

## Introduction

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*November 18, 2011.* University of California-Davis students demonstrating in solidarity with Occupy Wall Street sit with their arms linked, blocking a sidewalk. When they refuse to disband, campus security officers shower them with pepper spray. A photograph of Lieutenant John Pike casually shooting an orange stream at the bowed heads of students goes viral as the meme “Casually Pepper Spray Everything Cop,” where Pike is photoshopped into various scenes representing US democracy, including the Statue of Liberty, Mt. Rushmore, and John Trumbull’s 1819 painting *Declaration of Independence*. These images become emblematic of the excessive police force deployed against peaceful protestors and reveal the limits to America’s sacred right of free speech.



Figure 1.1. Pepper Spray Cop on Trumbull’s *Declaration of Independence*.

*June 4, 2013.* Chinese web activists seeking to mark the anniversary of the Tiananmen Square protests circulate creative parodies of the iconic “Tank Man” photograph, as search terms related to the incident are blocked on Sina Weibo, China’s popular micro-blogging site. In one, the tanks have been replaced with four giant yellow rubber duckies (evoking the rubber duck sculpture in Hong Kong’s Victoria Harbor); in another, the scenario is built out of Legos; in yet another, the scene is reenacted by a cow facing down a line of approaching bulldozers. Through these remakes of the “Tank Man” image, Chinese dissidents could commemorate the Tiananmen massacre, even while the authoritarian state seeks its official erasure.



Figure 1.2. Rubber Ducky Tank Man.

*November 23, 2013.* A group of activists stage a photo shoot in the Brooklyn, New York, IKEA store in response to the home furnishing giant’s purging images of a lesbian couple from the Russian edition of *IKEA Family Live* magazine. IKEA had removed the photographs to comply with Russia’s new law banning “gay propaganda.” To protest the Russian law and IKEA’s capitulation, photographer Alexander Kargaltsev (granted asylum in the United States based on his LGBT status) snaps shots of smiling gay and lesbian couples posing in kitchens and

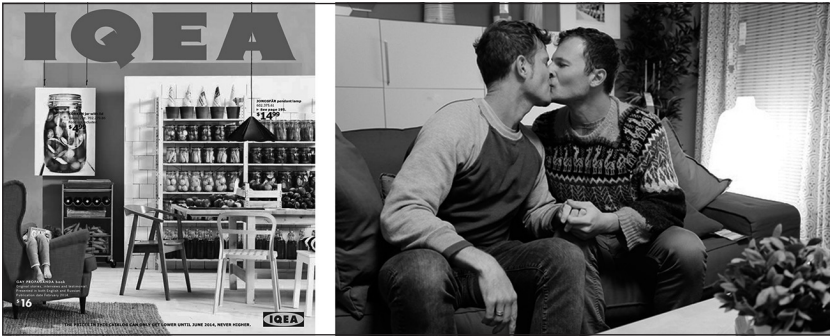


Figure 1.3. “IQEA.” Photo by Alexander Kargaltsev.

on couches. Alternative publisher OR Books posts the “IQEA” catalog images online, helping to shed public light on Russia’s persecution of gays and lesbians in the months leading up to the Winter Olympics in Sochi, Russia.<sup>1</sup>

*May 28, 2014.* On the day of multinational energy giant Chevron’s annual shareholder meeting, the hashtag #AskChevron began trending on Twitter. Ostensibly a corporate-sponsored PR initiative to engage the public via social media—modeled after #AskJPM (JP Morgan), which infamously backfired—#AskChevron was in fact a case of “brandjack-ing.” The activist group Toxic Effect had paid to promote the hashtag on



Figure 1.4. #AskChevron Twitter Jam.

Twitter, seeking to draw attention to Chevron's sordid record of environmental damage and malfeasance in Ecuador by inviting people to tweet their own questions to the corporation. Thousands responded, asking a variety of questions under the hashtag, including "What's your beef with the Earth?," "Are you the devil?," and "Can you tell me which country I should bribe & dump my toxins in? Larry Summers won't return my calls" (Abrams 2014).

*April 10, 2015.* Thousands of ghostly figures, chanting and carrying placards, marched in front of the Spanish Parliament in Madrid to protest the draconian new Citizen Safety Law, which prohibits gathering in front of Congress, assembling in public without a permit, and photographing or recording police. This was the first hologram demonstration in history, mounted by Holograms Por La Libertad, whose website invited people to upload their images, voices, and messages to participate virtually in the march.<sup>2</sup> The high-tech protest cleverly outflanked the authorities by publicly performing a hauntingly powerful message, but leaving no bodies to be arrested, charged, or fined.



Figure 1.5. Virtual protest march in Madrid, Spain, on April 10, 2015. Photo by Reiner Wandler.



Figure 1.6. “Homeland is racist” graffito, which appears on the series. Photo courtesy of the artists.

October 11, 2015. Tonight’s episode of the American TV series *Homeland* includes scenes of a fictional refugee camp meant to be located in Lebanon, close to the Syrian border. As the protagonists wander through camp, we see graffiti in Arabic script on the walls—apparently symbols of the politically explosive atmosphere in the region. However, what the show’s producers and most of *Homeland*’s audience fail to realize is that the Arabic slogans actually translate to “*Homeland* is racist,” “The situation is not to be trusted,” and “This show does not represent the views of the artists.” The Berlin- and Cairo-based “Arabian Street Artists,” originally hired by *Homeland*’s producers to lend an “authentic” look to the show’s set, have subversively expressed their views about the hit series’ “inaccurate, undifferentiated and highly biased depiction of Arabs, Pakistanis, and Afghans, as well as . . . the so-called Muslim world in general” (Amin, Kapp, and Karl 2015).

In each of these examples, activists have appropriated, reworked, and disseminated cultural symbols in order to contest meanings and challenge dominant forms of power. This book examines phenomena like these—creative acts of popular intervention performed by people seeking change, using whatever means and materials are at hand. We consider these actions instances of “culture jamming,” a term that first came into widespread use in the early 1990s. “Culture jamming” commonly refers to a range of tactics used to critique, subvert, and otherwise “jam” the workings of consumer culture. These tactics include media pranks, advertising parodies, textual poaching, billboard appropriation, street performance, and the reclamation of urban spaces for noncommercial use. Using various forms of semiotic defamiliarization, culture jamming seeks to interrupt the flow of mainstream, market-driven communications—scrambling the signal, injecting the unexpected, jarring audiences, provoking critical thinking, inviting play and public participation.

Over the past few decades, techniques of culture jamming have transformed considerably as activists have come to adapt them to different contexts and deploy them via rapidly changing communication media. Whereas early jammers used spray paint and photocopiers, today most of them carry digital recording devices in their pockets and use social media platforms like Facebook or Twitter to aid in the logistical coordination of actions and the rapid dissemination of content. Activists today no longer confront a monolithic broadcast media behemoth that targets passive, unwitting audiences; rather, they operate within what Henry Jenkins (2006) has called “convergence culture,” where top-down and bottom-up culture intersect and where media consumers are also media producers. Furthermore, the targets of culture jamming have expanded from advertising and consumerism to include numerous other social and political issues.

The essays, interviews, and creative work assembled in this book explore the shifting contours of culture jamming—plumbing its history, mapping its transformations, testing its force, and assessing its efficacy. While some might consider culture jamming passé, this volume argues for the concept’s continuing relevance in our globalized, networked world. Culture jamming tactics have been employed in a variety of contexts in recent years, as our opening snapshots suggest; even given the



hegemonic power of global capital (and the governments that underwrite it), people around the world are finding ways to resist and creatively intervene. Grassroots activists, artists, and ordinary citizens are reclaiming public space, spreading alternative messages, and fighting for democratic access to media channels. *Culture Jamming: Activism and the Art of Cultural Resistance* examines these actions in order to shed light on the possibilities for creative resistance in the twenty-first century.

## Roots and Routes

Like most master terms, “culture jamming” is contested and open to multiple interpretations. One common definition frames culture jamming as essentially negative: jamming up or blocking the flow of commercial messages. Christine Harold, in her 2004 essay reprinted in this volume (chapter 2), calls this type of jamming sabotage, tracing the etymology of that term to “sabot,” the wooden clogs worn in many European nations in the nineteenth century. She writes, “‘Saboter,’ then, meant . . . to ‘botch,’ presumably by throwing one’s wooden shoes into the machinery. ‘Sabotage’ means literally to ‘clog’ with one’s clogs.” An alternative view, articulated by Mark LeVine in chapter 4, likens culture jamming to a musical jam session, where artists and activists gather to experiment with cultural forms and play with one another.<sup>3</sup> In this view, culture jamming is not merely *anti*-consumer capitalism, a critical or negating force; it is also a creative and constructive one, seeking artfully to invent new visions for the future. These two approaches, of course, need not be mutually exclusive: indeed, LeVine asserts that culture jamming should be “both critical and positive . . . perform[ing] an inherent critique of the existing system while also showing the way forward to a different future.”

While the term “culture jamming” has a relatively short history, its philosophical roots and artistic/activist precursors wend back at least a century. An early version of the expression was coined by Negativland, the San Francisco–based experimental audio collage band whose record *Over the Edge, Vol. 1: Jamcon ’84* included a track called “Crosley Bendix Reviews JamArt and Cultural Jamming.” On the album, Negativland’s Don Joyce (as faux radio commentator Crosley Bendix) discusses billboard banditry, stating, “The studio for the cultural jammer is the world

at large. His tools are paid for by others—art with *real* risk.” Joyce alludes to the covert alterations performed in the 1970s and early 1980s by underground groups including California-based Billboard Liberation Front and the Australian ensemble BUGA UP (Billboard Utilising Graffitists Against Unhealthy Promotion). The term “jamming” here was borrowed from the vernacular of CB (citizens band) radio, where it refers to the rogue practice of interrupting broadcasts and interfering with conversations.

In December of 1990, cultural critic Mark Dery launched the term into the mainstream with his *New York Times* article “The Merry Pranksters and the Art of the Hoax.” Dery offered a first conceptual account of “cultural jamming” in his review of a new generation of media-savvy guerrilla artists—Robbie Conal, Jerry Johnson, and Joey Skaggs, as well as art collectives like Church of the SubGenius—who used semiotic appropriation, sociopolitical satire, and media hoaxes to articulate dissent. “Cultural jamming,” explains Dery, “is artistic ‘terrorism’ directed against the information society in which we live.” Dery’s writings on the subject developed into his seminal essay, *Culture Jamming: Hacking, Slashing, and Sniping in the Empire of Signs*, published in 1993 as part of Open Magazine’s Pamphlet Series and reprinted in this volume (chapter 1).<sup>4</sup>

Dery asserts that culture jamming is an “elastic category” that “accommodates a multitude of subcultural practices.” He situates culture jamming on a historic continuum of artistic resistance, including pre-modern folk festivals, artistic movements of high modernity (Dada, Surrealism, Artaud’s theater of cruelty), sociopolitical satire, and pop and appropriation art, William Burroughs’s cut-up collage, Situationist *détournement*, alternative media practices, Yippie antics, and graffiti art. Describing renegade jammers, Dery writes, “Part artistic terrorists, part vernacular critics, culture jammers, like [Umberto] Eco’s ‘communications guerrillas,’ introduce noise into the signal as it passes from transmitter to receiver, encouraging idiosyncratic, unintended interpretations.” He also calls jammers “Groucho Marxists,” highlighting their emphasis on play and having fun while attacking dominant ideologies.

In the early 1990s, Dery also published a series of articles in *Adbusters* magazine, the first of which was “Subvertising: The Billboard Bandit as Cultural Jammer.” The Adbusters Media Foundation, founded in 1989 by Kalle Lasn and Bill Schmalz, was on a mission to “break the spell that



advertising has cast over our culture” and to protest the lack of democratic access to the mass media (Lasn and Schmalz 1989). Soon after Dery introduced the term to Lasn and company, the Media Foundation took up “culture jamming” as its signature catchphrase, dubbing its website the “Culture Jammers’ Headquarters.” The advertising-free *Adbusters* magazine featured parody ads and cultural critique and promoted anti-consumer campaigns like Buy Nothing Day and TV Turnoff Week. Circulation grew steadily through the 1990s, and the publication won Canada’s Magazine of the Year award in 1999. To this day, *Adbusters* remains an important voice in the alternative scene of culture jammers and critics; the magazine put out the initial call to “Occupy Wall Street” on September 17, 2011, with a poster of a dancer balancing on the back of the bronze Wall Street bull.

Drawing on material from the magazine, Lasn published a book-length manifesto in 1999 titled *Culture Jam: The Uncooling of America™*. His book traces the origins of and philosophy behind *Adbusters*, framing culture jamming as revolutionary praxis. Lasn opens with a bold proclamation: “We call ourselves culture jammers. We’re a loose global network of media activists who see ourselves as the advance shock troops of the most significant social movement of the next twenty years. Our aim is to topple existing power structures and forge major adjustments to the way we will live in the twenty-first century” (xi). Lasn’s book is a wake-up call seeking to jar readers out of their consumption-induced stupors; a cry of rage against the colonization of our physical and mental environments by marketing messages; a vehement critique of privately owned, advertising-driven media and corporate personhood; and a demand for returning democracy to the airwaves. The book also offers instruction in culture jamming tactics, from small personal acts of resistance, to petitioning the government, to “meme warfare.”<sup>5</sup> Lasn’s style is brash and irreverent, and an insurgent ethos permeates the book from the very beginning: its epigraph is Marshall McLuhan’s proclamation that World War III will be “a guerrilla information war with no division between military and civilian participation” (McLuhan 1970, 66).

Another author from Canada, journalist Naomi Klein, published her bestseller *No Logo: Taking Aim at the Brand Bullies* later that same year. Klein’s analysis of branding, globalization, labor abuses, and the anti-sweatshop movement includes a chapter on culture jamming, which

she likens to “semiotic Robin Hoodism” (280). *No Logo* struck a chord with an audience that was growing more alarmed about the expanding power of multinational corporations and more critical of the neoliberal forces driving globalization. Klein argues that in the late twentieth century, multinational corporations based in the global North had largely shifted their energies from making products to building brands, and as such, brands had become a ripe target for attack. Indeed, many demonstrations of the anti-globalization “movement of movements” during the early years of the twenty-first century included both negative jams against brands and corporate capital and positive jams where people from various groups assembled in public spaces, collaborating in raucous, hopeful, carnivalesque “protestivals” (see St. John 2008).

The dramatic protests at the 1999 World Trade Organization meeting in Seattle, for instance, brought together a large and diverse coalition of activists, including labor unions, environmentalists, farmers, feminists, faith-based organizations, and advocates for fair trade, public health, and indigenous and human rights. Protestors not only physically jammed the streets with their bodies—singing, dancing, marching, some dressed as sea turtles and other fauna—but also took direct aim at corporate brands. Black bloc anarchists attacked global brands by vandalizing Seattle’s Nike Town storefront and throwing a hammer through a Starbucks window.<sup>6</sup>

Subsequent antiglobalization protests occurred at meetings of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank in Washington, DC, and Prague (2000), at the European Union summit in Gothenberg (June 2001), and at the G8 summit in Genoa (July 2001). These demonstrations involved culture jamming actions as well. Autonome a.f.r.i.k.a gruppe (2002), the anonymous guerrilla-communications collective based in Germany, describes how the Prague and Genoa protestors engaged in the “tactical distortion of signs”:

The hip-swinging fairies of the “Pink Block” not only managed to penetrate into the symbolic “heart of the beast” . . . they also created images that took the icon of the stone-throwing street fighter against the police to the point of absurdity. The warrior is a fighting woman in pink, she is a samba dancer. A year later in Genoa, it was Martians, UFOs, the U-NO men and women soldiers of the PublixTheatreCaravan, bikini girls, tire

men, and others that distorted and alienated the firmly fixed image of what a radical demonstration is supposed to look like and how it is to act. (3)

These creative jams confronted authority with imagination, subverting the stereotype of the angry, fist-waving protestor. As Steven Duncombe (2007) puts it, such “mass protests create temporary autonomous zones: a living, breathing, dancing imaginary form of a world turned upside down” (23).<sup>7</sup>

The most comprehensive scholarly account of culture jamming to date is Christine Harold’s 2007 monograph *Our Space: Resisting the Corporate Control of Culture*, which expands upon her 2004 essay reprinted here. Harold describes culture jamming as an “insurgent political movement” that seeks to “undermine the marketing rhetoric of multinational corporations” in order to “rescue publics from being consumed by consumption” (xxv–xxvii). From her analysis of a wide range of culture jamming examples, Harold discerns three “rhetorical postures”: sabotage, appropriation, and intensification. Sabotage seeks to block or jam the workings of consumer culture using parody and inversion; saboteurs are critical nay-sayers, and as such, wind up creating cynicism and perpetuating the very binaries they attack. Furthermore, Harold argues, sabotage is fundamentally limited in that it fails to “offer a new locus for the desires the market currently seems to satisfy—desires for community, identity, and beauty” (58). Appropriation, by contrast, is used by pranksters and pirates, and it works by “playfully and provocatively folding existing cultural forms in on themselves” (74). While pranking is less negative than sabotage, and does draw attention to the logics behind branding and marketing, Harold asserts that appropriation “still operates via an oppositional stance, a dialectic between the structures of capitalism and a mythical outside” (160).

Harold finds the greatest promise in a third posture, intensification—an idea she gleans from the Creative Commons project and other “open source” movements seeking to make intellectual and cultural work freely available for public collaboration. These projects do not assert or assume an outside space, removed from capitalism; rather, they creatively take up existing market concepts, like private property, and then intensify or amplify them in new ways. As such, intensification is

“not predicated on a dialectical relationship between publics and markets,” and so it can offer possibilities for resistance and political action “*within* the logics of postindustrial capitalism” (xxvii).

This notion of intensification is also integral to Henry Jenkins’s conception of convergence culture. Like Harold, Jenkins critiques the negative, pessimistic version of culture jamming; in 2006, he even suggested that “perhaps . . . the concept of culture jamming has outlived its usefulness. The old rhetoric of opposition and co-optation assumed a world where consumers had little direct power to shape media content and faced enormous barriers to entry into the marketplace, whereas the new digital environment expands the scope and reach of consumer activities” (215). To replace this oppositional model of jamming, in chapter 5 Jenkins proposes “cultural acupuncture,” a term that suggests participation rather than pure resistance, and focuses on how people amplify, intensify, and redirect the circulation of messages.

Both the concept and practices of culture jamming, then, have transformed considerably since the term was first coined in the mid-1980s. This book examines those transformations in an effort to help map the varied and shifting terrain of contemporary activism. While social movements bridging the millennium still rely upon older rhetorical forms—oratory, broadsides, protest songs, marches, and assemblies—many also incorporate variations of culture jamming.<sup>8</sup>

## Defining Culture Jamming’s M.O.

Culture jamming tactics vary across different historical and geographic contexts. While culture jammers seek to accomplish a range of ends, there are several features common to most of their interventions. Here, we outline a core set of qualities that define culture jamming’s *modus operandi*, illustrating not only what culture jamming *is*, but also what it *does*.

1. *Culture jamming appropriates.* Jammers typically retool existing cultural forms, poaching an image, corporate logo, advertisement, billboard, city wall, or retail space and transforming it into something new. Their raw materials are the images, sounds, landscapes, and habitual practices of late-modern consumer capitalism.<sup>9</sup> Lasn uses the metaphor of jujutsu to describe how culture jammers use the culture

industry's products and strategies against itself—for example, turning the cigarette-pushing Joe Camel into “Joe Chemo,” or organizing flash mobbers to prostrate themselves in mock worship before a shrine-like display at a Toys ‘R’ Us store. As Leah Lievrouw (2011) puts it, “What makes culture jamming distinctive . . . is that it ‘mines’ mainstream culture to reveal and criticize its fundamental inequities, hypocrisies, and absurdities” (80).

This process of mining mainstream culture and of appropriating and then transforming texts was called *détournement* by Situationist International, a collective of radical intellectuals and avant-garde artists who critiqued the “society of the spectacle” during the 1960s.<sup>10</sup> *Détournement* has no exact English counterpart, but close translations include “detour,” “diversion,” “subversion,” “hijacking,” and “misappropriation” (Harold 2007, 7; McLeod 2011, 3). The French term captures the critical impulse to turn culture back on itself: as Lasn (1999) writes, “Literally a ‘turning around,’ *détournement* [for the Situationists] involved rerouting spectacular images, environments, ambiances and events to reverse or subvert their meaning, thus reclaiming them” (103). *Détournement* prompts a double-take by viewers, creating a kind of “perspective by incongruity”: A hijacked billboard, for instance, not only attacks a specific brand, but prompts critical reflection upon the entire institution of advertising.<sup>11</sup> Street artist Banksy’s query “What are you looking at?” painted on a wall opposite a security camera, turns the authoritative gaze back on itself, protesting the encroachment of surveillance into public spaces.<sup>12</sup>

Because culture jamming appropriates existing materials, it is often technically illegal, in that it violates laws governing copyright and ownership. As both Kembrew McLeod (2007) and Lawrence Lessig (2004) have documented, intellectual property law in the United States effectively criminalizes the appropriation, remixing, and disseminating of various cultural forms. Hence culture jamming interventions may risk legal sanction; however, they importantly work to protest the shrinking realm of the intellectual and cultural commons, challenging copyright law with assertions of “fair use.”<sup>13</sup>

Christof Decker opens our Critical Case Studies section with his reading of 1970s compilation documentaries by the American filmmaker Emile de Antonio, focusing especially on the 1971 film *Millhouse: A White Comedy*. As Decker suggests, de Antonio’s appropriative use of

audiovisual material anticipated culture jamming practices and created “a unique convergence of documentary representation and media activism.” With his idea of a “national electronic archive,” de Antonio envisioned free and open access to the realm of media culture—a notion that has today been partially realized with online platforms such as YouTube.

The legal challenges posed by appropriative art is also a central theme of Evelyn McDonnell’s chapter on Shepard Fairey’s *Hope* poster, which rose to iconic status during Barack Obama’s 2008 presidential campaign. McDonnell traces the origins of Fairey’s form of culture jamming to the bricolage aesthetic of the 1970s punk scene, Dadaism and the appropriation art of the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, and the “sampling” practices of rap music. Her analysis of the legal showdown between Fairey and the Associated Press provides insights into the struggles over “free use” and illustrates, as she puts it, “what can happen to culture jammers when they fly too close to the sun.”

2. *Culture jamming is artful.* Another signature feature of culture jamming is that it is artful, in both senses of the word: it is typically clever and cunning, and also exhibits creative skill. Culture jammers play with form, creating works that are aesthetically pleasing or arresting, whether in visual, aural, or performative registers. Billboard jammers, for instance, don’t just deface or obliterate commercial messages; rather, they execute clever visual or verbal puns. Many of *Adbusters’* subvertisements over the years have been created by graphic designers and advertising industry artists—some of whom have jumped the corporate ship, and others who still work at ad agencies but moonlight as covert jammers—so the parody ads have the same professional quality as the originals they mimic.

Most of the jammers featured in this volume are artists of various stripes: painters, musicians, filmmakers, photographers, graphic and web designers, actors. Their work merges art and activism, endeavoring to shift how we experience and interpret the world. As painter Paul Klee said, “Art does not reproduce what we see; rather, it makes us see” (quoted in D’Ambrosio 2013, par. 7). Historically, artists have been the vanguard of societies—pushing boundaries, challenging traditions, introducing new and experimental ways of thinking and being.

Forerunners to culture jamming include Dadaists and Surrealists, artists who attacked the very norms defining “art.” Jammers also trouble



these boundaries, bringing art into the streets, and activism into museums. The Guerrilla Girls, featured in chapter 19, protest discriminatory practices of the Western art world, including the dearth of works by women and artists of color in museums. One of their most famous posters features a reclining woman, nude except for her snarling gorilla head mask, and pointedly asks: “Do women have to be naked to get into the Met. Museum? Less than 5% of the artists in the Modern Art sections are women, but 85% of the nudes are female.”

In another artistic jam of a high culture institution, Banksy surreptitiously installed in London’s British Museum a fake prehistoric painting depicting a caveman pushing a shopping cart: the sign hanging below read, “This finely preserved example of primitive art dates from the Post-Catatonic era” (BBC News 2005). Benedikt Feiten takes a closer look at Banksy’s work in chapter 9. Feiten argues that Banksy, who secretly applies stencil-sprayed images in a variety of urban contexts, “transform[s] public space into a field for improvisation.” More specifically, Banksy views his works as a way to “answer back” to the corporate (mis)use of public space as a site of one-way communication.

Other jammer artists also take their work to the streets, turning decaying building façades, fences and walls, homes and roofs into canvases. For instance, French “photographeur” JR pastes giant portraits of people onto these urban surfaces. JR has mounted enormous images of Israeli and Palestinian people, side by side and making playful faces, on the Israeli West Bank Barrier; he has pasted faces of women on forty hillside homes in the Providencia favela in Rio de Janeiro. Michael LeVan, in chapter 8, calls this “facing,” a “transformative practice in the face of poverty and oppression.” “Through his images of faces,” writes LeVan, “JR forces a confrontation with political complacency around the impact of poverty and economic globalization on people, communities, landscapes, and cities.” Another effect that LeVan attributes to JR’s practice of culture jamming is calling into question the professional system that is art, because JR installs his artworks in the public space—and, even more significantly, in underprivileged spaces—not in museums. Culture jamming, then, injects art into everyday spaces and routines, reclaiming them for the imagination.

3. *Culture jamming is often playful.* In confronting serious issues, culture jammers frequently use humor, pranks, and carnivalesque inver-

sions. Several critics writing about culture jamming note a distinction between the serious and the playful jammer; Naomi Klein (1999) frames this as a tension between “the hard-core revolutionary” and “the merry prankster” (283). The Yes Men certainly fit the latter category; they describe their form of intervention as “laughtivism” (see chapter 21). If culture jamming is fun to do, then it is more inviting to participants. If it uses humor and is funny to watch, then it is more engaging and appealing to audiences. Comedy disarms and opens the possibility for increased awareness and self-reflexivity.<sup>14</sup> Humor and play are also central to several interventions featured in the Culture Jammers’ Studio section of this book. Andrew Boyd, for one, explains how the playful, ironic schtick of “Billionaires for Bush” helped access “the economic unconscious, or the mythic dimension of money.”

Moritz Fink’s essay (chapter 11) analyzes the popular animated comedy *The Simpsons*, which cleverly presents corporate satire “to a massive audience in a context normally saturated with advertising and product placements.” Corporate satire, Fink argues, has long been a part of popular culture, going back to the magazine *Ballyhoo* in the first half of the twentieth century, and *MAD* magazine and wacky packs in the second. *The Simpsons* offers “gesture[s] of culture jamming in a context where we generally wouldn’t expect [them],” Fink observes. As a wildly successful mainstay of broadcast television entertainment, *The Simpsons* complicates notions of culture jamming as genuinely countercultural or anticapitalist rhetoric, and also provides a prominent platform for the humorous lampooning of a dominant culture shaped by brands and corporations.

4. *Culture jamming is (often) anonymous.* Culture jammers generally do not seek personal fame and fortune. Most of them work covertly—behind masks or under cover of night, using a pseudonym or the anonymity provided by the Internet. Street artists JR and Banksy are infamous for their mysterious identities. Balaclavas obscure the faces of Pussy Riot band members, as well as that of Subcommandante Marcos, spokesperson and leader of the Zapatista movement in Chiapas, Mexico. Guy Fawkes masks, popularized by Alan Moore and David Lloyd’s 1980s comics series *V for Vendetta*, are now a signature of the online hacktivist group Anonymous; these masks have also appeared in a variety of protests around the world (including Occupy, Arab Spring, anti-ACTA

protests in Europe, and antigovernment demonstrations in Bangkok). The Guerrilla Girls (2012), who wear gorilla masks and adopt names of famous female artists, explain the rhetorical force of anonymity:

Sometimes you gotta speak out publicly, but sometimes it works even better to speak out anonymously. This has its disadvantages, like working your whole life without getting any credit, but it has lots of advantages, too. Our anonymity, for example, keeps the focus on the issues, and away from our personalities. Plus . . . you won't believe what comes out of your mouth while wearing a gorilla mask! (n.p.)

The anonymity afforded by masks and pseudonyms, then, not only emboldens activists by providing a modicum of protection from the authorities, it also puts the critique, not its authors, center stage.<sup>15</sup>

With this anonymity, culture jamming also calls into question the very notions of authority and authorship. A variation of the pseudonym deployed by jammers is the “multiple name,” a collective identity through which anyone can perform an intervention under a common name. For example, the nom de plume “Luther Blissett,” which first appeared in Bologna in 1994, has been used by numerous activists in Europe and North America (see Deseriis 2010). Multiple names establish a sense of collectivity by linking actions that may be distant in time or space and by inviting participation by others. Autonome a.f.r.i.k.a gruppe (1997) asserts that “as people enter into this history and take part in the practices that are linked with the multiple names, they actually become part of the imaginary and collective person. . . . The multiple name cancels out the separation between the individual and the collective” (n.p.). In chapter 3, Marco Deseriis provides a taxonomy of “three orders of the fake” that are characteristic of culture jamming; he explains that “mythmaking fakes,” like the Luther Blissett Project, serve not so much to demystify or critique, but to “positively call a community, or a network of collaborators, into being.”

5. *Culture jamming is participatory.* Jammers put a premium on sharing and collaboration. In contrast to many other artists, culture jammers invite imitation and often provide free materials and practical instructions to empower others to become jammers, too. According to this logic, anyone could be a “Banksy” by articulating dissent with a stencil

and can of spray paint. Many culture jamming groups provide resources online: one example is the Yes Men's "Yes Lab," which includes an Action Switchboard and instructions to help activists "create fun, meaningful, and movement-building projects around the issues we all care about."<sup>16</sup> In chapter 17, Kembrew McLeod explains that "in many ways, pranking and culture jamming are twisted versions of participatory democracy in action" because "pranking blurs the line between audience and observer. It invites people to engage in the spectacles that pranksters create."

Some culture jamming actions explicitly solicit participation by the public at large. Carrie Lambert-Beatty (2010) calls this particular type "invitational culture jamming" (102). An example of this highlighted by Lambert-Beatty is the Bubble Project, started in 2005 by designer Ji Lee. Jammers can download and print empty speech bubbles, then paste them on advertisements in their communities, inviting future passersby to write in the blank spaces. As the project's manifesto states:

Our communal spaces are being overrun with ads. Train stations, streets, squares, busses, and subways now scream one message after another at us. Once considered "public," these spaces are increasingly being seized by corporations to propagate their messages. We the public, are both target and victim of this media attack. The Bubble Project instantly transform[s] these annoying corporate monologues into open public dialogues. They encourage anyone to fill them in with any expression, free from censorship. ("Manifesto" 2005, n.p.)

A prime benefit of invitational culture jamming is that "it connects like-minded people into real and virtual affinity groups" (Lambert-Beatty 2010, 101).

Our claim that culture jamming is participatory runs counter to Åsa Wettergren's (2003) assertion that culture jamming is "a strongly individualized form of resistance, engaging people who would avoid mass demonstrations or large manifestations" (38). While some jammers do act alone, their interventions often evoke public engagement and participation: one example of this is xtine burrough's Delocator.net, a user-driven database for finding locally owned coffee shops (see chapter 20).

The important question of whether culture jamming facilitates or hinders collective organizing is one taken up differently by authors in

this volume. Michael Serazio is rather skeptical, concluding that culture jamming is more stylistic and “cute” than revolutionary (chapter 10). Henry Jenkins, on the other hand, is more optimistic, arguing that collaborations forged around popular culture and fan affinities can provide on-ramps to political activism (chapter 5).<sup>17</sup> As his example of one fan community, the Harry Potter Alliance (HPA), shows, media activism increasingly assumes an inside perspective. Rather than condemning “the System” per se, it embraces some elements offered by the cultural industries while exposing and decrying others. Jenkins writes, “What the HPA calls ‘cultural acupuncture’ embraces a logic of participation rather than resistance; fan activists claim ownership over the materials of popular culture rather than disavowing them; and these new forms of attention-based advocacy take as a given the capacity to take collective action in order to call out issues that should be part of the society’s larger political agenda.”

6. *Culture jamming is political.* Culture jamming does political work in that it critically engages narratives of the dominant capitalist culture. At its most trenchant, culture jamming challenges existing structures of power, seeking to reveal hypocrisy and injustices, spark public outrage, and promote collective action.

Early culture jammers primarily targeted corporate branding and consumerism, fighting against the proliferation of billboards and shopping malls and the excessive branding of public places such as Times Square. Some of these interventions moved beyond critiquing over-consumption per se to contest political injustices embedded in specific products. For instance, in the early 1990s, the Barbie Liberation Organization (BLO) protested the sexist assumptions behind Mattel’s talking Barbie doll, which said, “I love shopping!” and “Math class is hard.” The BLO covertly swapped the voice boxes of Barbies with those of talking GI Joe dolls, and then returned them to stores. Unwitting customers took home Barbies who yelled, “Vengeance is mine!” and GI Joes who cooed, “Let’s plan our dream wedding!” (see also Harold, chapter 2). In 2001, MIT graduate student Jonah Peretti placed an order for a personalized pair of Nike iD sneakers, which buyers could customize with their names, a short slogan, or graphic content. Peretti requested that the word “sweatshop” be emblazoned on his new Nikes—a clear jab at Nike’s unethical labor practices. Nike rejected Peretti’s order, claiming

that it contained “inappropriate slang”; Peretti retaliated by forwarding his e-mail exchange with Nike to friends and ultimately posting it on the Web. The story got picked up by the mainstream media, including NBC’s *Today Show* and the *Wall Street Journal* (see Peretti 2001).

Later activists widened the culture jamming scope to target both corporate and political entities, seeking to draw public attention to a variety of political struggles. The Yes Men impersonate World Trade Organization officials or Dow Chemical employees to subvert government and corporate discourses from within (see chapter 21). A flash mob in Oakland, California, stages a song and dance routine in the frozen foods aisle attacking Whole Foods CEO John Mackey’s opposition to national health care reform (see chapter 13). The Italian collective IOCOSE launches a parody e-mail spam campaign to protest the right-wing conservative turn by the Italian Democratic Party (see chapter 23). And the artist Paolo Cirio hacks into the Cayman Island Company Register website in order to “democratize” access to offshore corporate tax havens (see chapter 22). In chapter 15, Wazhmah Osman analyzes multiple culture jams protesting US drone strikes in Afghanistan and Pakistan by making innocent victims visible, thereby revealing the racist hypocrisy of the Western “white savior” complex and debunking the myth of the surgically clean, bloodless war. None of these examples involves semiotic play for its own sake: all are interventions with specific targets and clear political aims.<sup>18</sup>

In recent years, culture jamming aesthetics have also seeped into mainstream politics. As candidates, parties, and even nations embrace branding strategies, those brands become ripe targets for parody, satire, and *détournement*. In chapter 16, Anna Baranchuk examines how the feminist collective Pussy Riot attempted to jam Russia’s post-Cold War nation branding efforts. She concludes that, while Pussy Riot’s performances drew praise from Western onlookers, their jam largely failed for the Russian audience, in that it further deepened lines of political and generational division. In the United States, political culture jamming has been waged by television humorists Jon Stewart (host of *The Daily Show*) and Stephen Colbert (host of *The Colbert Report*),<sup>19</sup> as well as by folks at home with access to YouTube who create parodies of political ads or mash-up videos mocking candidates (see Warner 2007; Serazio 2012; Day 2011). Andrew Boyd’s contribution to this



book (chapter 18) recounts the satirical performances of “Billionaires for Bush”; Kembrew McLeod explains in chapter 17 a prank in which his alter-ego, the RoboProfessor, confronted presidential candidate Michelle Bachman on the campaign trail about her homophobia. Culture jamming interventions—symbolically and sometimes quite literally—have migrated from the shopping mall and Times Square to the National Mall and Tahrir Square.

7. *Culture jamming operates serially.* In most cases, culture jamming occurs not as a singular, unique event, but as a series of related episodes. Just as Absolut Vodka’s iconic series of advertisements is instantly recognizable, so, too, are *Adbusters’* parody ads: a bottle in the shape of a noose (“Absolute Hangover”); red chairs arranged in the outline of a bottle (“Absolute AA”); an absent bottle outlined in white chalk, like in a homicide scene (“Absolute End”). Reverend Billy’s Church of Stop Shopping amphibiomorphic choir members transform into extinct Golden Toads over and over, descending on Chase Banks in New York, San Francisco, London, and elsewhere. This serial quality to culture jamming means that actions are repeatable—they can be taken up and reproduced easily by others, in different places, thus sustaining and rhizomatically expanding the reach of the particular campaign. A Pussy Riot member declared that the band “has nothing to worry about, because if the repressive Putinist police crooks throw one of us in prison, five, ten, fifteen more girls will put on colorful balaclavas and continue the fight against their symbols of power” (quoted in Baranchuk, chapter 16).

Related to seriality and repetition is the concept of “meme,” which, though contested, also enjoys widespread use and recognition. Memes are small units of meaning that are easily repeated, copied, sometimes altered, and spread—such as Pepper Spray Everything Cop. Evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins (1976) first introduced the term in his book *The Selfish Gene*, where he likens cultural transmission to genetic transmission and asserts that memes propagate themselves by “leaping from brain to brain” (192). This biological transmission metaphor also underlies the popular expression “going viral” to describe the phenomenon of a meme—or YouTube video, or other cultural tidbit—suddenly becoming wildly popular and spreading into public awareness, often via social media. Henry Jenkins critiques the viral conceptualization

of memes because it frames people as passive host organisms with no agency or critical capacities. He and co-authors Sam Ford and Joshua Green (2013) offer the notion of “spreadable media” to replace the infection and contamination metaphors; in their model, “audiences play an active role in ‘spreading’ content rather than serving as passive carriers of viral media” (21).

We agree that Dawkins’s original definition of memes is problematic and that memes do spread thanks to actions by media users, rather than leaping spontaneously from brain to brain. That said, memes are still significant as units of cultural meaning that are immediately recognizable, can be appropriated and remade and spread, and often come to stand in metonymically for a larger argument or critique. Memes are especially important to understand as networked culture expands to become global in scope. Limor Shifman (2014) maintains that Internet memes play a “key role in contemporary formulations of political participation and cultural globalization” (171–72).

In this collection, Jack Bratich opens chapter 14 with a reading of “Occupy” as a meme. While the Occupy Wall Street protests of 2011 created the meme of “the 99%,” the phrases “We are the 99%” and “99% versus the 1%” have outlived the OWS encampments and been deployed by activists, organizations, and even some elected officials. The seriality and repeatability of memes and other forms of culture jamming play an important role in garnering recognition and fostering participation.<sup>20</sup> OWS, Bratich argues, was not just another meme: “For one thing,” he writes, “it mutated into a platform for other actions, even other memes (such as Pepper Spray Cop and . . . other Internet memes . . .). For another, the temporarily formed assembly mutated into something more enduring—a decentralized but resilient networked collective body.” The memetic and serial qualities of culture jamming, then, help to foster participation and collaboration.

8. *Culture jamming is transgressive.* Jamming interventions transgress boundaries both spatial and normative. Culture jammers often infiltrate the spaces governed by consumer capital, violating expected rules of behavior and thus eliciting surprise, confusion, amusement, or even shock. In their interview here (chapter 24), Reverend Billy and Savitri D note that their incursions into Disney and Starbucks stores reveal how the range of acceptable behaviors in commercial spaces is very narrow in-

deed. Rebecca Walker (chapter 13) explains the profound impact of such spatial transgressions: “In a flash 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 and (2) reminding the audience of the mob of the absurd and arbitrary nature of so-called ‘normal’ behavior. To say it differently, the flash mob reminds us that we actually have a choice.” Walker asserts that flash mobs, as new forms of culture jamming, “confound the corporation machine, intrigue passersby, and deterritorialize behavioral norms.”

Several versions of the flash mob were deployed as part of the #BlackLivesMatter movement in the fall of 2014. Citizen protests had erupted in cities across the United States after a white police officer killed unarmed African American teenager Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, on August 9. At a St. Louis Symphony concert in early October, several symphony-goers stood in the audience and sang out the Civil Rights song, “Which Side Are You On?” as banners reading “Racism Lives Here” and “Requiem for Michael Brown 1996–2014” unfurled from the balcony. In Oakland, California, and New York City, activists launched #BlackBrunch, peacefully entering the predominantly white spaces of trendy restaurants during weekend brunch hours and standing solemnly amidst the tables to read aloud the many names of African Americans killed by police. These interventions sparked mixed reactions: some observers stood in solidarity with the protestors, while others objected to being inconvenienced.

Performances like these transgress the unstated rules of decorum and propriety. Other jams are more irreverent and explicitly confrontational. In chapter 12, Tony Perucci explores an abrasively transgressive form of culture jamming he calls “ruptural performance,” which resists legibility and often prompts the response, “What the f\*\*k is that?” Perucci investigates innovative and sometimes perplexing culture jams executed by groups in Brazil, the United States, and Russia protesting media censorship, consumer capitalism, and corruption in electoral politics. These performances disrupt the onlooker’s gaze by staging bizarre actions in unexpected places, drawing upon the theatrical traditions of Dada, Brecht, Artaud, and Abbie Hoffman. Ruptural performance, Perucci explains, “jams up the meaning-making process itself. It willfully con-

fuses . . . and utilizes the very bafflement that ensues as a strategic advantage in challenging power.”

Culture jamming is also transgressive in a legal sense, since it frequently disregards copyright law and private property ownership. The collaborative, anonymous, and appropriating qualities of culture jamming described above run counter to the individualistic, accumulative, zero-sum mentality driving corporate capitalism. Through various modes of trespassing private property, jammers press for fair use and promote the idea of the commons.

Finally, culture jamming in the twenty-first century is traversing national boundaries and growing into a global phenomenon. While jamming emerged first in the San Francisco Bay Area and Pacific Northwest, centers of both technological innovation and countercultural activism, it quickly spread overseas to other late-capitalist consumer societies in Europe and Australia. Since the turn of the millennium, culture jamming has traveled yet farther, partly in response to the global expansion of consumer capitalism and partly thanks to the rise of digital networks and proliferation of increasingly powerful mobile devices. In China, netizens engage in *e gao*, a popular form of fan-subbing and satirical media spoofs (Meng 2011). In Turkey in the summer of 2013, culture jammers contested the lack of media coverage of clashes between police and Gezi Park protesters with televisual memes (Tufeci 2013). In South Africa, a Rhodes student made parodic t-shirts that *détourned* South African Breweries’ (SAB) slogan “America’s lusty, lively beer, Carling Black Label Beer, Brewed in South Africa” into “Africa’s lusty, lively exploitation since 1652, Black Labour White Guilt, No regard given worldwide” (Rens 2005, 21). In Brazil, street artists leveled poignant critiques against the social and economic impact of the 2014 FIFA World Cup; photos of murals that depict starving children next to symbols of the brave new sports world went viral on social media. In Mexico, the Zapatista Air Force attacked Mexican Army barracks in Chiapas with a fleet of paper airplanes, “which flew through and over the barbed wire of the military encampment, each carrying a discursive missile: messages and poems for the soldiers” (Lane 2003, 130). As a transgressive, boundary-blurring form of activism, culture jamming is constantly on the move—emerging in unexpected places, adapting to new contexts, inventing new modes of critique.

## Critiques and Limitations

At its best, culture jamming is a creative and inventive mode of public engagement: it cultivates critical attitudes toward commercial culture and dominant institutions, and helps foster belief that the world can be different. That said, culture jamming is not a panacea, nor is it the best or only tool for achieving social change. Indeed, culture jamming has been both widely celebrated and roundly critiqued in the past few decades by academics, in the popular press, and even on the very pages of *Adbusters* magazine, in the letters submitted by readers (see Haiven 2007). Here we engage the most significant critiques of culture jamming—not necessarily to debunk or discredit them, but rather to understand why these critiques have emerged and address the assumptions behind them. Several contributors to this book take critical positions as well, noting where some culture jamming interventions have failed, challenging certain definitions of the term, and offering revisions to or departures from older conceptualizations. To be sure, culture jamming does have limitations and cannot by itself achieve the grand, revolutionary aims often proclaimed by its champions.

In fact, the revolutionary rhetoric in which culture jamming is sometimes couched is one source of dissension. For instance, Lasn's (1999) introduction to *Culture Jam* issues a fervent call to arms:

We will strike by smashing the postmodern hall of mirrors and redefining what it means to be alive. We will reframe the battle in the grandest terms. The old political battles that have consumed humankind during most of the twentieth century—black versus white, Left versus Right, male versus female—will fade into the background. The only battle still worth fighting and winning, the only one that can set us free, is The People versus the Corporate Cool Machine. (xvi)

While this insurgent tone may quicken the pulse and stir readers' passions, it also invites visions of a full-fledged social movement fighting to achieve massive change. Taken literally, such a call for revolution seems overblown, and the People's Army feebly equipped, if its primary weapons are *détourned* billboards and subvertisements. Furthermore, in the passage above, Lasn sets up a stark binary, asserting the righteous

authenticity of “us” versus “them.” This kind of dualistic framing—where culture jammers are rebel outsiders, attacking or evading the dominant spectacle staged by the Powers that Be—is problematic and has drawn considerable flak. Max Haiven (2007), for instance, critiques *Adbusters* for furnishing its followers “with the smug satisfaction of being ‘outside’ or ‘knowingly critical’ of (and thus no longer complicit with) consumer culture” (91).

Underlying this us/them, outsider/insider model is a conviction that authentic experience exists only *outside* of consumer capitalism and that people can (and should) access authenticity by rejecting television, advertisements, shopping. Valerie Scatamburlo-D’Annibale (2009) observes that “there is a conceptual murkiness in the way that [Lasn] and others employ the term [authenticity]—while the presumably ‘inauthentic’ spectacle is contrasted with some vaguely defined authentic gestures, exactly what constitutes the ‘authentic’ remains largely unarticulated” (226). “Authenticity” is a loaded term, particularly in late capitalist cultures where branding has come not only to dominate the marketing of consumer products, but also to inflect art, politics, religion, and even the crafting of our individual identities. In her book *Authentic™: The Politics of Ambivalence in a Brand Culture*, Sarah Banet-Weiser (2012) explores the complex invocations of authenticity in brand cultures, noting that formerly authentic spaces, like religion, are now increasingly branded and that authenticity *itself* has become a brand (11). Banet-Weiser suggests that we need to move beyond the reductive framing of “the authentic versus the fake, the empowered consumer versus corporate dominance” in order to understand the complex ways that brand cultures, as utopian spaces, are fundamentally ambiguous (13).

The insider/outsider binary is attacked by Joseph Heath and Andrew Potter (2004) in their fervent broadside against culture jamming, *Nation of Rebels: Why Counterculture Became Consumer Culture*. They contend that the very notion of counterculture is bunk and indict *Adbusters* for hypocritical posturing—for claiming to resist consumer culture while simultaneously peddling their own products, including the Blackspot sneaker, a logo-less shoe made using ethical labor practices. Heath and Potter assert that the revolutionary, antiestablishment attitude copped by jammers actually reflects the true spirit of capitalism and that counterculture “cool” has been used to sell products for decades. Countercul-



ture rebellion, they argue, is a sort of pseudo-rebellion, “a set of dramatic gestures that are devoid of any progressive political or economic consequences and that detract from the urgent task of building a more just society” (65). They conclude that culture jamming is both a cop-out and a dangerous distraction from the real and important—if less hip and “cool”—work of democratic political reform.

Heath and Potter (2004) also attack culture jammers and their ilk for treating “the system” as monolithic—but in the end, we find that these authors essentially do the same thing to “counterculture.” They reductively paint jammers as individuals concerned primarily with image, who want to look hip by rejecting mainstream brands, but who remain beholden to consumer capitalism all the same: hippies driving VW buses and listening to Hendrix; hipsters buying Blackspots and feeling superior for dissing Starbucks. Certainly, traces of this ethos can be found in the pages of *Adbusters* and among some counterculture types, but Heath and Potter’s caricature of counterculture fails to adequately capture the range of attitudes and actions that constitute culture jamming, as this collection demonstrates. Furthermore, Heath and Potter miss the rhetorical and political opportunities that flow from countercultural activism. Their critique of the Blackspot sneaker campaign, as Harold (2007) incisively puts it, “is unfortunate and unfair, *especially* given that their ultimate thesis is that countercultural calls for revolution distract people from more valuable incremental reforms. Their book is so set on disabusing the masses of the countercultural ‘myth’ that they fail to see that, in this case, *the myth sells valuable incremental reform*” (68). This point is an important one: the bold, brash, irreverent, and even revolutionary rhetoric of culture jamming can and does play a useful role in broader political movements.<sup>21</sup>

Several critics, Heath and Potter among them, note that culture jamming tactics have been deftly captured and redeployed by marketers, making it difficult if not impossible for culture jamming to maintain its critical bite. Michael Serazio’s chapter in this book examines how one agency, Crispin Porter + Bogusky, has coopted the edgy, “anti-advertisement” attitudes of culture jamming and effectively channeled them back into ads. Such cooptation, however, need not signal the demise or ultimate impotence of culture jamming in toto: rather, it alters the field of signs available for appropriation, pushing

culture jammers to invent new tactics, to morph and adapt and spread in unpredictable ways.

The final and perhaps most significant weakness of culture jamming is the potential danger that it becomes an end in itself. Scatamburlo-D'Annibale (2009) ties this to “discourse radicalism,” the idea that textual resistance—e.g., *détourning* a billboard or advertisement—becomes equivalent to, or a substitute for, political resistance (227). Some critics worry that culture jammers seeking authenticity outside of the consumer spectacle will simply retreat into that space of refuge, rather than struggle for structural political change. Or, in a related vein, that culture jamming will be used simply as a tool to encourage socially more “responsible” shopping—still a private act, still rooted in consumption.<sup>22</sup> Others hold that culture jamming lacks the serious Marxist class critique that drove the Situationists and that it is more stylistic than substantive. Worse yet, culture jamming might serve as a distraction, a steam-valve, or an obstacle to collective action.<sup>23</sup> As Henry Jenkins puts it in chapter 5, “Often, jammers have been accused of falling prey to a romance with resistance that locks them permanently outside the mechanisms of power through which lasting reforms might be won.”

In response to these many critiques, several authors in this book offer new versions of culture jamming that recalibrate its activist potential for the twenty-first century. Michael LeVan offers a meditation on “facing”; Henry Jenkins proposes “cultural acupuncture.” Jack Bratich advocates an ecological conceptualization of culture jamming rooted in polemology and the corporeal body politic, while Rebecca Walker suggests that “flash mobs” may be “the perfect platforms for culture jammers of the digital age, combining the power of live performance with the mass dissemination capabilities of the viral video.” Mark LeVine champions a musical, “auratic” understanding of culture jamming as joyful hybridity, asserting that, “culture jamming is the best, and perhaps only, way to grasp and work through the unprecedented complexity of globalization and the problems it has generated.”

\* \* \*

While the actions featured in *Culture Jamming: Activism and the Art of Cultural Resistance* span several decades and many countries, we do not claim to provide a comprehensive survey of the full breadth of culture

jamming activism or scholarship. Rather, this project brings together manifestoes, new critical scholarship, and statements by culture jammers themselves in order to foster a rich and provocative exchange. We hope that this collaborative work offers useful tools with which to think (and act!) and that it will serve as a springboard for future studies of culture jamming interventions yet to be seen.

In the face of widening income inequality, deepening struggles over globalization and fair trade, increasing private encroachment on the public commons, and accelerating global warming and climate disruption, we draw hope and inspiration from the artists and activists around the world who dare to imagine a radically different world. As Kalle Lasn (2000) said in an interview with one of us at the turn of the millennium:

If we dump this unsustainable consumer culture of ours, if we jam it into the ground and start creating a new culture from the bottom up, then who knows what that culture's going to be? It's up for grabs! That's the very nature of a culture—that nobody can predict in advance what it's going to be. At the moment we have this top-down culture, and we know what's in store if we keep that culture, but I like the unknown, the unpredictability of not being able to answer that question, of saying, "I don't know what it's going to be like, but it's gonna be fun finding out what kind of culture we'll make that has a non-commercial heart and soul." Of course, I think I know some of the contours of that new culture: it will be sustainable, have a true-cost marketplace, we'll be driving cars a lot less and probably using different kinds of foods. . . . But exactly how this new culture will pan out, nobody knows.

#### NOTES

- 1 See [www.orbooks.com](http://www.orbooks.com). OR Books is also publisher of *Gay Propaganda: Russian Love Stories*, co-edited by Masha Gessen and IKEA protest organizer Josef Huff-Hannon (2014). OR gets into the culture jamming act further by offering information and digital tools to help smuggle *Gay Propaganda* into Russia.
- 2 See the website at [www.hologramasporlalibertad.org](http://www.hologramasporlalibertad.org).
- 3 See also Branwyn (1997); Harold (2004); Harold (2007); Lambert-Beatty (2010); Fink (2012).
- 4 Dery (2010) notes that his Inner Grammarian prompted him to retool "cultural jamming" into "culture jamming." Today, the original pamphlet is available only

- through second-hand retailers or on Ebay. In 2010, Dery relaunched the essay with a new introduction on his website, [www.markdery.com](http://www.markdery.com).
- 5 Lasn (1999) explains: “A meme (rhymes with ‘dream’) is a unit of information (a catchphrase, a concept, a tune, a notion of fashion, philosophy or politics) that leaps from brain to brain. . . . Potent memes can change minds, alter behavior, catalyze collective mindshifts and transform cultures. Which is why meme warfare has become the geopolitical battle of our information age. Whoever has the memes has the power” (123). See also our discussion of memes below.
  - 6 Kevin DeLuca and Jennifer Peeples (2002) argue that this “symbolic violence,” directed at carefully selected property rather than at people, functions as an image event, or a mind bomb that provokes “the shock of the familiar made strange” (144).
  - 7 Here, Duncombe (2007) invokes Hakim Bey’s notion of “temporary autonomous zones,” or TAZs.
  - 8 A variety of these recent creative interventions are featured in the tactical manual *Beautiful Trouble: A Toolbox for Revolution* (Boyd and Oswald 2012) and its accompanying website, [www.beautifultrouble.org](http://www.beautifultrouble.org).
  - 9 This process of seizing and reassembling bits of culture was influenced by the Dadaists, who made collages by cutting up aesthetic artifacts and recombining them in new, provocative forms, or transformed ordinary objects into “art” by putting them in museums (exemplary here is Marcel Duchamp’s *Fountain* [1917]).
  - 10 Guy Debord ([1967] 2014) describes the “society of the spectacle” as a new mode of social control wherein authentic experience is supplanted by representations of consumer capitalism. The spectacle, writes Debord, “is not a collection of images; it is a social relation between people that is mediated by images” (2). For the Situationists’ concept of *détournement*, see Debord and Wolman ([1956] 2006), Debord ([1967] 2014, 109–10), and Marcus (1989).
  - 11 Kenneth Burke ([1937] 1984) describes perspective by incongruity as a “method for gauging situations by ‘verbal atom cracking.’ That is, a word belongs by custom to a certain category—and by rational planning you wrench it loose and metaphorically apply it to another category” (308).
  - 12 Zack Malitz (2012) argues that “*détournement* works because humans are creatures of habit who think in images, feel our way through life, and often rely on familiarity and comfort as the final arbiters of truth. Rational arguments and earnest appeals to morality may prove less effective than a carefully planned *détournement* that bypasses the audience’s mental filters by mimicking familiar cultural symbols, then disrupting them” (28–29).
  - 13 A prime example of this kind of protest is the Illegal Art show, put together by Carrie McLaren, publisher of *Stay Free!* Magazine. McLeod (2005) writes that the traveling show “won a small victory for freedom of expression’ by committing repeated acts of copyright civil disobedience” (145–46).

- 14 Åsa Wettergren (2009) links the playful fun of culture jamming to Bakhtin's account of utopian laughter (6).
- 15 As Graham St. John (2008) puts it, "Collective 'masking up' attracts attention to one's cause (rather than one's self), contesting the field of appearances through a kind of tactical disappearance" (178).
- 16 See [www.yeslab.org](http://www.yeslab.org).
- 17 In a similar vein, Stephen Duncombe (2002) writes, "Because cultural resistance often speaks in a more familiar and less demanding voice than political dissent it makes this move even easier. In this way cultural resistance works as a sort of stepping stone into political activity" (6).
- 18 Unlike postmodern pastiche—that is, "blank parody" bereft of parody's critical impulse (Jameson 1984, 65)—culture jamming critically comments on the appropriated signs, filling them with new counter-meanings and engaging in a confrontation with the dominant capitalist culture.
- 19 Perhaps one of the best examples here is the Super PAC started by Colbert in 2011, "Americans for a Better Tomorrow, Tomorrow," which raised over \$1 million. Colbert used the Super PAC to reveal the ludicrous loopholes and ambiguities in campaign financing after the 2010 US Supreme Court's *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission* decision. When Colbert later decided to explore running for office (for "President of the United States of South Carolina"), he signed over control of the Super PAC to Jon Stewart, who then referred to it as "The Definitely Not Coordinating with Stephen Colbert Super PAC." Ultimately, Colbert's Super PAC was retired, and proceeds were donated to charities.
- 20 See Davi Johnson's (2007) case for the meme as a useful tool for analyzing the political effects of cultural discourses, and for engaging in geographically-oriented materialist criticism.
- 21 Vince Carducci (2006) argues that culture jamming interventions into consumption can lead to changes in practices of production. "By exposing the inconsistencies on the producer side of the leger," he writes, "culture jammers may in fact be the avant-garde of the evolution of consumer society, encouraging producers to conform to new consumer expectations in order to garner sales, and thereby continuing the development of socially conscious production in Western capitalism" (123).
- 22 See, for instance, Richard Gilman-Opalsky (2013).
- 23 Heath and Potter (2004) put this point most acerbically when they assert that "countercultural rebellion is not just unhelpful, it is positively counterproductive. Not only does it distract energy and effort away from the sort of initiatives that lead to concrete improvements in people's lives, but it encourages wholesale contempt for such incremental changes" (8).

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