can serve as an everyday form of communication that articulates discontent and visualises injustice in more subversive ways, (Speier, 1998). According to the work of Mikhail Bakhtin (1965), humour has had a political impact in the West as far back as the late medieval and early modern periods.⁹ Carnivals, spectacles, and 'protestivals' all articulated an idiomatic *world turned upside down*, a seditious way for micropolitical subjects, shielded from the authorities by a veil of humour, to disregard established norms and hierarchies. Despite the risks that such events could get out of hand, as they did on multiple occasions, political protest was usually permitted in these ritualised settings.¹⁰ Or rather, the cost of suppressing this subversive humour was deemed too high, as repression itself might provoke an escalation of tensions. Likewise, as emphasised by Douglas (1975), in royal courts the ritualised position of a jester carried a sort of immunity. After all, 'fools' were not taken seriously and replying in a serious manner to a joke was usually considered bad practice. So while parallels could be drawn between the medieval jester and what Critchley (2002) might refer to as reactionary humourists that reinforce the status quo, these early manifestations of political frivolity demonstrate that there is indeed a

⁸ Framing is defined here a process where agents of a social movement define and articulate the position of actors involved through translating ideological beliefs into an existing, practical framework, giving events meaning so that they are connected with each other, (t'Hart, 2007).

⁹ A scholar in the USSR during the 1920s, the depth of Bakhtin's writings on frivolity were not widely known until they were rediscovered and published shortly before Bakhtin's death in 1975.

¹⁰ According to t'Hart (2007), Emmanuel Ladorie (1979) and M. Lane Brunner (2005) provide in-depth examples of revolts that followed from carnivalesque performances such as a 16th century uprising in Romans, France and an 1833 political protest against authorities in Dijon, France.

strong historical correlation between performance humour and contentious social micropolitics.

As Graeme Chesters and Ian Welsh (2006) point out, a key development since the time of these early ritualised spectacles has been the formulation of what they call *repertoires of creativity*—or, modes of affective post-aesthetics and autonomous cultural production rooted in radical anarcho-political avant-garde movements such as Dadaism, Surrealism, and the Situationist International.¹¹ Playing off of Charles Tilly's (1995) notion of repertoires of contention, these fantasmic inventories of post-political creativity mark a momentous shift in how to conceptualise humour in social movements. During the medieval festival, wit as a weapon was strictly limited to those ritualised moments of formal performance art, and as such, the utilisation of frivolity outside of what was officially sanctioned as the festive would be quickly suppressed, (t'Hart, 2007). But by turning public spaces into performance stages through rendering everyday objects and situations surreal, these radically playful avant-garde imaginaries have transcended the official micropolitical jester by re-appropriating the fantasmic power of spectacle. This ontological repositioning of spatiality has enabled performative modes of intervention and occupation in public spaces that are unthinkable in isolation, providing a resonant instrument for challenging the prevailing ideological and discursive structures through what Chesters and Welsh (2006) refer to as the *tactical frivolity of resistance*.

True to its anarcho-political foundations of artistic innovation, practices of tactical frivolity are complex demonstrations of situational absurdity that express multi-layered cultural meanings, symbolically generated to be manifested in spectacular, imaginative and creative disturbances of the neoliberal order. For example, during the 1999 WTO protests in Seattle the dramaturgical presence on the streets played a significant role in terms of public space, with much emphasis being given to the slogan 'Teamsters and Turtles Unite,' reflecting the presence of union contingents and activists dressed up as turtles, (t'Hart, 2007). According to Chesters and Welsh (2006), entering such spaces is a step into another world, where carnivalesque performances reflect complex relations of trust, and symbolic coding inverts the meaning and sign value of the familiar. By combining street-theatre, festival, performance art, visuals, and what might be described as non-violent warfare, contemporary activists have managed to create a new language of civil disobedience. For Critchley (2008), by deploying a surrealist politics of humourist subversion that embodies the Situationist mantra: "it will be a laugh that buries you," where 'you' refers to those in power. Such tactical frivolities generate a language that exemplifies the effective foraging of horizontal chains of equivalence and a

¹¹ These avant-garde movements are often grouped together due to their autonomist nature and the fact that Dadaism, which arose out of the disgust of WWI, was a celebration of anti-art that laid foundations for the Surrealist anarcho-political thought, literature, visual art, philosophy, and social theory that reached the height of its popularity in the 1920-30s. Both of these then fed into the Situationist International's comprehensive critique of mid-20th century advanced capitalism.

collective will formation across diverse protest groups, all in order to put intense satirical pressure on the system by revealing how new forms of creative imaginaries are indeed possible.

In complimentary fashion to Scott's (1985) discussion of weapons of the weak, the creative repertoire of tactical frivolity reveals how humour is a powerless power that uses its position of weakness to expose those in power through forms of self-reflexive ridicule. According to Critchley (2008), when compared to the pious humourlessness of most manifestations of, for example, vanguard-Marxist nihilism, it is the exposed, self-ridiculing, and self-undermining character of tactically frivolous forms of protest that perform their powerlessness in profoundly powerful ways. Take the *Pink Bloc*, *Fluxus Billionaires for Bush*, the *Yes Men*, the *Laboratory of Insurrectionary Imagination*, the *Clandestine Insurgent Rebel Clown Army*, *Orange Alternative*, and countless other imaginative, aesthetic, affective, and self-organising groups rooted in the repertoires of creativity introduced by radical leftist anarcho-political art movements. Wielding feather dusters and water pistols, donning tuxedos and top hats, impersonating corporate executives and environment ministers, tagging, dancing, and jesting all within public spaces, such tactically frivolous groups have protested everything from authoritarian capitalism and G8 conferences to climate summits and European social forums, all with a marginal, defiantly subversive, and profoundly internationalist character that enables them to escape easily assimilation or dissolution. For Chesters and Welsh (2006), the work of these groups act as vectors of force that allows questions about boundaries of art, politics, and culture under neoliberal globalisation to be rethought and reframed.

Humorous vectors of force can take movements further than the ephemeral, contingent performances of marches, protests, actions, and occupations—what Hakim Bey (1991) refers to as temporary autonomous zones (TAZs): temporary spaces that elude formal structures of control constructed on the boundary lines of established regions—in order to construct more permanent spaces of autonomous revolt. Take the Zapatista movement: a revolutionary leftist political and militant group based in Chiapas, the southernmost state of Mexico. From the beginning, the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) has resorted to ridiculing everyone, even themselves, in order to get their messages across. Public statements the organisation releases take the form of comic fables, and many of the Zapatista's gestures serve to turn revolution into a satirical battle of wit and magical realism, (Olesen, 2007). Moreover, Zapatista leader Subcomandante Marcos points to the importance of framing the debate, of changing the terrain of struggle—not just winning the struggle, but defining the terms as well.¹² Thus Marcos turns revolution into postmodern slapstick comedy that deploys tactical frivolity as a political opportunity that takes up the

¹² Subcomandante Marcos (1992), character, constructed persona, hologram, and 'colorful ruse,' was created by the Clandestine Revolutionary Indigenous Committee of the Zapatistas, because "[the outsiders] can only see those who are as small as they are. Let's make someone as small as they are, so that they can see him and through him, they can see us."

clown for revolutionary advantage. Frailty and imperfection are often the basis for their humour, which frames the essence of revolt as a learning which takes place essentially through dialogue with others—well captured in the Zapatista catchphrase, ‘asking we walk’ (preguntando caminamos). Social and political change, then, is not just about some distant goal, but just as much about the method and the way to get there. Understanding that sets the Zapatistas apart from the more traditional revolutionary groups of Latin America in both past and present, which have often proceeded from a ready-made theory of where to go and how to get there.

Of course, as Critchley (2008, p.124) bluntly points out, “history is habitually written by the people with guns and sticks and one cannot expect to defeat them with mocking satire and feather dusters.” Yet as the history of anarcho-political activism eloquently shows, repertoires of contentious creativity are lost as soon as they exclusively reduce their repertoires down to violence. The successes of a political movement or action are dependent on a precedent revolution of the psyche. After all, to tear down a factory or revolt against a government is to attack the effects of subjugation rather than its causes, and as long as any attack is focused solely on effects, no structural political change is possible. It is rather the cultivation of a multiplicitious activism that deploys techniques of non-violent tactical frivolity that must be engaged if radical social groups are to pose serious challenges to the prevailing neoliberal order. For as Chesters and Welsh (2006, p.144) add, the epistemologies of thinking-through action and the return of a radical aesthetic within anti-capitalist repertoires expressed through the parallelogram of forces, “marks a return to desire as becoming, to the affective, to rhythms of speech, music, and modes of movement as important political terrain.” This extends repertoires of contention and creativity to new assemblages—carnivals against capitalism that strive to maintain open boundary conditions and continue to find different registers of antagonistic expressions through tactical frivolity, leading movements such as the Zapatistas (cited in Chesters & Welsh, 2006, p.145) to argue, “the revolution in general is no longer imagined according to socialist patterns of realism, that is, as men and women stoically marching behind a red, waving flag towards a luminous future: rather it has become a sort of carnival.”

Radio Alice and the frivolity of Autonomia

When supported by well-structured social imaginaries that are galvanised by culturally resonant, action-oriented symbols, according to Sidney Tarrow (2011), repertoires of creative contention generate radical micropolitical subjectivities that are *intersectional*, in that they refer to issues spanning multiple localities, *modular*, in that they are easily convertible from one circumstance to another, and importantly, *autonomous*, in that they are instigated by activists’ own initiatives. As a theoretical system, according to Sylvere Lotringer (1980, p.8), this notion of autonomy first emerged in Italy during the 1970s once carnivalesque affinities established by the Situationists as aesthetically anarcho-political critiques of the everyday came together with the

works of post-Marxist theorists such as Antonio Negri, Gilles Deleuze, Felix Guattari, and Franco 'Bifo' Berardi to generate the notion of a *post-political autonomous*, or "the desire to allow difference to deepen at the base without trying to synthesise them from above, to stress similar attitudes without imposing a general line, to allow parts to co-exist side by side, in their singularity." By embracing this post-political moment, where the definition of the 'political' had become a problem in itself, the Italian autonomous movement, or *Autonomia*, generated an anti-hierarchical and anti-dialectical counterforce to power, and in the process, became one of the first groups post-1970s to mobilise tactical frivolity as a tool of resistance against the neoliberal state.

For Lotringer (1980, p.14), *Autonomia* was the only political group "simultaneously [making] use of the most abstract machinery (the techno-scientific intelligence) and of the masses' most traditional community ties." Due to these techno-foundations, and the fact that radio is intersectional, modular, and autonomous, *Autonomia* naturally gathered itself around a free radio movement, which included *Onda Rossa* in Rome, *Controradio* in Firenze, and most notoriously, *Radio Alice* in Bologna, giving it a diffusion throughout the country, (Lotringer, 1980).¹³ As a result, they attempted, through Radio Alice, to subvert the dominant mode of discourse and in so doing to show that it is not the only one possible. According to Mikkel Bolt Rasmussen (2007), from 1976 to early 1977, Radio Alice played a central role in the movement, taking control of the radio waves in an attempt to reinvent the medium of radio as a laboratory for the creation of a new *Mao-Dadaistic life*.¹⁴ Thus Radio Alice stands out as an important test case in the intermingling of radical anarcho-politics, experimental art, and tactical frivolity. Instead of the passivity that characterised the way capitalist states employed new medias such as television, Radio Alice sought to activate the audience by challenging the relationship between speaker and listener, democratising the radio by making it transmit as well as receive, (Rasmussen, 2007). The merging of frivolous ears and mouths transformed the radio into a carnivalesque celebration, where the egalitarian flows of voices and sounds were not empty, solemn utterances, but the playful fusion of everyday life and poetry.

Following on from Dada, Surrealism, and the Situationists, Radio Alice strove to abolish not only the separation between speaker and listener, artist and audience, but according to Rasmussen (2007), between art and life. For *Autonomia*, provocation, theatrical analyses, political action, and avant-garde

¹³ The political collective took the name Radio Alice from Lewis Carroll's Alice because they sought to subvert reality in the way it was in *Alice in Wonderland and Through the Looking Glass*. They were especially interested in the politics of speech, and how speech itself reflects the worldview of the dominant reality. As a result, they attempted, through Radio Alice, to subvert the dominant mode of discourse and in so doing to show it is not the only one possible.

¹⁴ Inspired by de Sade, Dada and Surrealism, Deleuze and Guattari, and the Situationists, Radio Alice introduced Mao-Dadism, where 'dada' was the critique of the separation of art and life, of praxis and theory, and 'mao' was the materialist dimension transcending this structure.

creative experimentation all fused into heterogeneous praxis. The anarchical imaginations that had survived in art were to be released into the everyday. As Guattari (as cited in Goddard, 2012) points out, this is miles away from more traditional notions of both community and political radio because central to the unique micropolitics of Alice is the practice of interrupting serious political discussions with violently contradictory, unpredictably humorous, and poetico-delirious interventions. In this way, Radio Alice was not so much a counter-informant as a frivolous attacker of the neoliberal structuring of mass media. The audience was on the air and out in the streets, transforming everyday life as Alice's output jumped, without warning, from poetry to labour protests, prank calls to political analysis, cooking recipes to love declarations, and Jefferson Airplane to Beethoven. The seriousness of politics were displaced by this joyful militancy as people phoned in to request the sound of the grass growing. As Bifo (2009) recalls, the enemy was indeed buried in a roar of laughter that was impossible to co-opt because Alice refused to play by the traditional rules.

Infusing Mao-Dadaism, Lewis Carroll-inspired non-sense and a mixture of false and real news under the slogan: "let's spread false news that produce real events," the most infamous prank initiated by Radio Alice was the false edition of *La Repubblica*—a centre-left national daily newspaper—produced in conjunction with *Il Male*, a satirical magazine. Its front page splash featured the improbable 'arrest' of Ugo Tognazzi, a popular comic actor, as the grande vecchio (godfather) behind the Red Brigades, so ridiculing the press' obsession with framing anti-capitalist politics in terms of 'terrorist' conspiracy theories. This assemblage of radio and print point to the ways in which, for the Autonomists, radio constitutes but one central element of a whole range of communication means, from informal encounters in the Piazza, to the daily newspaper—via billboards, mural paintings, posters, leaflets, meetings, community activities, and festivals. In other words, similarly to Subcomandante Marcos of the Zapatistas, Alice's project is less a question of the subversive use of a technical media form than the generation of a media, or rather post-media ecology that is a self-referential network for an unforeseen processual production of radial subjectivation amplifying itself by way of technical means. As Guattari (1996) points out, this is miles away from ideas of local or community radio in which groups should have the possibility on radio to represent their particular interests and from conventional ideas of political radio in which radio should be used as a megaphone for mobilising the masses. In contrast, on Alice, serious political discussions are interrupted by violently contradictory, humorous and poetico-delirious interventions and this is central to its unique micropolitics. It was even further removed from any modernist concern with perfecting either the technical form of radio—for example through concerns with perfecting sound quality—or its contents—the development and perfection of standard formats—even a brief engagement with the tapes of Radio Alice is more than enough to convey this last point!

All of these other approaches to alternative radio, that is the local, the militant and the modernist, share an emphasis on specialisation—broadcasters set themselves up as specialists of contacts, culture and expression, yet what really

counts in popular free radio are collective assemblages of enunciation that absorb or traverse specialities: “Alice looks around, plays, jumps, wastes time in the midst of papers illuminated by the sun, runs ahead, and settles down elsewhere...the practice of happiness is subversive when it becomes collective...to conspire is to breathe together,” (A/Traverso, 1980, p.132). Written by the collective of Alice’s affiliated journal, *A/Traverso*, according to Rasmussen (2007, p.42), ‘A’ stands for alteration, anonymous, alternative, a-socialism and millions of Alice’s’ who did not have a voice: “the first letter of a new alphabet for those who start screaming, communicating, talking about themselves without first having responsibility.” Words such as these personify the frivolous and playful desires of the movement. And it is these images of Radio Alice running, jumping, playing, activating, that most distinguishes popular free radio from the usual pacifying operations of mass media. For Guattari (as cited in Goddard, 2012), autonomous languages of desire invent a new everyday that leads straight to action. Alice begins by ‘touching,’ by provoking laughter, by moving people in humorous ways, and then it makes people want to ‘move out,’ toward those who speak and toward those stakes of concern to them. Thus Radio Alice, and by extension Autonomia, were not merely humorous conversations meant to mock and mimic the neoliberal order, they were also tactically frivolous micropolitical mobilisations, dissensions, fantasmic occupations of public and private spaces, strikes, practices of auto-reductionism, and the re-appropriation of the post-political nature of everyday life.

Overall, it is best to think of Autonomia as a decentralised network or archipelago of various types of localised autonomist social movements and organisations connected through the techno-bridges of free radio, rather than as one integrated social movement at the national level, (Lotringer, 1980). For Bifo (2009), such decentralisation leaves the forces of neoliberal order scratching their heads because they are unsure where the crack-up is coming from since Autonomia does not rely on pre-existing identities; rather, it only expresses its own movement of auto-referential self-constitution. According to Goddard (2012), this shift from fixed political subjectivities and a specified program is the key to this transformation to post-political politics and indeed to a tactically frivolous era, where politics blends with art to become an unpredictable, immanent process of becoming rather than the fulfillment of a transcendental narrative. This is why Radio Alice, as well as Autonomia more generally, are integral parts of the study of humour as a subversive post-political tool, by invoking the frivolity of avant-garde in tactical forms, Alice was the realisation of art as politics, the unleashing of desire, and the creation of self-affirming virtual and corporeal spaces of playful autonomy where the everyday existed outside the logics of the neoliberal order. As such, every social movement that has invoked humour as a political tool since Autonomia, is indebted not only to its realisation of Mao-Dadaism, which makes possible the fusion of art and life necessary to create a space for the post-political art of humour as everyday surrealisation, but also Radio Alice’s techno-scientific, post-Marxist re-appropriation of the mediums of large-scale communication.

Electronic repertoires from Autonomia to Anonymous

If the notion of repertoire can be defined as a locus around which varied performances are created, and as an improvisational set of tactical tools utilised by social movements within a given timeframe, then the conception of Charles Tilly's (1995) repertoires of contention features prominently in the study of humour as a post-political tool. Playing off of Tilly's initial theorisations, Graeme Chesters and Ian Welsh (2006) infuse the carnivalesque affective aesthetics of anarcho-political art movements such as Dadaism, Surrealism, and the Situationists to point out the repertoires of creativity present in the post-politics of contention, while Sidney Tarrow (2011) highlights how such repertoires of creative contention tend to generate radical micropolitical subjectivities that are intersectional, modular, and autonomous in nature. Building upon these foundational links between social repertoires and the post-politics of humour, especially Tarrow's notion of the modular, Brett Rolfe (2005) continues that the importance of digital space as a site for contestation means that the tactically frivolous notion of repertoire must be expanded further to the practices of online direct action (ODA).¹⁵ As such, Rolfe (2005) puts forward what he calls an *electronic repertoire of contention*, which describes both the specific repertoire of an individual activist group practicing ODA, as well as the total collection of online tactics deployed within the digital space by various social groups.

Following from the sentiments of Autonomia, which insisted that mass media was the major method of social control within capitalist societies, the *Critical Art Ensemble* (2001) has pointed out that the importance of digital space as a site for contestation is increasing as the groups with which movements are contesting become more vested in the online realm.¹⁶ Or put another way, the nexus of power is becoming virtual, and to remain relevant, tactically frivolously spaces of protest must take this into account. In developing ODA as a form of tactical frivolity, Rolfe (2005) highlights that many online campaigns, such as those engaged by *Electronic Disturbance Theatre*, are essentially electronic perpetuations of existing performances, and thus inevitably continue to utilise the same approaches that have been honed offline. As such, the electronic repertoire of creative contention usually comprises of digital extensions of familiar routines: virtual protests, sit-ins, and blockades, as well as gripe sites, email bombs, web hacks, and computer viruses, (Lasn, 2000). Taking cues from Radio Alice, activist organisations like CAE, EDT, and *Adbusters*, as well as anarcho-political organisations such as *@TMark* (Registered Trademark), the *Electrohippies Collective* (Ehippies), *etoy.CORPORATION*, *Hacktivism*, *Cult*

¹⁵ Also known as hacktivism or cyberjamming, Rolfe (2005) defines ODA as a rapidly growing field that extends the notion of direct action into the 'virtual' world of electronic communication.

¹⁶ Critical Art Ensemble (CAE) is a collective of tactical media practitioners who encourage the use of any media that will engage socio-political contexts to create molecular interventions and semiotic shocks that could diminish the rising intensity of authoritarian culture, (CAE, 2001). The Electronic Disturbance Theatre (EDT) is essentially the next iteration of CAE.

of the Dead Cow, and many others—, have employed techno-scientific intelligence to pioneer creative new tactics of frivolous civil disobedience including site spoofing, viral-virtual culture jamming, and corporate data leaking, (Rolfe, 2005).¹⁷

Echoing the mantra of *Autonomia*, according to Graham Meikle (as cited in Rolfe, 2005), the key attributes of a creative repertoire of tactical frivolity in the electronic era include critical awareness, technical expertise, autonomous sub-grouping, an innovative and cooperative mindset, and a flexible agenda rather than an alignment to one specific ideological cause. Or put another way, virtual micropolitical tactical frivolity calls for what Umberto Eco (1967) refers to as *communications guerrilla warfare*, which includes the ingenious use of technology, tendency to reverse engineer equipment, and the desire to exploit systems. Over the past few years, a loosely associated rhizomatic of activist and hacktivist entities known collectively as *Anonymous* has emerged from the deep spaces of the Internet in order to take up this role. Initially, Anonymous developed out of *4chan*, the enormously popular site for sharing and commenting on images, and was primarily associated with the frivolous phenomenon of trolling: sowing discord on the Internet by posting satirical images and comments. According to Quinn Norton (2012), the driving force behind Anonymous was initially laughter, silliness, the sweet relief from the obligations of modern life's daily rhythms, or what the collective calls *lulz*. A corruption of LOL, or 'laughing out loud,' *lulz* can be witty or puerile, what makes them so important in understanding Anonymous is their anarchic, anti-capitalistic nature. They cost nothing, they transcend borders, and *lulz* decisively ridicule, reject, and exploit accepted social conventions.

In pursuit of the *lulz*, early Anonymous members, or *anons*, conducted massively choreographed pranks, widespread denial-of-service attacks, and complicated hacks in a chaotic, unpredictable, and a-political manner. And as Norton (2012) points out, what first pushed Anonymous in a political direction was essentially the only thing that could have, an attempt to interfere with their frivolity. According to Gabriella Coleman (2011), in 2008 Anonymous made its first openly political move by conducting a series of 'raids' known as *Project Chanology* against The Church of Scientology for attempting to sue various websites for hosting a video that satirises the organisation. From there, *anons* began to script, record, and circulate politically charged videos invoking much of the carnivalesque iconography, such as the Guy Fawkes mask—, for which Anonymous has become so well known.¹⁸ As Coleman (2011) highlights, due to

¹⁷ While there is unquestionable overlap from the first list of activist groups, for more information on these groups, their methods, and plenty of other insights outside the scope of this paper, see the Electrohippies (1999), CAE (2001), Dominguez (2002), Jordan (2002), and Rolfe (2005).

¹⁸ While a headless suited question mark is the oldest Anonymous icon to emerge from *4chan*, the Guy Fawkes mask, a stylised depiction of the 17th Century revolutionary popularised by the 1988 graphic novel, *V for Vendetta*, has become the group's most recognisable symbol.

Chanology's successes, the collective expanded its tactics of political frivolity, with operations against Hollywood (*OpPayback*), MasterCard, Visa, and PayPal (*Operation Avenge Assange*), coordinating a global day of action where over six thousand protesters across the Western world congregated in major cities to express political intentionality and consciousness, and even playing a key logistical role in aspects of the 2011 Tunisian Uprising that overthrew the government, serving as a catalyst for the larger Arab Spring (*OpTunisia*).¹⁹ Since then, anons played central roles in Occupy, breached Sony and Nintendo, and *LulzSec*, an anon affiliation, went on a hacking spree that targeted everything from the FBI and the US Senate, to law enforcement agencies and the CIA (Norton, 2012).²⁰

"I came for the lulz but stayed for the outrage," reflected one anon voicing a common sentiment in the wake of Anonymous' various carnivals of dissent, (Coleman, 2011, p.4). Whether advertently or not, by indirectly following in *Autonomia's* footsteps, Anonymous took the Mao-Dadaist rejection of the everyday separation of life and art and applied it to a post-political electronic repertoire in unprecedented new ways. What started out as a small operation, the likes of many of the other hacktivist groups listed above, turned into a worldwide movement that rattled the very foundations of the neoliberal order. Instead of free radio, the group used message boards and Internet Relay Chat, as well as more mainstream social media platforms, yet, similarly to Alice, Anonymous' intentions were frivolously malicious attacks on the neoliberal structures of mass media, fantasmic reoccupations of public and private spaces, the mobilisation of decentralised micropolitical self-affirming subjectivities, and the replacement of 'serious politics' with a joyful militancy that takes pleasure in laughter, all with that same autonomous, marginal, defiant, subversive, and profoundly internationalist character which enabled them to easily escape assimilation or dissolution. For Anonymous, and the dozens of other micropolitical groups occupying an electronic repertoire of creative contention, that sense of carnivalesque spectacle, of tactical frivolity, of lulz, serves as a release valve making the struggles of post-political engagement, from *Autonomia* to Anonymous and beyond, all the more endurable.

Challenging feverent fears and imagining frivolous futures

While there are clear ontological divisions between the anarcho-political protest groups, collectives, and organisations touched on here, they all share a creative repertoire of contention that employs micropolitical subjectivities of tactical frivolity, the playfulness of an everyday post-politics. However, as Critchley (2008) reminds us, to date history has indeed been written by the people with

¹⁹ Lulz Security, abbreviated as LulzSec, was an Anonymous affiliated black hat hacker group that executed a 50-day hacking spree ending on June 19, 2011, during which the group claimed responsibility for dozens of high profile, extensive, and carnivalesque public and private hacks.

²⁰ For further information re: these, and dozens of other hacks, see: *We Are Anonymous: Inside the Hacker World of LulzSec, Anonymous, and the Cyber Insurgency* by Parry Olsen, (2012).

sticks, not water guns. And as humour, through its unifying spectacles of mimicry and provocation, leaves little space for institutionalised response, it should come as no surprise that the neoliberal state order tends to counter peaceful performances of frivolity with the same unrestrained violence that it is being mocked for in the first place. In Italy for example, the promise of Radio Alice was met with violent response by the state, which in 1977, closed down the station, and with support from the Communist party, drastically reduced civil liberties and imprisoned thousands of Autonomia members, (Rasmussen, 2007). As for Anonymous, in 2011 the FBI managed to secretly turn Hector 'Sabu' Monsegur, one of the most central anons, who then spent months helping law enforcement identify and arrest 25 of the groups' principal hacktivists, (Norton, 2012). Moreover, from the Clandestine Insurgent Rebel Clown Army to the Critical Art Ensemble, there are countless examples of activists and assemblies being disciplined and displaced by unfettered state-sanctioned violence.

What drives neoliberalism's feverent fear of frivolity is the anti-hierarchical, self-referential, and autonomous nature of the carnivalesque, culminating in a global-do-it-yourself culture, an international milieu fostering opposition to market fundamentalism and committed to ecological sustainability, social justice, human rights, and radical post-political forms of expression and congregation. Motivated by the desire to formulate an alternative to the neoliberal order, the tactical frivolity of resistance, or what Graham St. John (2004) calls DIY tribalism can be contextualised by its opposition to the reach of capital into everyday life, and to the unchecked power of the state. As such, rather than disappear into the state-sanctioned 'protestivals' of the medieval jester, by finding their voice within the avant-garde, these counter-tribes take their carnivalesque grievances to global cosmopolitan centres, creating temporary autonomous zones- in the neoliberal heartland, which, if only for a moment, can jar populations out of their robotic capitalistic routines. For as St. John (2004) points out, the insurrectionary spectacle seeks lasting change, it ruptures the present with figurative vision, a post-political re-appropriation of human performance enabling the pursuit of new futures from the present. Such attempts to imagine new futures, to speak outside of policed bureaucracies, to give non-answers to empty questions, these sorts of frivolous politics are the greatest threat to a neoliberal order built on the 'serious' binaries of 'us and them,' 'terrorist and citizen,' 'political' and 'non-political.' After all, if the citizenry decides to eject, who will be left to pull the veil of (neo)liberal democracy over?

When asked by the functionaries of neoliberalism what they wanted, Autonomia replied: "nothing, we are not citizens, we do not belong to this society, and we will never accept your point of view, the point of view of totality. We refuse to play this game, that's all," (Rasmussen 2007, p.42). Perhaps unsurprisingly, a familiar post-political statement was made over 30 years later by select anons: "we just happen to be a group of people on the Internet who need—just kind of an outlet to do as we wish, that we wouldn't be able to do in regular society. That's more or less the point of it," (Coleman, 2011, p.5). As such, beyond the

practice of inducing laughter at the status quo's expense, Autonomia, Anonymous, and dozens of other distinct but frivolously interrelated groups are utilising micropolitical desire, spectacle, and non-violent warfare in an attempt to generate a space outside the given binaries of neoliberalism; a permanent autonomous zone of the everyday. However, these post-political attempts at autonomy via tactical frivolity are predicated on the key assumption that there is in fact an 'outside' to be realised. After all, apart from expanding the lexicon of the mass media and the consciousness of a few hundred thousand committed activists, what lasting and structural changes have radical anarcho-political avant-garde movements really accomplished in past the 40 years?

For a time, tactically frivolous collectives occupy physical and virtual spaces, bring in new and committed members, challenge prevailing ideologies and subjectivities, celebrate discontent, anti-hierarchies, mock, mimic, desire, and develop their repertoires of contention, but eventually the laughter is always silenced. Threatened by the post-political imaginaries generated via cognisant peoples dancing, singing, laughing, and criticising together, the state pushes back, jokesters become terrorists, and all but a select few devoted actors fall back into their routines. Every time a group tries to push outside the boundaries of neoliberalism and construct new assemblages of lasting autonomy, the system breaks their ranks by making it too costly to continue the struggle. For as Slavoj Žižek (2012a) points out: "carnivals come cheap—the true test of their worth is what remains the day after, how normal daily life will be changed. The protesters should fall in love with hard and patient work—they are the beginning, not the end." Essentially, the message of many of these groups is this—*the system is broken, we do not live in the best possible world, we are allowed, even obliged, to think about alternatives*. As such, Žižek (2012a) asks: "What new positive order should replace the old one the day after, when the sublime enthusiasm of the uprising is over?" It is at this crucial juncture that we see a break in the (il)logic of tactical frivolity. The authentic rage it expresses rarely transforms itself into a post-political program of permanent autonomous change, and as such, we are given the spirit of desire, contention, and revolt, but without the revolution.

Reacting to Paris protests of May '68, Jacques Lacan (as cited in Žižek, 2012a) reflected: "What you aspire to as revolutionaries is a new master. You will get one." And for Žižek (2012b), insofar as tactical frivolity stays the course of hysterically provoking the master without proposing a tangible new imaginary to replace the old order, nothing foundational will be changed. As such, it is not enough to reject the current order as a ruthless and exploitative form of neoliberal ideology. Radical anarcho-political avant-garde performances of non-violent warfare must begin to think seriously about what to propose instead of the currently predominant form of politico-culturo-economic organisation, and to imagine and experiment with alternative forms of everyday communities. The advent of global protest movements, groups, and collectives without a coherent program is not an accident. It reflects a deeper crisis without an obvious solution. For most, the solution until now has been to ignore the omnipresence of the neoliberal order. We feel free because we lack the awareness to articulate

our un-freedom. As Zizek (2012b) points out, all the terms we use today to designate our present reality: 'war on terror,' 'human rights,' 'green capitalism,' 'democracy and freedom,' these are all false terms, mystifying our perception of the situation instead of allowing us to think through it. This is precisely where humour can be most affective/effective. By rupturing our everyday subjectivity, by dislodging the reality in which we find ourselves, humour is a post-political liberation, a carnivalesque realisation of our un-freedoms, a dissentful changing of our ideological situation, which given frivolous persistency, has the potential to change our structural one as well.

Perhaps the post-political terrain is most fertile if we return to examples of Radio Alice, Project Chanology, and importantly, Subcomandante Marcos and the Zapatistas. The frailty and imperfection of resistance under neoliberal subjugation forms the basis that connects their various humours—a tactical frivolity which frames the essence of revolt as an ongoing process that takes place through engagement—'asking we walk' transformed into 'laughing we walk' by connecting experiences and aims in humorous and human terms to create a point of reference for people locally and internationally. Everyone is familiar with the types of mistakes, doubts, and challenges that the social movements have always faced. We all know, from our daily lives, that existence cannot be 'planned', that the best results are often achieved by cooperation and discussion with others. While the danger of comedies of recognition are always present, social and political change lies in the ambiguities of humour, its ability to eradicate the spaces between 'us' and 'them' over shared moments of unmediated and unmitigated laughter directed strategically and contagiously towards the bastions of power. Humour is immediacy. It is not just some distant goal but a method to get there—an initiation of a spark of collective energy that does not entrench a ready-made theory of where to go, but initiates an infective eruption that can never be fully quelled. For every Radio Alice that is brutally repressed and every Lulzsec that is maliciously infiltrated there is a new post-media ecology that moves in to fill the space. Thus the post-political potentials of tactical frivolity should not necessarily be framed as a means to initiate a fully comprehensive alternative order to neoliberal capitalism, but as a persistent process through which social movements can delegitimise hegemonic power in order to clear (and re-clear) the stage for something else. Humour as a means, not end in itself.

Conclusion

In his volume *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious* (1905, 2003:161), Sigmund Freud wrote: "Humour is not resigned; it is rebellious [...] by making our enemy small, inferior, despicable, or comic, we achieve the enjoyment of overcoming them." Utilising these Freudian notions, Egon Larsen (1980) adds that tendentious jokes are first and foremost a way to make criticism possible against those in positions of power. Thus the joke represents a rebellion against authority, liberation from pressure, and a safety valve in which oppressed peoples preserve some sanity. Moreover, those in power have no appropriate

recourse against the mockeries and mimics. Fighting back makes them look even more ridiculous. As such, tactical frivolity is moving us towards a post-political realisation that the definition of 'political' has become a problem in itself. However, as this paper draws out, what results from political humour can be convoluted. Alongside Critchley (2002) and Coulthard's (2014) that humour can serve as a control function by reenforcing various comedies of reconciliation and containment—which provides temporary relief that disarms potentially conflictive situations and naturalises prejudice by denigrating certain sectors of society—the authentic rage that humour expresses struggles to transform itself into structural change—revolt without the revolution. Yet as the actions of the Autonomists and Anonymous make explicit, time and again, humorous vectors of force have proven their efficacy in empowering social movements to construct and reconstruct spaces of autonomous revolt. Hence the post-political potential of humour, while definite, is by no means a guarantee that transformation is forthcoming.

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