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Dawn of the Debt: Tactical Performance, Humour and the Practice of Alter-geopolitics

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Abstract

This paper examines tactical performance – a creative and humorous form of protest - as a form of alter-geopolitical intervention that poses counter-hegemonic challenges in society. This paper extends the writing on humour in political geography through a consideration of the spatial use of humour in political protest. My analysis is informed by a scholar activist methodology rooted in collaboration with resisting others and an ethic of solidarity. The paper argues that the practice of tactical performance requires a narrative that is attentive to an 'action logic' that mobilises humour and requires both emotional and spatial registers understood as sites of intervention that articulate alternative geopolitical narratives and practices from below through various forms of material action.

This approach to alter-geopolitical action is grounded in an empirical case study in which the author participated, namely the Dawn of the Debt zombie action during the 2004 May Day protests in Glasgow, Scotland. Drawing upon disposition theories of humour, and a Marxist understanding of the figure of the zombie in contemporary capitalism, the paper argues that while in engaging with particular action logics and sites of intervention, the use of humour in political protest remained ambiguous in its results. This poses challenges to the deployment of humour and tactical performance as forms of alter-geopolitics while at the same time opening up new avenues to activist engagement.

Keywords

Alter-geopolitics; tactical performance; humour; action logic; sites of intervention

On a sunny May Day in Glasgow, 2004, activists from a range of different organisations gathered near George Square in front of the City Hall to celebrate and prepare for a reclaim the streets action: taking over parts of the city for protest and party, in an ad hoc manner in order to confound the policing of the event and temporarily change the character of public space in the city. Several hundred activists with May Day banners and flags were assembled, preparing to set off on an initial demonstration around George Square before heading towards the West End of the city.

From out of the assembled crowd moved a group of spectre-like zombies. They were dressed in black, with whitened faces and blackened eyes, painted-on blood dripping from their mouths. Giant 'American Excess' credit cards had been shaped and worn so as to appear frozen in the act of being swiped through the zombies' heads. With their arms outstretched the zombies walked in shambling rhythms through the crowd. They represented the 'Dawn of the Debt' - a humorous and playful reference to George A. Romero's 1978 film *Dawn of the Dead* in which survivors of a zombie outbreak barricade themselves into a shopping mall and survive through consuming its products.

The May Day zombies monotone voices chanted "Shop. 'Til you. Drop" and they staggered towards shoppers and watching passers-by. Giant stickers on the zombies' clothing imparted the advice: 'Shut up and shop". The group headed off towards Princes Square, a nearby upmarket shopping centre. The zombies - the living dead - proceeded to interact with shoppers, those, as I argue below, that we might consider as the dead, living - dead labour power reanimated through the act of consumption and exchange.

This paper examines this May Day zombie action as an example of tactical performance - a form of alter-geopolitical intervention (Koopman, 2011) that is creative and deploys humour to challenge hegemonic ideas in society. This paper extends the writing on humour in political geography through a consideration of the use of humour in political protest and its spatial iterations. This is important because the issues that give rise to protest - and the political actions that constitute such

protest - are frequently serious in character. This paper argues for the importance of 'protest humour' and considers the use of humour in a specific protest, namely the Dawn of the Debt action.

My analysis is informed by a scholar activist methodology. This has been motivated by the belief that critical thinking and critical practice are mutually constitutive: they inform and produce one another. My methodological practice is committed to participation in, and collaboration with, different movements, campaigns and protest initiatives. In so doing, I have attempted to practice 'situated solidarity' (Nagar and Geiger, 2007; Routledge and Derickson, 2015; see also Derickson and Routledge 2015). This involves being emotionally moved to collaborate with activists and movements because of core values (e.g. concerning dignity, self-determination, justice) that I share with them. Situated solidarity also implies the recognition of various ethical concerns, e.g. that the production of knowledge and hence my representations of events (including those in this paper) are partial. They have been influenced by my reception and interpretation of information; the quality of the affective link generated between my collaborators and me; the workings of my memory; and my emotions, subjective evaluations and personal limitations. In short, my scholar activism 'writes from within' protest.

In this paper I will argue for a spatialized understanding of tactical performance, understood through the notion of sites of intervention (Routledge, 2017). Such tactical performances require a narrative that is attentive to an 'action logic' that mobilizes humour and deploys both emotional and spatial registers that articulate alternative geopolitical narratives and practices from below through various forms of material action. The paper is structured as follows. First, I briefly discuss alter-geopolitics as a form of counter-hegemonic challenge. Second, I consider the role that emotions play in such politics and focus upon how humour has been treated within the geopolitical literatures. Third, the paper considers tactical performance, focusing upon its spatiality (played out in a range of 'sites of intervention'), narrative or action logic, and the deployment of humour. This approach to alter-geopolitical action is then grounded in the case study of the May Day zombies. I will argue that while engaging with these sites of intervention, humour is ambiguous in its results. I conclude by considering the potential of humour and tactical performance as forms of alter-geopolitics.

Alter-geopolitics

Dominant neoliberal economic doctrine during the past thirty years has wrought profound damage to democratic practices, cultures, institutions and imaginaries. Dominant or hegemonic ideas in society propagated by politicians, corporate advertising and the mainstream media have frequently become the generally accepted practice and way of life for the majority within society (Brown, 2015). As Judith Butler has argued, hegemonic understandings of politics are achieved in part through circumscribing what will and will not be admissible as part of the public sphere itself.

> To produce what will constitute the public sphere [...] it is necessary to control the way in which people see, how they hear, what they see. The constraints are not only on content [...] but on what "can" be heard, read, felt, seen and known. The public sphere is constituted in part by what can appear... (2004: xx).

Because hegemony is enacted though lived practices, transforming such hegemonic social relations requires challenging dominant ideologies (what Antonio Gramsci termed 'common sense') as experienced in everyday practices (Gramsci, 1971). Gramsci realized that transforming consciousness within society involved action in the realm of culture and that one of the primary ways to achieve this was through engaging with people's emotions. This could enable the challenging of dominant ways of doing and thinking in society, and enable protestors to register their values and beliefs, and announce that alternatives are possible. In so doing hegemonic power is rendered visible, open to confrontation, negotiation and possible change. Such challenges are expressions of what Koopman (2011) terms 'alter-geopolitics'.

Alter-geopolitics is prosecuted by a range of 'civil society organizations' such as social movements, activist groups and non-government organizations. Alter-geopolitics poses three key challenges to hegemonic geopolitics. First, it challenges the *material* (economic and military) geopolitical power of states and global institutions; second, it challenges the *representations* imposed by political elites upon the world and its different peoples, that are deployed to serve their geopolitical interests. Third, it creates *lived alternatives* to hegemonic geopolitical ways of being and acting in the world (Koopman, 2011; see also Routledge, 2006). The 'alter' prefix stresses that other worlds are possible, including forms of protest, and that political interventions frequently have a prefigurative element - they attempt

to live the future they want to see. Within such alter-geopolitical practices, the role of emotions such as humour has had an important place, and it is to this that I now turn.

Emotional Politics

Politically, emotions are intimately bound up with relations of power and affinity, and are a means of initiating action. People become politically active because they feel something profoundly—such as injustice. This emotion triggers changes in people that motivate them to engage in politics. It is people's ability to transform their feelings about the world into actions that inspire them to participate in political action (Chatterton, Fuller and Routledge 2008). As feminist geographers and others have argued, collaborative association with (activist) others, necessitates interaction with others, through the doing of particular actions and the experiencing of personal and collective emotions, through creativity and imagination, and through embodied, relational practices that produce political effects (Anderson and Smith 2001; Pulido, 2003). Hence emotions are both reactive (directed towards outsiders and external events) and reciprocal (concerning people's feelings towards each other). Shared emotions of activism create shared collective identities and are mobilized strategically (e.g. to generate motivation, commitment and sustained participation). Activists create shared emotional templates in order to find common cause, and to generate common narratives and solidarities (e.g. Bosco, 2007; Goodwin, Jasper and Polletta 2001; Gould, 2009).

Emotions frequently find expression in (public) protests that can be understood as ritual performances: they have a range of internal rules (e.g. such as keeping protest non-violent) and choreographies - forms of movement and types of action considered culturally and strategically pertinent to particular issues and places of protest (e.g. a demonstration route that ends with a rally and speakers sited outside a national government building). Frequently such performances create image events that amplify emotions such as anger and transform them into senses of collective solidarity (Juris 2008). Performance and the performance of emotions have become increasingly important in the practice of politics. Indeed, emotions have always been an important element of the practice and performance of politics through the engineering or channeling of fear, anger, aggression etc (e.g. ´O Tuathail 2003; Oslender 2007; Pain 2009).

Attention to the emotional dimensions of activist experience, (inter)action and communication is a potentially compelling intervention in the repertoire of political performance, particularly when combined with the confrontational approach of direct action, the subversive power of humour and the motivating force of anger. Distinctive emotional cultures are created that influence how emotions are expressed and managed when protestors engage with the public, political elites and opponents (Wulff *et al*, 2015). Further, emotions can be used to develop or enhance activists' relational and organisational power (Arenas, 2015). In such contexts humour plays a potentially important role.

Humour and politics

Humour has long been regarded as constituting a core communicative and emotional strategy for social movements (Dodds and Kirby, 2013; Kurtz-Flamenbaum, 2014; Purcell, Brown & Gokmen, 2010). Political geographers have considered the (geopolitical) role of humour in a range on contexts including how humour has been deployed to make mockery of state policies and imposed geopolitical identities (Kuus, 2008); how it has been used - through irony and satire - to subvert or resist dominant geopolitical projects and representations of the other through the deployment of cartoons (Dodds, 2007; Dittmer, 2005; Hammett, 2011); the reception of humour's uses (Gilmartin and Brunn, 1998; Mu□ ller, Özcan, & Seizov, 2009; Ridanpää, 2009); and the political role of humour in print and TV media (e.g. Fox, Koloen & Sahin, 2007; Hussain, 2007; Shifman, Coleman & Ward, 2007); standup comedy (Purcell, et al 2010) and the teaching of geopolitics (Dittmer, 2013). This paper extends the consideration of humour in geopolitical practice by focusing on spatialized tactical performance and its use in political protest.

Within the practice of humour at least four theories have been mobilised to differentiate the various practices taking place. First, superiority theories interpret humour such as mockery and ridicule as a means to put down the other (LaFave et al. 1976). Second, relief theories interpret humour as a release mechanism such as in the dispelling of fear or as an escape valve to deal with discomfort associated with questioning of the contemporary order (Morreall, 1987). Third, incongruity theories consider humour that places two or more disparate ideas together to allow space for new ideas to emerge, and assumptions to be challenged (Rothbart, 1976). Finally, disposition theories attempt to

reconcile the other three theories to provide nuanced understandings of social attitudes brought to humour, and to consider the particular social contexts (such as shared norms and power relations) in which humour is fashioned and received (Zillman and Cantor, 1976; see also Purcell, et al, 2010).

Therefore, humour is contextual, relational, dynamic and constitutive, acting as a narrative device (Hammett, 2010). The use of humour spans the political spectrum: it can act as a powerful means of producing, reproducing or challenging the norms and values of particular places and people, and can be indicative of notions of spatial inclusion or exclusion (see Macpherson 2008; McHugh & Fletchall, 2012; Ridanpää, 2014b). Humour in the form of ridicule can play a central role in the reproduction of unequal social relations: because being the target of ridicule can be humiliating and distressing, the fear of such ridicule can ensure social compliance (Billig, 2005). Humour can also act to establish boundaries concerning who belongs and who is excluded within and between groups (Kuipers, 2015), and can be an effective means of legitimizing differences between classes (Friedman & Kuipers, 2013), ethnicities (Weaver, 2010), and genders (Kehily & Nanak, 1997).

For activists, the deployment of humour can enable the undermining of 'cementing emotions' that underpin the extant relations of domination such as fear, self-doubt, shame and hatred while re-appropriating, redirecting and intensifying other 'mobilizing emotions' (Flam, 2015) such as pride, anger, solidarity in order to bring about social change. The subversive and antagonistic power of humour lies in its ability to rile oppressors as well as encourage resistance (Tilley, no date). Humour can be used to undermine and disrupt authority effecting emotional disruptions to the control scripts and myths of political claim-making and state-driven policy (Epstein and Iveson, 2009), as well as challenge geopolitical claims (Dodds and Kirby 2013) and hegemonic ideas and framings in society. Humour can make political messages more palatable to the public and can deploy powerful metaphors for understanding the nature and dynamics of social and political relations within particular contexts (Duncombe, 2007). It can act as a means of rallying those on margins and can act to deconstruct and construct meaning (Obadare, 2009).

The power of humour is that it has communicative impact and can acts as a form of 'truth-telling' in subtle and ambiguous ways (Weaver, 2010). It can allow feelings such as insult, disrespect,

ridicule, and slur to enter into dialogue in 'disguised and deniable form' (Crawford, cited in Watts, 2007; see also Lockyer and Pickering, 2009), thus making it difficult to challenge due to its plurality of form, and the fact that as humour it is not to be taken seriously however serious the message (see also Berger, 1997; Sorensen, 2008). In this sense humour represents a challenge to processes of governmentality that attempt to generate normalizing behaviours and regulated conduct amongst people (Foucault, 1979).

The spatiality of humour's deployment in political protest is important but has received less attention (although for example, see Routledge, 2012). However, as I will argue below in a consideration of the Dawn of the Debt action, humour can play an important role in the practice of alter-geopolitics in particular through the prosecution of spatialized forms of tactical performance aimed at challenging assumptions and attitudes in society.

The Dawn of the Debt as tactical performance: action logic, humour and sites of intervention

Tactical performance

The use of humour in political protest forms a crucial element in a broader terrain of what Bogad (2016) terms 'tactical performance': forms of creative, often theatrical political interventions that seek to challenge hegemonic representations and understandings of politics, places and identities (Hammett, 2011; Nyroos, 2001; Purcell et al, 2010), and challenge more traditional forms of political protest. Tactical performance intends to communicate desires and grievances, build momentum in social movements and discourage police violence (Bogad, 2016).

The use of tactical performance in protest has roots in various initiatives including Augusto Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed, and the International Situationists. Tactical performance frequently uses surprise and humour since they tend to act as the opposite of cliché. Cliché tends to dull the senses and bores the mind, whereas surprise and humour can activate people, providing a moment of openness and freshness, potentially providing new perspectives, reflections or responses in people. For Bogad (2016), there are frequently habituated sites of conflict within protest scenarios (such as a picket lines or demonstrations) whereby the familiar and clichéd tactics can generate unexamined automatic behaviours or just be boring and easily dismissed, not least by the general public. The use of tactical

performance attempts to change this dynamic by acting as a force multiplier and a voice amplifier, stimulating the imagination, achieving tactical surprise, and generating synaptic disruption.

In the U.K. recent forms of tactical performance have emerged from the anti-roads movement of the 1990s, including the actions of the group *Reclaim the Streets* (RTS). Protesting the domination of urban space by motorised transport, RTS organized a series of protests that sought to close down roads in the city though staging street parties and celebratory demonstrations (Routledge, 2017). The subsequent alter-globalization protests were in part characterized by what was at the time called 'tactical frivolity': forms of protest performance that deliberately sought to add a subversive humour to political action (Bogad, 2016).

Tactical performance enables certain conditions of possibility and expression for 'hidden transcripts' (Scott, 1990) to appear, those grievances and world views of the oppressed, as well as the development of subcultures and counter-cultures and alter-geopolitical visions, that are waiting to flourish and make themselves known. Alternative visions need alternative spaces to be developed and shared in order for what Nancy Fraser (1997) terms 'subaltern counterpublics' to be formed. Such spaces provide sites where collective action frames can be articulated.

In this sense tactical performance - through forms of humorous embodied action - constitutes the power of appearance in the public sphere, and attempts to address the public's "capacity to feel and apprehend" (Butler, 2004: xxi). To do this, tactical performance depends on a well crafted 'action logic' (Boyd, 2002) materialized in different sites of intervention and deploying humour as a form of unreconstructed antagonism.

Action logic

Action logic is directly related to the goals of campaigns or protests. It frames and informs a particular protest through crafting maximum storytelling impact that addresses directly the social or political problem in question. In order to influence public perception, protestors 'think narratively' by considering how stories and power are interwoven. This requires a consideration of: (i) which audience activists are trying to reach; (ii) how a particular issue or conflict is framed; (iii) what types of story or imagery are deployed in order to show what is at stake in a particular struggle (rather than tell people

what to think about that struggle); and (iv) how common sense thinking on an issue can be challenged, and in so doing express alternatives and solutions (Canning and Reinsborough, 2012a).

Narratives do battle within an asymmetric environment that favours dominant, elite discourses - what Bogad (2016) terms the 'hegemonologue'. Activist narratives attempt to enter this dominant discourse and its' symbolic frame and shift or interrupt its meaning, and in so doing excite, galvanize or elicit support. Such narratives frequently use humour in order to not only open up thinking - since people tend to be more open to different ideas if they are accompanied by a laugh or amusement (see Routledge 2012) - but also to counter authoritarian tendencies within societal uses of space e.g. the privatization of public space and the denotation of 'official' protest sites (e.g. see Mitchell, 2003).

Storytelling is a source of political identity and solidarity, political meaning-making and subjective engagement. Stories can illustrate and dramatize particular societal conditions and influence how people feel about such conditions. Indeed stories enable an engagement with, and interpretation of, social reality in the subjunctive mode making it possible to evaluate the given and imagine alternatives (Bogad, 2016). To do this reframing is critical. This is a process of replacing an old story with a new one that widens, narrows or shifts the frame. Reframing requires narrative power analysis - studying how an issue is currently framed which seeks to identify its underlying assumptions and biases (Canning and Reinsborough, 2012b). Actions that can do this with humour open up folks to the alternative story that can create or provoke a shift in the public conversation on an issue.

The Dawn of the Debt idea was thought up by the *ad hoc* affinity group Invisible Plot, a rag tag group of male and female white academics, actors, film makers, unemployed workers and activists to which I belonged. Alongside the traditional trade union-dominated May Day protests around the world, alter-globalization activists have began to conduct their own forms of May Day protest and celebration since the turn of the century. These have frequently included forms of tactical performance. For the Glasgow May Day we came up with the idea of acting as zombies, since they are potent symbols within protests.

As a form of alter-geopolitical practice, our tactical performance attempted to challenge dominant representations associated with consumer capitalism. One of the key elements of

contemporary geopolitical economy in advanced capitalist countries has long been commodity consumption. Politicians constantly inform the public that is generates growth that in turn generates jobs. However, in both the U.S. and the U.K., under conditions of low wage growth, commodity consumption fuelled by advertising has generated high levels of credit card debt that fills the gap between people's desire to consume products and their financial ability to do so (Harvey, 2003).

The members of Invisible Plot had all witnessed Glasgow city centre on any given Saturday, filled with shoppers walking endlessly through shopping malls and up and down the pedestrianized precincts, hands laden down with bags of purchases. We wanted to parody such behaviour by representing shoppers as zombies and the debt that they were incurring by mounting a giant credit card through our heads.

As noted at the beginning of this paper, we drew upon Romero's film *Dawn of the Dead* for our inspiration. In the film a plague of flesh-eating zombies marauds across the United States precipitating social collapse. Television station staff seek sanctuary in a shopping mall, defending it against the mindless zombie hordes. Survivors craft a living space in the mall and are able to enjoy a hedonistic lifestyle, utilizing the mall's various and plentiful commodities, despite the chaos beyond the mall. The homogenous zombie mass fail to notice what is around them beyond their need to consume (flesh) - they lack any form of critical consciousness (Jones-Devitt, 2017). With its tropes of class, consumption and collapse, the film provides numerous satirical comments on contemporary consumer capitalism.

Zombies also lend themselves particularly well to tactical performance. They can represent both the agents and victims of capitalism (e.g. see Harman, 2010), and through their movements, appetites and undeadness they speak to the selling out of individuals' life-energies to the market in order to survive (McNally, 2011). Their simplified gestures can be easily copied and improvised.

The main target of protestors is often a potentially mobilizable public rather than decision-makers (Doherty et al, 2007). The Dawn of the Debt action logic attempted through the playful confrontation of the shoppers with the zombies to exaggerate the social order, retextualizing it in order to reveal its contradictions, and invite others (such as the public) to reconsider it. We targeted consumers, framing the act of shopping as unthinking and immersed in debt. We wanted to challenge

the assumption of capitalist consumerism as normalized behaviour. Tactical performance involved (zombie) bodies in the production and circulation of humorous action logics in order to question the capital relation.

Marx argues that dead capital is capital which is not in immediate use (e.g. machinery in off-hours) and depreciating because it is not immediately engaged with living labour (2011). In the capital relation, living labour brings dead capital (back) to life. Further, for Marx, this capital once produced by living labour can also be called dead labour - it is parasitic of living labour - much as zombies are parasitic of living beings - since living labour alone generates value. Irrespective of the amount of dead labour that is acquired by capital (e.g. as means of production or material wealth) accumulation is never satisfied because the ongoing extraction of living labour is necessary to preserve value (see Schneider, 2012).

Further, as Harman (2010) has argued, the production process involves a certain passage of time - or dead time - between labourer, producer and consumer that constitutes the site of capital depreciation that can lead to over-accumulation and thus economic crisis (pp 42-43). Any product generated through these processes enters the interval between production and consumption as dead labour, in need of reanimating by its purchase. In short, the depreciation of capital can only be halted through the process of reanimating through work and exchange. (Schneider, 2012). For Schneider, the live act of playing dead (as a zombie) neatly characterizes the capital relation: it juxtaposes what counts as live and dead, "where some suck the life out of others, and where live labour, "dead labour" and the machinery of reanimating continually circulate in a drama of parasitism" (2012: 157). One can read the tactical performance of zombies as the living dead as a movement between the states of living labour and dead labour - the very interval of crisis that Harman, following Marx, identified.

Activists are both alive (to the engaged and vibrant time of protest), and dead (to their valorization by capital through their labour). The tactical performance of the zombie is paradoxically an act of dezombification (Nyong'o, 2012). The slogan of the International Situationists in Paris in May 1968 to live without dead time can refer *both* to the lived time of activism as well as to the injunction of capitalism to distract and preoccupy ourselves endlessly in commercial or entertainment activity so that

our lives are without dead (as unoccupied) time. In response, the zombie "performs the body as an accumulation strategy...a survival skill for living with dead time" (Nyong'o, 2012: 145).

Sites of Intervention

Tactical performance combines elements of surprise, creativity and humour and deploys a spatial logic, in order to target 'sites of intervention'. These are material and conceptual spaces within a system where activists apply pressure in order to disrupt its' functioning or argue for change as part of broader strategic goals of campaigns. Drawing upon and extending the original idea of 'points of intervention' created by the smartMeme Collective/Centre for Story-based Strategy (Verson, 2007), I argue that there are a range of sites of activist intervention wherein space is politicized. These include: sites of production (e.g. factories) that reflect activists' struggles to maintain or create sovereignty over the means of livelihood, and can involve picket lines and occupations at the places where such productive activities occur; sites of destruction (e.g. at places of resource extraction) that reflect activists' struggles to resist displacement and can involve protests at the very locations that destructive activities are occurring; sites of decision (e.g. at governmental buildings) that reflect activists' struggles concerning corrupt or unaccountable forms of governance, and can involve locating protest at those places where key decisions are made; sites of social reproduction - the activities, responsibilities and relationships that are directly involved in maintaining protests and providing physical and emotional sustenance for activists (e.g. as cooking; child-caring; and cleaning); and sites of potential that include protests that seek to stimulate the imagination concerning possible future scenarios about how to live, and attempt to actualize such alternatives 'on the ground' (e.g. Critical Mass mass bicycle rides in which cyclists take over city streets by the power of their numbers)(Routledge, 2017).

Those of importance to this paper are three additional sites: sites of consumption which can include chain stores and supermarkets that reflect activists' concerns over the dominant and destructive role of consumerism in contemporary culture; sites of circulation such as roads, shopping centres and squares etc. where resistance attempts to disrupt the flows of resources, traffic or personnel upon which capitalism depends; and sites of assumption that attempt to change how people think and feel about particular issues by challenging underlying beliefs, and control mythologies (Routledge, 2017).

Tactical performance attempts to challenge everyday assumptions, by opening up potentials to think, feel and act differently, and by challenging the meanings and feelings associated with particular places. Such practices can engage with critical emotional and thinking responses, in activists, the police and the public and attempt to alter the landscape of protest by challenging common sense.

The role of activism here is to hijack events or mass popular spectacles using the images and signs of popular culture to reveal the underlying (corporate, neoliberal) ideologies of advertisements, mainstream media and political messages, as well as cultural artefacts, and in so doing communicate meanings that are at variance with their original intention (Wettergren, 2009; Routledge, 2017). The idea then is not to change policy as such so much as it is to soften the cultural terrain (Bogad, 2016) and to change minds.

To deploy zombies in a Glasgow shopping centre made sense as a classic site of consumption (of products) and circulation (of shoppers). Tactical performance also targeted sites of assumption through an attempt to subvert the hegemonic logic and the taken-for-granted world articulated by consumer capitalism. The targeting of such sites of assumption enable what the Galeano (2016) terms 'peripheral vision' - an indirect view of an aspect of reality that potentially opens up peoples' regularised perceptions of places and events to different understandings. The Dawn of the Debt zombies walked slowly and in a stilted fashion through the shopping malls of Glasgow. We moved inexorably as if compelled to shop, staggering into shops, onto escalators, into groups of shoppers standing and chatting, around the seated figures in coffee shops. Only four words ever left our black zombie lips: "Shop. 'Til. You. Drop".

Such actions attempt to reframe space by challenging what is usually seen, heard and felt in a shopping centre (and also the streets of Glasgow). The purpose was to generate feelings out of place in a shopping centre where the habituated behaviours (of shopping) could be disturbed. Weighed down by the responsibilities associated with reproducing life under capital, many feel zombified. As parodied in Romero's zombie film classic, consumers shuffle through shopping malls endlessly consuming, endlessly unsatiated. They are dead, yet living: dead labour reanimated through the practice of consumption and exchange.

Addressing such sites of assumption requires mobilizing transformative play (such as humour and satire) to communicate. Such play necessitates (like all jokes) active audience participation and imagination (so they get the joke) that creates an intimacy between the performer and the audience (Duncombe, 2007). Here the performative character of humour is key.

Humour as reconstructed antagonism

The use of humour in tactical performance is critical, since 'the medium is the massage' (McCluhan and Fiore, 1967). The medium represents the milieu of assumptions, those ways of thinking without which the message would not work. Humour attempts to disturb the general acceptance of the medium: it challenges the milieu of assumptions in visual, tactile, kinetic ways.

Tactical performance can utilize external and internal humour (Kutz-Flamenbaum, 2014). External humour refers to the tactics and frames directed beyond social movements (e.g. to policy makers and the public). The purpose of humour here is to identify and critique an issue; to engage others; frame the diagnosis of problems and solutions, and motivate others (see Benford and Snow, 2000; Dodds and Kirby, 2013; Snow et al, 1986). Humour can make it easier to get attention from the media, and is also a way to stand out from other political organizations and to highlight a political claim's intelligence and wit (Sorensen, 2008). Because of its irrationality, humour has an ability to affect conflict relationships in surprising and unpredictable ways that potentially undermine traditional sources of dominating power that are based on functioning rationality. Uses of humour in protests can also make it harder for authorities to justify violence (Bogad, 2016).

Internal humour can help to create deep bonds between activists and maintain, strengthen and grow movements and help to fashion collective identity as well as enhance participation (Haugerund, 2013). In this sense humour can be used to develop emotional intelligence within groups to enhance trust, empathic concern, participation, and collaboration (Romero and Pescosolido, 2008).

The use of humour in protest needs in some way to be confrontational, a form of reconstructed antagonism. It must provoke, mock, or ridicule, in order to escalate the conflict between protestors and their opponents in order to put pressure on them (Sorensen, 2008). It must also engender laughter or knowing recognition on behalf of the public to be able to potentially challenge thinking on particular

issues (Hammett, 2010). The performative character of humour – that being embodied and discursive it has the potential to open the body and mind (Ridanpää 2014a) - means that it can form part of a broader structure of feeling that includes emotional and collective intelligence (see Routledge, 2012). However when used in tactical performance, the use of humour must strive to balance novelty and familiarity. Public reactions are not predictable and the clarity of a message might be easily threatened or misunderstood. The joke and its target much be clear - this then depends on the narrative power of the action logic. Once decisions have been made on the action logic and use of humour, tactical performance considers the spatiality of its' narration.

The Dawn of the Debt zombies targeted their humour externally towards the public, identifying practices of consumption in capitalist society, critiquing them and attempting to subvert shopping protocols (Kutz-Flamenbaum, 2014). To do this they mobilized mind humour (satirizing and parodying the act of shopping) and body humour - staggering, seemingly uncontrollable, arms outstretched - in their tactical performance to signal their message to the consuming public (Ridanpää, 2014a).

Spatially, the sight of a group of zombies staggering with arms outstretched and endlessly repeating in a machine-like monotone "Shop. 'Til you. Drop." was clearly out of place in a shopping centre and on the streets of Glasgow. It generated surprise, some laughter and occasional shock amongst the shopping public. Drawing upon disposition theory we can consider the particular social contexts in which zombie humour was fashioned and received (Purcell, et al, 2010). For humour to be most effective in tactical performance requires active audience participation and imagination that creates an intimacy between the performer and the audience and can open up the public to the political content of activists' messages.

The Dawn of the Debt action attacked the object of focus (shopping under capitalism) using exaggeration, caricature and ridicule to create humour (see Thorogood, 2016; also Dodds, 2007). In this context humour acts as an exclusionary process that differentiates between self and other, through nurturing complicity and creating a shared space of laughter ('we' get the joke, while 'they' are the butt of our humour) (Terrion and Ashforth, 2002; Taylor and Bain 2003). The zombies distinguished

themselves from a range of others - the shopping public, other May Day activists, and the broader context of capitalist consumption.

However, Dawn of the Debt attempted to cross this distinct register of self and other. While shoppers were the butt of the joke, the action aimed for complicity with the public. The public recognized the figure of the zombie from the movies, and also understood the slogan 'shop until you drop' from consumer advertising. The two placed together however, with reference to credit card debt, provided a surprise, something incongruous and humorous that attempted to get people to ponder on their own consumption behaviours.

Nevertheless, in the shopping centre encounter between the zombies and the shoppers there was a mixed response from the public who, ironically, consumed the performance of the zombies. Invisible Plot's tactical performance slipped perhaps too easily into a superior attitude of commenting on the interplay between living and dead labour by using the character of the zombie to mock and ridicule the act of shopping, and by extension shoppers themselves. The deeper Marxist juxtaposition between living and dead labour was perhaps too complex an idea to communicate effectively, getting lost in the fun of acting out the Dawn of the Debt.

Unsurprisingly, some folk took exception to this and ridiculed the zombies, a few shoppers even shouting angrily that we should 'go and get a job' - an ironic comment since it was precisely our refusal to bring capital to life through our labour that inspired this tactical performance. Other shoppers saw the performance as humorous, some 'got the joke' - of the incongruity of zombies who, shopped to death, continue shopping. In that moment of recognition, assumptions concerning the normalization of the dominance of consumerism and shopping malls in everyday life were able to be challenged, if only temporarily. However, the zombie action was not prefigurative: it illustrated conditions in society that Invisible Plot opposed rather than articulate the world that we wanted to create.

Beyond the shopping public, the narrative of the Dawn of the Debt zombies juxtaposed the living carnivalesque of the May Day protests with walking as if dead. According to the protestors that I talked to, the zombies helped to energize the May Day protests (interviews, 2004). Certainly, the

zombies provided a challenge to the more clichéd performances of traditional trade union organized May Day protests, exemplified by the demonstration and the rally - both of which took place during the Glasgow event. They added an element of fun and surprise to proceedings and were able to spatially extend the May Day demonstration beyond its policed route and into shops, shopping centres and other streets. They engaged the public in a variety of ways and in so doing blurred the separation between a viewing public and marching protestor, even while dramatically setting themselves apart from both.

Further, the Dawn of the Debt was an independent action, not specifically tied to a particular social movement. As such what was gained in uncensored imagination, was potentially lost in being able to influence a particular political campaign. However, alternative media covered the May Day protests. For example, the Dawn of the Debt featured in a film on the protests produced by the Glasgow-based radical film collective *Camcorder Guerrillas* and distributed nationwide to activist groups, as a source of inspiration and possible adaption.

Certainly, the Dawn of the Debt action helped to deepen the bonds between the members of Invisible Plot - our group conducted many protest actions over the subsequent decade. For a few hours on a May Day afternoon, Dawn of the Debt's tactical performance attempted to subvert capital's production of meaning. This brings me to a consideration of the potential of humour through tactical performance in alter-geopolitical practice.

Seizing the Production of Meaning

This paper has attempted to extend the consideration of humour in geopolitical practice by focusing on spatialized tactical performance and its use in political protest. The Dawn of the Debt deployed a clear and simple action logic. The action entered the symbolic frame of consumer capitalism: that the activity of people circulating through sites of consumption is assumed to be normal everyday behaviour. The zombies shifted the frame's meaning to suit Invisible Plot's ends: to create an 'irresistible image' (Bogad, 2016: 112) to interrupt the hegemonologue. Deploying humour, the action targeted specific sites of intervention, and contained a powerful story-telling impact concerning consumerism's role in everyday life.

As a form of alter-geopolitics, such performance attempted to challenge dominant representations associated with consumer capitalism. A spatialized approach to the use of humour in political protest means that all spaces - e.g. the streets, squares, traffic and buildings of the city (including shopping centres), as well as social media become possible sites of intervention through play, mockery and humour. Spatialized tactical performance is critical in future protests as society is faced by the very concerns that inspired of Romero's film. With growing economic inequality and the emergence of the super-rich; increasing levels of commodity consumption worldwide and the threats of climate change and ongoing austerity, there remain ongoing problems of class, consumption and collapse.

While zombies as a form of tactical performance have focused on the representational narratives of capitalism, the character of the zombie has acted as a form of political virus. This is an event, invention, visual image or idea, designed to spread, catch people's attention and to insert an ideological code or 'meme' that is mobile and easily replicable, wherein the content and humour are tightly interwoven (Boyd, 2002). Since the Dawn of the Debt action, protestors have intervened in sites of decision and social reproduction (amongst others), dressed as zombies to represent capitalist bankers and corporate traders in Occupy Wall Street (Schneider, 2012) and Occupy London (Nyong'o, 2012). Most recently at the G20 meeting in Hamburg Germany in 2017, over 1000 activists dressed as zombies to intervene in sites of decision and assumption, to protest the G20's policies and to comment on the lack of political participation of the general public (https://www.newsweek.com/welcome-hell-thousand-zombies-gather-hamburg-protest-against-g20-summit-632286).

As a mode of action a virus has the advantages of being cheap, fast, and quickly replicable. However, viruses can mutate. They can take on lives of their own and can evolve as well as inform and inspire. Hence, zombie marches have emerged as a cultural phenomenon over the past fifteen years (do Vale, 2010). They are forms of costumed play (or 'cosplay') that have their own websites, conventions, and documentaries. While humorous, they have become a sub-cultural commodity (Nyong'o, 2012). Further, the deployment of zombies in popular culture have also been used to represent a range of dangerous, invasive others such as illegal immigrants and Islamic terrorists in a broader geopolitical terrain of globalized fear (Saunders, 2012).

More generally, there are other potential pitfalls to the use of humour. For example, the effective use of humour against a target might deliver the (momentary) justice that an audience craves, but in so doing generate political passivity. The pleasure people experience in the disruption of dominating power that they are not sure they can achieve themselves can act as a release valve rather than contributing to mass protest. Further, people might use humour to disassociate themselves from the injustices of the world, also leading to political inactivity. Being able to laugh at something can be a means of coping rather than challenging injustice, although it can form part of a struggle when used in conjunction with a range of other strategies that motivate people to seek justice.

In addition, the use of humour can play into the gendered, racialised, and striated realms that construct identities and unequal relations of power (See Glynn and Cupples, 2014). Certainly direct action and tactical performance can be seen as tactics of class and race privilege, used primarily by white, ableist, middle classed activists (Derickson and MacKinnon, 2015). Although the policing of protest has become more 'robust' over the past decade, such activists tend to have less to be concerned about concerning how police may respond *to them*. For people of colour who face ongoing police violence, harassment and detention in the U.K. and elsewhere, direct action protest is a far more risky undertaking.

Nevertheless, while humour and more broadly tactical performance cannot be expected to transform public policy, they have the potential to effect wider social struggle. They can make the task of everyday organizing in workplaces and communities more enjoyable and attractive, signalling that protest can be empowering, enjoyable and humorous. Humour can also help to soften the cultural terrain, enabling people to be more open to ideas that challenge common sense assumptions. Therefore, tactical performance can enable the seizing of the means of the production of meaning from capitalism, albeit temporarily. Zombie actions such as those in Hamburg signal that citizenship consists of more than producing, consuming and voting. The use of humour and other forms of tactical performance signal the withdrawal of consent to be ruled and can make alter-geopolitical practices and spaces of dissent attractive, opening up the public sphere for potential transformation.

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