

Panel introduction:

Does it work? Contemporary uses of avant-garde methods in communication.

This session attempts to determine and analyze various fields in which the ideas of the avant-garde spread outside of, or manifest themselves in the outskirts of, the art sphere. Through analysis of different contemporary phenomena like cultural jamming, subculture studies and identity politics, internet activism, street art, performance and alternative advertisement, we try to designate how avant-garde methods have exceeded the limits of art. Today, various avant-garde methods are used to criticize and affirm the social system in many different ways; they are both used and abused to affect everyday life.

These strategies include techniques to reclaim urban space, the use of new media like the Internet as a means of activism, media interventions, hoaxes, and different attempts to find and create spaces beyond the logic of global corporate capitalism. These different forms of critique have one thing in common: They attempt to change everyday life for the better. They are minor revolutions that to a large degree communicate within the frame of the capitalist society.

These small revolutions in which the critique is expressed "within society" are vulnerable to being absorbed by the market. Subversive expressions can be difficult to distinguish from commercial lifestyle products and alternative advertising campaigns make use of the same tools as their critics to catch the public eye. Artistic critique might be hard to express, but recuperation even harder to avoid.

Adams & Itso – Reclaim of urban space

By Julie Thaning Mikines

"A hidden room of refuge without rent and with other types of playing rules - a sanctuary by the track." – Adams & Itso.

Within any large city is an urban sub territory that all our lives depend upon, but which we rarely pay attention to. The city is based on an extensive underground system of pipes, cables and hidden areas, which give the city its structure, supplies and order. Since it is all located under the ground it is not often explored by ordinary people. In spite of this, the underground contains numerous hidden rooms, which easily can be used. The artist duo Adams & Itso reclaim the urban space by finding and using these hidden spaces in their everyday life.

Market economy is the engine of gentrification, which denotes the socio-economic and demographic change in an urban space, resulting from wealthier people buying housing property in a less prosperous community and thereby a factor that excludes certain groups. This also leads to an increasing regulation of what is permitted at street level. Adams & Itso criticize this economic-related development radically by living without the use of money: "I see it as a political statement not to consume" as Adams expresses it. Adams & Itso's project can be seen as an avant-gardistic endeavor where art and everyday life melt together. Furthermore their way of living is a protest against consumer society, which has clear roots in the Situationist International whose core arguments also were attacks on the capitalist degradation of the life of people.

Adams & Itso are artists who not only work in the underground, but also make a virtue out of being unknown. Through an analysis of Adam & Itso's hidden room under the Central Station (2002-2006) in Copenhagen I want to examine and discuss the avant-garde potential expressed through this work also in relation to the way the work is communicated (or not communicated) to the public.

Play in the street

By Hanne Cecilie Gulstad

Can we find contemporary use of avant-garde methods? Street art movements, working in a guerrilla way for change.

I will look at two phenomena that use avant-garde methods to communicate and interact with the world. With his 'space-invaders,' **Invader** tags the cities of the world. This is a play in which he conquers the places he visits, in order to document them on the internet so everybody can follow his moves. He also makes maps so it is easy for everybody to take part in his play.

My other example is '**The Pink Army**'. This is a movement that is happening, at this very moment, here in Copenhagen. Everybody can take part in this guerilla play by painting miniature soldiers and glueing them around the city.

These invasions and reclamations of urban space take part in public places so everybody can see their work. They invite different ways of seeing the public rooms of the city and new ways of taking part in a movement, to break out of our routines and participate.

In my proposal I will link my two examples with earlier avant-garde movements, in particular the Situationists' use of psychogeography and *dérive*. I will also see how the effects of **Invader** and **The Pink Army's** avant-garde strategies work within today's society, in which the institutions of art and capitalist society seem to absorb everything that tries not to be absorbed.

Radical communication on the Internet

By Anette Sophie Fuglesang

The Internet is a fundamental communication method in today's society; it structure our every day life and public sfere. But, the Internet and its communication methods can also be used in radical ways. Within the frames of contemporary use of avant-garde methods in communication, this proposals aim is; can some use of the Internet's communication methods, can be seen as avant-garde? More precisely expressed trough activism on the Internet.

Extended case: *In May 2008 the earthquake in the Sichuan Province in China razed 7000 schools to the ground. Compared to other public buildings, the sum of razed schools where a lot higher. Similarly, the exact numbers of dead schoolchildren where never published. These aspects of the disaster started a number of speculations around the policies of economy and development within the Chinese government. As a part of these speculations, and as a critique of the fact that the Chinese government did not want to publish the numbers of the dead. The Chinese artist and media activist Ai Weiwei, started to publish the names of the dead schoolchildren on his blog.*

On a micro level this media activistic action is only important for the victims relatives. But on a macro level Ai Weiwei act political trough his project, national as well as international. National by criticize and challenging the existing power structures in the Chinese government. International by, and extended with the national, facilitate global attention (in a negative way) against the Peoples Republic of China.

This case exemplifies that radical use of the Internets communication methods can criticize and challenge the structures of the society. Within this optic I will examine the use of avant-garde methods and ideas within the field of radical uses of the Internet's communication methods. A paradox, and as a field of further discussion, is how it is possible to use the term avant-garde on a phenomenon that is so fundamental in every day life?

Media hoax as a method

By Martin Rørtoft Rasmussen

Through media based performance stunts and manipulative maneuvers, as identity corrections, the Yes men's activist approach has been much influential in the field of culture jamming.

The Yes Men has case specific agendas on each work. Whether they pretend to be WTO-representatives, animate fake websites, press fake newspapers or make conference interventions, the hoax, as a manipulative maneuver, is a founding principle in their conceptual thinking. However, the concept of their work method does not fluctuate much, but can, in every piece of work, be seen as a case of identity correction? or in other words, by pretending to be powerful people or represent big corporate organizations, they try to establish an agenda of criticism by changing the ways of communication.

With focus on The Yes Men, I will examine the use of avant-garde tactics and ideas within the field of culture jamming. By analyzing the communicative tactics behind the "correction" of WTO in 2005, Dow Chemical in 2004 and the fake edition of New New Times in 2009, I wish to determine the subversive potential. One might argue, that using available types of media to place a critique by changing and subverting the channels of communication, the identity corrections in itself contains the undermining characteristics of the subversive potential. On the other the former is likely to represent an aesthetic viewpoint, where maneuvers in media activism are seen as an artifice. To what extend does the works of the Yes Men influence the everyday life? Does it work?

The tactical approach of the Yes Men seems to have similarities with the situationists' idea of detournement, and all though, they may not work within an announced artistic sphere, the need for change through media based activism and awareness of subversive potential in communication, simply cannot be seen just as political activism, but corresponds to the early avant-garde's ambition of changing everyday life through art, and that use of new technology and media could be beneficial in terms of making a

change. When linked to avant-garde groups and artist, the origins of the hoax technique constitutes the Yes Men's position between the revolutionary aspects of avant-garde art, cultural and political activism and guerrilla communication.

Avant sell out!

By Anders Asbjørn Olling

It is nothing new that market forces absorb the ideas of the avant-garde art movement. The aesthetics of the subversive have been used to sell products from the early historical avant-garde to today's media hoaxes by, for instance, The Yes Men.

Experts suggest that traditional advertising has lost its effect on certain segments of consumers. Therefore new strategies to address the public arise and these have similarities with the alternative communication strategies of the contemporary 'avant garde movement'.

Through analysis of recent alternative advertisement campaigns I look at the communicative similarities between art and ads. The use of scams and media intervention often creates public attention and becomes a part of the common news flow.

Through analysis of the manipulative advertising strategies to promote the bar 'B41' and the scandal-seeking media stunts of the American casino Golden Palace and Danish alco-soda manufacturer Cult Shaker, I try to find links to cases within the art sphere. I also take a look at the hoax reality television program "De Grote Donorshow" in the Netherlands, which ended up being an alternative way of addressing the lack of organ donors to the Dutch public.

The last example is not an ad, but it illustrates the potential of alternative ways of communication to put not just products but also political problems on the public agenda. These strategies have lucrative, but also subversive and edifying, potentials.

The style of contestation

- Avant-garde, subculture and the politics of identity

By Kristian Møller Schmidt

Published in 1979, Dick Hebdige's *Subculture – the meaning of style* was hardly meant as a contribution to avant-garde theory. However, as an engaged study of everyday behavior and lifestyle of English working class youths as a main site of resistance against forms of alienation and oppression in mainstream post-war society, it seems reasonable to situate Dick Hebdige's classic study of subculture among the works of such theorists as Guy Debord and Henri Lefebvre, whose association with the avant-garde movements is due to their extra-artistic contribution to the historical avant-garde project of a cultural revolution of everyday life.

Whereas Guy Debord still subscribed to some version of historico-philosophical Marxism, the pluralistic landscape of subcultural resistance described in Dick Hebdige's study might have been the kind of decenteredness Andreas Huyseer was thinking of, when in his 1986-work *After the Great Divide* he suggested that "Today the best hopes of the historical avant-garde may not be embodied in art works at all, but in decentered movements which work toward the transformation of everyday life". In Huyseer's 1980's, dominated by postmodern rejection of any universal ideology of progress and a capitalist culture industry seeming to have made any revolutionary aesthetics obsolete, self-creating subjectivities such as Dick Hebdige's subcultures of the 70's might have appeared as the only possible prolongation of the avant-garde revolt against cultural domination and conformity.

Today, however, the subversive potential of Hebdige's conception of subculture seems far from evident. Thirty years after its publication, in the contemporary world of aestheticized lifestyle economy and an ever growing global scene of identity politics, the difference between mainstream consumerism and the distinguishing mechanisms of subcultural style is still harder to grasp. In my conference paper, besides making a

historical investigation of the avant-garde traits of *Subculture*, I intend to propose a critique of Dick Hebdige's interpretation of the subversive uses of style. In my doing so, both Manfredo Tafuri's critique of the avant-garde cult of negation and the more recent analysis of contemporary anti-corporate counterculture in Heath & Potters *The rebel sell* (2005), will be of great importance