Culture Jammed The Art of Subverting Violence

Andreas Oberprantacher

"In mimesis slumber, tightly bound up in each other like cotyledons, the two sides of art: semblance and play."

Walter Benjamin

Versicolora

The history of mimesis in (and as) art is a history of desire as much as it is a history of disguise. If there is some truth to what Jacques Lacan says with regard to the "insertion" of the subject in the picture – that "it is not a question of harmonizing with the background but, against a mottled background, of becoming mottled" (Lacan 2000: 532) –, then the following anecdote told by Pliny the Elder might prove to be significant for an

analysis of contemporary media activism: sometime at the beginning of the 4th Century BC two painters, named Zeuxis and Parrhasius, competed with each other in a contest. Zeuxis, for his part, presented an image of grapes that was so true to nature that "birds flew up to the stagebuildings were it was hung" (Pliny 1991: 330). Parrhasius, on the other hand, presented a picture of a linen curtain that seemed so real in the eyes of Zeuxis that he requested the maker "that the curtain be drawn aside and the picture revealed" (ibid.). Once he had realized that he had been disguised, Zeuxis remitted the prize to Parrhasius while acknowledging that his artistic skills were such as to deceive even a painter.

At first, it may seem as if both Zeuxis and Parrhasius were engaged in what Plato's "stranger" characterizes as "falsehood" (Plato 1996: 41 [237a]) in *Sophist*, i.e. "likeness-making art" (Plato 1996: 39 [235d]), or Ernst Gombrich as "illusionism" (Gombrich 2000: 139) in *Art and Illusion*. But considering what Lacan has contributed to the analysis of this anecdote, most notably in his essay "Of the Gaze as *Objet Petit a*", among the various aspects that confer structure and meaning to the narrative there is one that should not be ignored:[1] while the birds' desire is driven by the wish to "devour" what is offered to their eyes, Zeuxis is primarily attracted (or irritated) by the veil and fooled by the symptomatic desire to get beyond the image itself. This "makes it clear", according to Lacan, "that if one wishes to deceive a man, what one presents to him is the painting of a veil, that is to say, something that incites him to ask what is behind it." (Lacan 2000: 538)

In view of this Lacanian exuberance I would like to emphasize that is not simply "the question that drives us", as Trinity says to Neo in the notorious movie *The Matrix* – if anything at all, it is the desire of the Other which composes and directs, paradoxically, the subject's "own" desire: according to Pliny's anecdote it is Parrhasius who presents his painting of a/as a curtain to Zeuxis. It is this curtain then, situated between two rivals, that catalyzes desire, but without being the desire's proper object – rather, it acts as its enigmatic agent. Taking this analytic instruction as a first lead, questions like "what is [really] behind" the concept or "logic of mimetic

desire" (Girard 2005: 193) become problematic inasmuch as they imply the existence of a spontaneous, if not original passion subsequently obscured by human culture – a hypothesis patently rejected by Lacan and, in part at least, also by René Girard.[2] Instead of asking such questions I shall discuss the relevancy of Lacan's argument by tracing the legacy of the desire to lift the "veil" – also termed "intersection" by Leon Battista Alberti in *On Painting* (Alberti 1991: 65) – in the context of the contemporary advertising industry and by illustrating the polymorphous forms of resistance this industry has provoked in recent decades.

Not driven by the earnest of apocalyptic zeal, but rather by the messianic pleasure of disconcerting hegemonic power, practices of *détournement*, adopted by many contemporary protest movements, aim at "jamming" cultures of violence – but without the visionary pretension of having these cultures replaced with an unconditional truth. Similarly to Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe's and Jean-Luc Nancy's formula that "diversion [...] borrows a concept in order to make it serve other ends" (Lacoue-Labarthe/Nancy 1992: 89), the aesthetic of catachretic re-appropriation and re-signification, be it in the form of *adbusting*, of *subvertising*, of *identity correction* etc., also calls for social and political action that is based on "impure" mimicry. In fact, the very act of repeating hegemonic messages, images, and discourses, preferably by means of exaggeration and strategic distortion, has become a prime mode of expressing dissent and re-defining a participatory politics that is capable of subverting forms of violence.

With regard to an analysis of contemporary media activism, my personal desire is a fourfold one: I shall, first of all, pose the problem of desires in the context of a Foucauldian analysis of the advent of positive power regimes. Secondly, I will provide an overview of recent practices of *détournement* against the background of relevant strategies and working principles. Thirdly, I shall relate these practices briefly to Girard's warnings of the danger of *mimetic rivalry* invested in the production of culture and, thus, also in alternative or so-called counter-culture. And finally, I shall contribute to this debate by contrasting *mimicry* with *mimetic desire* and

by asking what is the "added-value" that Homi Bhaba's approach may offer to "pure" *mimetic theory*.

Regimes of desire

Mildly put, in post-industrial societies a life worth living can hardly be imagined without resorting to those seducing imageries put on display or on sale everyday by the advertising industry. Even though human culture is generally a culture of signs, of which some were always intended for commercial use, there is plenty of evidence that one particular system of signification, i.e. advertising, has eventually encroached on other *semiospheres* and is nowadays a fully-blown life-support machine for our reveries. It is not simply a matter of size, but considering that in 2008 one estimate suggests that $ 654 billions might have been spent on product- or service-placements (cf. Armstrong et al. 2009: 405), one may well concede that advertising is a major industry in it's own right that supersedes and visualizes (Marx would probably say: *fetishizes*) all other forms of work and consumption, and thus it is also an expression of contemporary lifestyle.

What advertising is, what it comprises, how it addresses potential customers, how it meets the market and creates future demands, how it invests on images etc. – all these are questions too important to be relegated to standard marketing textbooks traditionally claiming that "advertising is the art of getting a unique selling proposition into the heads of the most people at the lowest possible cost" (Reeves 1961: 121). Instead of repeating a capitalist doctrine, I would like to propose a little *detour* and draw on the work of Michel Foucault, who repeatedly observed that in order to understand contemporary management

techniques, manifest in both politics and economy, we have to do away with the early modern idea of *sovereignty* as a negative exercise of authority, according to which power equals the right "to *take* life or *let* live" (Foucault 1998: 137). Quite to the contrary, Foucault was convinced that the rise of the nation-state (mainly, but not just on European grounds) and the establishment of (social)liberal capitalist democracies in the latter 20th Century demanded an exercise of power that was quite different in order to productively "imagine" populations and to let the economy flourish. Against this historical context the concept of *bio-power* is introduced, which, in Foucault's own words, is a power to "*foster* life or *disallow* it to the point of death" (ibid.).

It is of particular importance to mention that this transformation of power regimes (from a mainly negative expression lasting until early modern history to a predominantly positive exercise of power from the 18th Century onwards) had a serious impact on the political as well as economic use and significance of desires. If life is not anymore addressed in primarily negative, i.e. life-threatening terms, but rather in a positive, administering tone, then the production of collective interest is from now on effectively regulated "through the play of desire" (Foucault 2007: 73), as Foucault contends in his lectures on *Security, Territory, Population*. Put in proper historical perspective, Foucault argues that for the economic-political thought of the *phsyiocrats* – who presented a first comprehensive theory of economics – "the problem of those who govern must absolutely not be how they can say no, up to what point they can say no, and with what legitimacy they can say no. The problem is how they can say yes; it is how to yes to this desire. The problem is not therefore the limit of concupiscence or the limit of self-esteem in the sense of love of oneself, but concerns rather everything that stimulates and encourages this self-esteem, this desire, so that it can produce its necessary beneficial effects" (ibid.). With regard to Foucault's analysis of the rise and establishment of modern management techniques as a unique set of doctrines, institutions, strategies etc. all embodying and orchestrating the "governmental" wish to enhance life in its productive forms, we have a

crucial theoretical framework for understanding what advertising is (also) today: an iconic practice of boosting and, at the same time, regulating our desires, of making them work as proper *desiringmachines* (e.g. Deleuze/ Guattari 2004: 1-8) in order to maximize consumption.

The criticism of the capitalist mode of production and the all too familiar world of images, desires and phantasms it arranges is probably as old as the doctrine of capitalism itself. Ranging from Marx's *fetishism theory* over *Critical Theory's* thought of a *culture industry* and Guy Debord's influential writing on *The Society of the Spectacle* up to the *Post-Operaismo* movement in the 1970s and 1980s in Italy, the efforts to generate counter-theories are as polymorphous as the political and economical practices with which they critically engage. Yet, the problem of desiring and dreaming otherwise might be considered as a thread that traverses most, if not all writings that claim to provide some understanding of what is problematic about our political-economical culture. It is no coincidence, thus, that in line with a critical re-reading of political modernity, from the perspective of radical politics the problem of desiring is not so much conceived in the light of simple alternatives – as if it would suffice to exchange one product with another. Rather, the problem is posed in the light of the conjecture that we cannot abandon desires as though they were not *our* desires by now, as though we didn't want to experience enjoyment when giving in to them.

The probably most outspoken critic of today's capitalist culture of permissiveness is Slavoj Žižek. Taking up Herbert Marcuse's thought of a *repressive tolerance* in the age of post-fordist capitalism, Žižek argues in a conversation with Glyn Daly that in today's permissive society we are facing the following paradox: "This is to say, officially, we get the permissive society, we are allowed to enjoy ourselves, or, rather, to have pleasure: we are allowed to organize our lives around how to get as much satisfaction as possible, to realize our ego and so on. But the fundamental result is what? The inherent, necessary result is that in order to truly enjoy life, we have to follow so many regulations and prohibitions: no sexual harassment, no smoking, no fat food, no alcohol, no eggs, no stressful

situations, etc. The paradox is that if you posit pleasure directly as a goal, then you are obliged to submit to a number of conditions – for example, fitness regimes in order to remain sexually attractive – so your immediate pleasure is again ruined." (Žižek 2004: 115)

Strategies of détournement

The problem of capitalist economy, thus, is not only the contemporary accumulation of wealth and maximization of profit it demands, which, in many respects, have become so unsustainable as to pose serious threats to human and non-human life alike on this planet. The risk is at least as great that we are "impotent" to respond to these threats because we are spellbound by contemporary "libidinal economy" (cf. Lyotard 2004), an economical regime whose spell is perpetuated by the desire (again I'm inclined to say: *our* desire) to reach beyond the veils so persuasively drawn by the advertising industry and to finally achieve a state of immediate pleasure, *jouissance* – an all too human desire that is as understandable as it is impossible to fulfill.

Far from being contested solely by means of theory – means that should not be undervalued, however –, even in our "permissive society" we find a wide range of dissenting acts (and not just opinions), be these acts individualistic or collectivist, spontaneous or premeditated, peaceful or violent, effective or utter failures. Under the common, but often misleading header of *culture jamming*, occasionally also referred to as *guerilla semiotics*, a cluster of these strategies and practices make extensive use of *mimicry* as a preferred strategic principle when engaging with the hegemonic images released by the advertising industry. In doing so these protest movements remain largely indebted to the *Situationist*

International forming with and around the aforementioned Debord. In an article entitled "A User's Guide to Détournement", which he had co-authored with Gil J Wolman for the Belgian surrealist journal *Les Lèvres Nues* in 1956, Debord pleads *expressis verbis* to "conceive of a parodic-serious stage where the accumulation of detoured elements, far from aiming to arouse indignation or laughter by alluding to some original work, will express our indifference toward a meaningless and forgotten original, and concern itself with rendering a certain sublimity." (Debord/ Wolman 2003: 208-209) Taking this plea "parodic-seriously", a variety of groups have formed – especially over the past thirty years – that are taking up the challenge to confront the advertising industry by "jamming", i.e. subverting, its corporate messages. *Culture jamming* is thus performed as a deliberate disruption of the imaginary assembly line, which is feeding the audience with a multiplicity of monothematic impressions of pleasure. The resistance is organized less on grounds of a radical opposition, but rather by using hegemonic signs, i.e. commercial rhetoric, against their primary framework of reference, that is: consumption.

One of the historic groups, known for a variety of campaigns with a high degree of publicity, was the *Barbie Liberation Organization* (BLO), which was active mainly in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Their name refers to one of their operations for which they had bought hundreds of Barbie and G.I. Joe dolls. After they had switched all dolls' voice boxes they returned them to the shops where they were resold just before Christmas. One may only imagine the surprise of the children and their parents who, on opening the presents and playing with the dolls, were all of a sudden confronted with a G. I. Joe exclaiming "let's plan our dream wedding" or with a Barbie commanding: "Eat lead, cobra"!, or "Dead men tell no lies!", or "Vengeance is mine!" (cf. Baker 2008: 206)

In contrast to *Critical Theory's* argument that the *culture industry* (cf. Adorno 2003) cannot be revolutionized from within since any aesthetic practice relying on principles of mass-production is doomed to reproduce the whole system, those who engage in *culture jamming* do indeed believe in the possibility of subverting the imperatives of the advertising industry

and thus of creating alternative places, one could say *heterotopias* with Foucault. *The Culture Jammer's Manifesto*, released on the iconic date of 25 December 1993, formulates the following ambitions and interventions: "We will take on the archetypal mind polluters and beat them at their own game. We will uncool their billion-dollar brands with uncommercials on TV, subvertisements in magazines and anti-ads right next to theirs in the urban landscape. We will seize control of the roles and functions that corporations play in our lives and set new agendas in their industries. We will jam the pop-culture marketeers and bring their image factory to a sudden, shuddering halt. On the rubble of the old culture, we will build a new one with a non-commercial heart and soul" (Culture Jammer's Manifesto 1993).

Perhaps *the* major *culture jamming* organization, which also issued the aforementioned Manifesto and evolved around it, is *Adbusters*, a Vancouver-based organization that understands itself as a critical, interventionist media literacy program founded by Kalle Lasn and Bill Schmalz back in 1989. According to its alternative "mission statement" *Adbusters* is a loose network of activists, artists, educators, pranksters etc. all united in and by the shared ideal of actively transforming the current political and economic conditions as to make the 21st Century a better place to live. Whereas the movement *Reclaim the Streets* engages with the use of physical, urban spaces by promoting the idea of communally owned and organized public spaces by means of non-violent direct actions, *Adbusters* is focusing its attention on the advertising industry. The "archetypal mind polluters" are "busted" by reclaiming and reusing the cultural capital that has been "surrendered" to the advertising industry – be it the reader-supported journal *Adbusters* or social marketing campaigns like the *Buy Nothing Day* or the *TV Turnoff Week*, the interventions and re-significations promoted by the group are as various as the advertising techniques they ridicule.

The history of the *Billboard Liberation Front* (BLF) goes even further back. It was in September 1977, when Jack Napier and Irvin Glikk, along with 24 other activists, managed to "improve two existing billboard messages"

(BLFa) for the first time. One of the best-know interventions the BLF stands for is the scam that was directed against the Exxon Corporation: In wake of the Exxon Valdez oil spill that had occurred in Alaska on March 24, 1989, the group decided to rejoin after more or less five years of inactivity and to release an ironic press statement, in which Napier called for solidarity with the corporation by claiming that the "seepage of oil is a natural occurrence [...] and, as such, the Alaskan spill should be applauded by all Americans as another step in our ongoing evolutionary destiny. We should capitalize on our good fortune as presented by Exxon Corporation" (BLFb). As if this was not enough, a group of activists around Napier altered the corporate message of a couple of Exxon-billboards in San Francisco in May 1989 from "Hits Happen-New X-100" to "Shit Happens-New Exxon" (ibid.). The technique employed by the BLF as well as by other groups active in the field of *culture jamming* is called *subvertising*. Directed against a corporation's brand equity, *subvertising* turns the motivational appeal of commercial advertising against itself by making "visible what corporations prefer remain invisible." (Harold 2007: 34)

Even though *subvertising* might be the preferred scriptural means to disrupt the ideological *perpetuum mobile* of the advertising industry, it is by far not the only subversive technique in use. Apart from performance activists like *Reverend Billy* and his *Church of Life After Shopping* relying on street theatre and revival meetings there is one sensationalist group in particular that is working with a rather unique understanding of subversive *mimicry*: The *Yes Men* – a group that "officially" consists of no less than 300 activists who, by impersonating publicly accepted roles, "agree their way into the fortified compounds of commerce, ask questions, and then smuggle out the stories of their hijinks to provide a public glimpse at the behind-the-scenes world of business. In other words, the Yes Men are team players... but they play for the opposing team" (*Yes Men*). Or, to put it in proper, strategic terms: those who practice as the *Yes Men* engage in what is called *identity correction*: Andy Bichlbaum and Mike Bonanno, the two main characters of the group, assume, in most realistic ways possible, identities of people working in decisive

political and/or economical positions in order to pass themselves off as CEOs of multinational corporations or to infiltrate corporate media news, globalization conferences, or stockholder meetings. Since these organizations are usually not in the position to critically question the identity of those who claim to be the representatives of major corporations or institutions, the *Yes Men* avail themselves of the weak spots of the mediatic empire in order to transport their dissident messages.

Capitalizing on Subversion?

Little more then ten years have passed since Naomi Klein's activist manual *No Logo* was published. Considering that most, if not all economies are currently trying to contain the aftershocks of the Financial Crisis by socializing private losses – while one financial hub after the other is bailed out (except for a handful of scapegoats) –, one may well-assume that the imaginaries capitalism has to offer are inspiring less confidence than ever. But as Klein points out in a recent article for the British newspaper *The Guardian*, the opposite holds true when pondering on the viral expansion of *branding*, both in economy and in politics. What begun with the "Bush administration's determination to mimic the hollow corporations" (Klein 2010) has reached a new climax with the all-encompassing Obama brand, says Klein. Now, the overall political goal is to "create an appealing canvas on which all are invited to project their deepest desires but stay vague enough not to lose anyone but the committed wing nuts (which, granted, constitute a not inconsequential demographic in the United States)" (ibid.). In her critical review of Obama's politics, Klein goes as far as to argue that he "didn't just rebrand America,

he resuscitated the neoliberal economic project when it was at death's door." (ibid.)

This grave testimonial leads me to the question to what extent the "capital-parliamentarism" (Badiou 2005: 84) may be characterized as an essentially mimetic system that is able to even capitalize, i.e. feed on subversive strategies such as those of *détournement*? Is *culture jamming* perhaps the mimetic twin of capitalist culture? At first sight (at least), there is indeed a doubling effect that concerns both sides of this apparent rivalry: On the one hand, some critics like Carrie McLaren claim that once subversive organs such as the journal *Adbusters* have eventually "become an advertisement for anti-advertising" (McLaren quoted in Klein 2002: 296). On the other hand, the advertising industry is itself mimicking the strategies of the "antimarketers", as Klein illustrates in the aforementioned article – as *Absolut Vodka's* "Absolut no label" limited edition or *Starbucks'* first unbranded ("stealth") coffee shop in Seattle (cf. Klein 2010) suggest, advertising, *subvertising,* and *culture jamming* are intimately linked to one another and cannot simply be divided apart.

Drawing on Girard's theory, one may thus contend that there is no easy way out of capitalist culture, since desires are so forcefully invested in the products of our daily living and since even the desire to be different ultimately remains obliged to the dominant role model that is rejected. This is not the same as to say that "critique [is] one of [capitalism's] most powerful motors" (Boltanski/Chiapello 2005: 42), as Luc Boltanski and Ève Chiapello stress in their book *The New Spirit of Capitalism*. Rather, it means that we are so passionately dependent on our objects of desire – and capitalism is an economy of libidinal reification –, because these objects (looks, habits, goods etc.) are desired by others too, as Girard argues: "the most skillful advertising does not try to convince that a product is superior but that it is desired by Others" (Girard 1965: 104). In their study *L'enfer des choses* (cf. Dupuy/Dumouchel 1979) that was published more than 30 years ago and that applies Girard's *mimetic theory* to the field of economy, Jean-Pierre Dupuy and Paul Dumouchel explain in detail how capitalism, scarcity and envy are inextricably linked. Simply put, it is *envy*,

as a particular modulation of *mimetic desire*, in a triangular setting characterized by *scarcity* that makes us crave for what others seem to "really" want. Capitalist culture is a culture as ephemeral as it is mimetic – and the advertising industry is the veil that keeps our yearning for the final object of desire alive.

Yet, when applying mimetic theory to the case of culture jamming the following question inevitably arises: what is the contested object of desire when activists rival with the advertising industry? Considering the logic of the media activists' interventions, it is certainly not the visible, advertised object (product, message, service, lifestyle etc.) – nor is it the brand embodied by the advertising company or its particular aesthetic practice. In order to make sense of the rivaling situation stretching from multinational corporations on the one hand to protest movements on the other, the only possible contested "object" of desire that may be named is that of generating or catching the public's attention (i.e. the attention of the anonymous audience silently presiding over Zeuxis' and Parrhasius' contest). Advertising functions only if attention is attracted by and directed to a particular item that is imagined as being desired by others too. Conversely, it is the protest movements' professed mission to reclaim, i.e. to liberate public attention from the control exercised by corporate adverts, symbols and messages. But as Klein puts it, in doing so culture jamming remains deeply indebted to the culture that is jammed: "Culture jammers are drawn to the world of marketing like moths to a flame, and the high-gloss sheen on their work is achieved precisely because they still feel an affection – however deeply ambivalent – for media spectacle and the mechanics of persuasion." (Klein 2002: 294)

Sublime in/difference

If *mimetic desire* incites and regulates human passions in the age of post-fordist capitalism, does subversive *mimicry* as expressed in forms of *culture jamming* renew and intensify the cycle of *mimetic rivalry* and (aesthetic) vengeance or does it rather make a significant difference? And what is the potential "added value" for civic education and media education? With regard to the provisos formulated in the previous chapter, the answer to these questions depends very much on what is meant by rivalry or by difference.Even though Girard concedes that not all forms of mimetic competition necessarily entail "an irreversible escalation in the system" (Girard 2003: 307), he nevertheless seems to maintain a mainly pessimistic understanding of antagonism that becomes visible when he is arguing, for example, that the "fundamental human situation [is characterized by] mimetic rivalry that leads to a destructive escalation" (Girard 2003: 214). As should have become sufficiently evident in the previous chapter, strategies of *culture jamming* do indeed stage rivalry as much as they intend to introduce specific differences into hegemonic messages and practices – but does this really bear the risk of a destructive escalation?

Quite similarly to the discourse and practice of colonial *mimicry* presented and discussed by Bhabha in the chapter "Of Mimicry and Man" of his book *The Location of Culture*, *culture jamming* too is "constructed around an *ambivalence*" (Bhabha 2005: 122). As much as advertising strategies and techniques of commercial rhetoric are studied and employed by activists in their campaigns, these strategies and techniques are also ridiculed and rendered void of any exploitable significance – at least in theory – by

means of exaggeration and ironic parody. When *culture jammers* mimic the hegemonic imaginary of the advertising industry, they are certainly *not just* "imitating a pre-existing desire" (Girard 2003: 357). Rather, they are engaging in an aesthetic and political practice of mimic ambivalence, characterized by Bhabha with the following words: "almost the same, *but not quite*" (Bhabha 2005: 123). Instead of proposing alternative objects of desire (and instead of trying to desire otherwise), many of those who engage in *guerrilla semiotics* are driven by the – ultimately Messianic – hope to suspend the "production" of capitalist desires altogether, but without replacing it with a more sophisticated one, a hope around which the writings of Walter Benjamin revolve.

In this sense then, strategies of culture jamming may be of particular value for civic education and media education since they render visible the subliminal production of hegemonic discourses that tacitly govern our daily lives while insisting on and conferring an unprecedented meaning to practices that mark differences that matter, not least for the generation of public spaces. Aside from exposing and framing the advertising industry's technological capacity to stage, capture, direct and manage desires – that we all too often consider to be the most intimate part of our Self – to specific objects, culture jamming offers also viable examples of how to dis-engage from the captivating Society of the Spectacle (cf. Debord 1999) by re-enacting a ludic attention that is potentially emancipatory. Inversely, civic education and media education hold the genuine chance to critically question the ethos of such subversive modi so as to prevent them from becoming the industry's mimetic twins, i.e. pure fashion.

Possibly, *mimicry* and *mimetic desire* are also "almost the same, but not quite": While *mimetic theory* is essentially an "objectivist" theory, building upon the idea that desire is invested in objects, *mimicry* might allow for a rather different play with the objects of desire. As Bhaba says: "The desire of colonial mimicry – an interdictory desire – may not have an object, but it has strategic objectives which I shall call the *metonymy of presence*." (Bhaba 2005: 128) In this view then, *culture jamming* may be characterized as a strategic semiotic intervention that tries to subvert the hegemonic

imaginaries of the advertising industry by mimicking the mimetic (capitalist) desire itself, but without demanding (necessarily) for an alternative object of desire. Or, to put it in other words: by mimicking the use of customary objects of desire, the violent cult of passions promoted by the advertising culture is jammed to the extent that the contested objects of desire loose their (inflated) exchange value and are potentially re-consigned to a new use. Giorgio Agamben has characterized this act as *profanation*: "The creation of a new use is possible only by deactivating an old use, rendering it inoperative" (Agamben 2007: 99). However, judging by our contemporary consumption level, it seems as if Parrhasius' veil is still exerting its power over us.

Literature

Agamben, Giorgio (2007): Profanations. New York: Zone Books.

Adorno, Theodor W. (2003): The Culture Industry. Selected Essays on Mass Culture, London/New York: Routledge.

Alberti, Leon Battista (1991): On Painting. London: Penguin.

Armstrong, Gary et al. (2009): Marketing: An Introduction. Harlow: Pearsons Eduction.

Badiou, Alain (2005): Metapolitics. London/New York: Verso.

Baker, Chris (2008): Cultural Studies: Theory and Practice. London: Sage.

Bhabha, Homi K. (2005): The Location of Culture. Abingdon: Routledge.

BLFa, <http://www.billboardliberation.com/history.html>, accessed 24 May, 2010.

BLFb, <http://www.billboardliberation.com/images/shit/shit_media_1.html>, accessed 24 May, 2010.

Boltanski, Luc and Eve Chiapello (2005): The New Spirit of Capitalism. London/New York: Verso.

Culture Jammer's Manifesto (1993), <http://www.evolutionzone.com/kulturezone/futurec/culture.jammers.manifesto>, accessed 24 May, 2010.

Debord, Guy (1999): Society of the Spectacle, New York: Zone Books.

Debord, Guy and Gil J Wolman (2003): A User's Guide to Détournement. In: Debord, Guy: Complete Cinematic Works, Scripts, Stills, Documents. Oakland/Edinburgh: AK Press, 207-210.

Deleuze, Gilles and Félix Guattari (2004): Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia. London: Continuum.

Dumouchel, Paul and Jean-Pierre Dupuy (1979): L'enfer des choses. Paris: Seuil.

Foucault, Michel (1998): The Will to Knowledge: The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Foucault, Michel (2007): Security, Territory, Population. Lectures at the Collège de France, 1977-1978. New York: Picador.

Girard, René (1965): Deceit, Desire, and the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Girard, René (2003): Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World. London/New York: Continuum.

Girard, René (2005): Violence and the Sacred. London/New York: Continuum.

Gombrich, Ernst H. (2000): Art and Illusion: A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation. Millenium Edition with a New Preface by the Author. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Harold, Christine (2007): OurSpace: Resisting the Corporate Control of Culture. Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press.

Klein, Naomi (2002): No Logo: No Space, No Choice, No Job. New York: Picador.

Klein, Naomi (2010): Naomi Klein on how corporate branding has taken over America. In: The Guardian, 16 January, 2010, <http:// www.guardian.co.uk/books/2010/jan/16/naomiklein-branding-obama-america>, accessed 24 May, 2010.

Lacan, Jacques (2000): Of the Gaze as Objet Petit a. In: Clive Cazeaux (ed.): The Continental Aesthetics Reader. London: Routledge, 519-541.

Lacoue-Labarthe, Philippe and Jean-Luc Nancy (1992): The Title of the Letter: A Reading of Lacan. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Lyotard, Jean-François (2004): Libidinal Economy. London: Continuum.

Plato (1996): Plato's Sophist or the Professor of Wisdom. Newburyport: Focus Publishing.

Pliny the Elder (1991): Natural History: A Selection. London: Penguin.

Reeves, Rosser (1961): Reality in Advertising. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.

The Yes Men <http://theyesmen.org/hijinks/tampere/index.shtml>, accessed 24 May, 2010.

Žižek, Slavoj and Glyn Daly (2004): Conversations with Žižek. Cambridge: Polity Press.

---

[1] Another important aspect is the anecdote's terminology: Pliny's use of the words "scaenam" and "linteum" delineates the "background" as a theatrical stage and the scene itself as *skenography*.

[2] I say in part, because Girard invites us to think of a non-spontaneous, *triangular desire*, but nonetheless he addresses the resulting *sacrificial crisis* repeatedly in view of a "fundamental truth" (Girard 2005: 10), an

"underlying truth" (Girard 2005: 24), or "the whole truth" (Girard 2005: 144) – a truth that, according to Girard, needs to be told, as if sacrifice itself was the (truest) truth behind the obscuring veil of human culture. But what does the act of sacrifice in Girard's own terms reveal, if not the radical impossibility of (positively) designating desires without violence? Or, to put it otherwise, how could one claim that Girard's desire to tell us, his readers, the "truth" is of a mimetic order completely different than that critically reflected in his own work?