

The role of **TACTICAL MEDIA**

**in the power struggle between Empire
and its counter movements**



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Mette Næsby & Christian Villum
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Written by:

Christian Villum

Mette Næsby

Supervisor: **Julia Z. Klausen**

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(M) = Written by Mette Næsby
(C) = written by Christian Villum
(M & C) = written by both

INTRODUCTION

The focus of this project will be the concept of Tactical Media in the contemporary society, a relatively new proliferation of so-called alternative use of media; usage that moves out-of-the-box compared to conventional ways of using mass media such as television, audio broadcasting and the printed press.

Tactical Media

Basically, Tactical Media is *the utilization of unconventional means (and unconventional usage of conventional means) in order to bring forward a thought-inspiring, non-commercial and non-authoritarian message to a large body of recipients without the cost – nor the commercial representation - normally associated with mass media*. The purpose of tactical media practitioners is therefore to fabricate a *strike* that include a ‘spectacle’ – an occurrence or phenomenon - significant enough to gain attention on a broader scale, for instance by gaining news coverage in conventional mass media or via distribution through the Internet.

Tactical media is predominantly used in activist and counter movement circles seeking to display their appeal (most often a message of opposition against authoritative institutions) to a broader audience without having the financial resources to do so in traditional ways of big budget mass media communication.

By using unconventional means (and unconventional usage of conventional means) is meant that:

- tactical media wraps radical messages into unfamiliar settings; infiltrating conventional media - for instance by sampling an official website or by fusing political awareness with contemporary art - meaning that the message is subtly fitted into a specific contextual discourse in which you would not normally expect to find messages of opposition.

Tactical media takes use of any form that is deemed applicable, including (but not limited to) printed text, video, audio, networks, theatre, street demonstrations, art performance, literature, photography etc.

- tactical media does not rely on only one communication channel. Rather, it moves across communication platforms and takes use of both "the street" and "cyberspace"; meaning both off- and online communication instruments.

One of the basic traits of tactical media is that there are no limits to what kind of design and which channels of distribution can be utilized. Ever changing through the continuous creation of new ideas and approaches, tactical media cannot be labelled or categorized easily, and that is exactly what gives new tactical media initiatives its news value; the news interest that makes tactical media go from micro level to macro level – here meaning from micro media such as blogs, personal websites and small scale art performances - to mass media such as newspapers, radio and TV. Only through creativity will tactical media practitioners catch the attention of the public and therefore the tactical media concept must constantly be redefined and redeveloped.

Aim of the project

Our aim is to investigate the significance and role of tactical media in today's society as used by counter culture movements to bring forth their message. A society in which globalization and technology is constantly changing the way people interact, and also constantly affecting the flow of capital and power relations and consequently the conditions for politics, the corporate sector and the arts. We deem that namely power relations are significant when looking at the role of tactical media in this context.

As mentioned, tactical media is predominantly used in circles of opposition; opposition against, for instance, suppression and injustice or more generally as a product of political dissent towards the overall social, political or economical structure of the society of today. The dynamics of the power relationship between these opposing movements on one side and established institutional powers of politics, culture and the corporate sector – David vs. Goliath - is the prism of which we will scrutinize the role of tactical media.

Setting up the prism

The established institutional powers mentioned above are described in critical terms by a range of predominantly leftist scholars including Antonio Gramsci, Jackson Lears, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, who all describe that we, in the Western

world, live in a neo-capitalist based society structure in which wealth and power are strongly intertwined, thereby setting the socio-political climate. This structure is, by Hardt and Negri, referred to as *Empire*. This term will be collocated with characteristics of counter movement structures in order to establish the power relationship in overall terms.

In setting up this prism more accurately, we will base our analysis and discussion on the following hypothesis:

A neo-capitalist regime - Empire – permeates the Western hemisphere, and its ideology diffuses politics, the corporate sector, the arts/culture and social dimensions in general, as opposed by counter movements.

This leads us to the following concrete problem formulation:

What role does Tactical Media hold in the power struggle between Empire and its counter movements?

We will now proceed with an account of the underlying epistemological considerations of the project, followed by a detailed methodological account of how we plan to conduct our research and investigation.

EPISTEMOLOGY AND PROJECT STRUCTURE

In this section we wish to account for the epistemological considerations that form the framework of this project, as well as map the structure of the project.

Epistemological considerations

In overall perspective, the framework concept of Empire that we have chosen as our hypothetical stepping stone in this project is arguably a social construction, and thus dealing with it – in our case determining tactical media's role in this very context – makes us use the path of a social constructivist approach, seeing that we for this given project will share the understanding of society through the eyes of Michael Hardt, Antonio Negri and the other proponents of the concept of Empire. What signifies social constructivism (in this case on ideological level) is that the validity of a given view (in this case a world view) is achieved through the sharing of that belief (Roenn 2006: 70-71). This is what we have done in formulating the hypothesis to construct our prism, as described earlier – thus making the idea of Empire be the frame of social constructivist reality that we will work in.

Project structure

Structurally, this project will be divided into six main sections; above *the introduction* that presented our problem formulation followed by this *project structure overview*. Then we continue through four subsequent sections: a *methodological account* followed by a *theoretical account section*, an *analysis & discussion section* consisting of an empirical data overview, analysis and the actual discussion, and finally a *concluding section*. These last four sections will be presented in the following:

Methodology

The methodological section consists of a presentation of the tools we will be using in the analysis section, as well as an account of the choice of these specific tools.

Theory

To enable ourselves to achieve the best and most academically grounded framework, we have chosen to divide the theory section into two subsections, both of them

accounting for an academic stepping stone in the scrutiny of our topic and the challenge put forward by the problem formulation.

- *Contemporary society*

Two concepts will be treated here: Firstly, a brief insight into how globalisation has impacted society in the latter half of the twentieth century. This lead us to look at the significance of the network principle that is permeating the society today, mainly in the shape of Internet. A lot of the impact tactical media utilizes rests upon the power of networks, and thus it is our intention to draw perspective between tactical medias significance and role compared to the way technology is infiltrating everyday life in the western world. To do this we will rely mainly on the accounts by major network society theorist Manuel Castells, famous Spanish sociologist and award-winning author.

Lastly in this part, we will account for the neo-capitalist structures of Empire as advocated by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, considered some of the most critical scholars of the contemporary western society. They describe how we live in a neo-capitalist structured society in which wealth equals power, and given the prism we wish to use to investigate tactical media, we will give a thorough account of the term based on their offerings, combined with contributions by other scholars as well, including ao. Antonio Gramsci and others. This also includes accounting for the foundations of power relations and a view into the notion of digital resistance: Seeing how capital is fluid and borderless and why resistance must also adjust to this new setting.

- *Accounting for the concept of tactical media*

Being the main unit of research in this project, we will put great emphasis on presenting the characteristics of tactical media as offered by leading scholars Geert Lovink and David Garcia, inventors of the term and organizers of the worlds most significant assemblies on the theorization of tactical media, the annual 'Next 5 Minutes'-conferences. Further we will bring forth the work of the Critical Art Ensemble, a significant counter movement famous for authoring the perhaps most acclaimed take on tactical media, namely 'Digital Disturbance: Exploring Tactical Media'. Lastly, a variety of valuable points

from a range of academic papers will be included. All of this will lead us to present our own up-to-date definition of the term.

Analysis and discussion

The analysis and discussion section will be divided into two parts:

1. *Empirical data account overview*

As mentioned, our empirical data consist of accounts of three carefully selected tactical media strikes. We have chosen these specifically, because they oppose to three different dimensions of Empire (politics, the corporate sector and the arts) and further make use of three different ways of achieving exposure and media coverage (websites, television and the printed press).

The accounts will comprise information from and quotes by the tactical media practitioners themselves, as well as more subjective narratives from contemporary media. By using other sources than the practitioners themselves, we pursue the most non-biased and subjective point of departure available when using second-hand sources. All empirical data are included as digital appendixes on the attached CD-Rom.

2. *Analysis and discussion*

An analysis derived from the empirical data will be densified into our constructed analysis matrix using inductive method in order to make the data tangible for discussion (we will elaborate on this in the following methodology). This overview will constitute the bedrock of the subsequent analysis and discussion in which we will compare, contrast and juxtapose with our theoretical framework, expert statements from scholars, activists and critical commenters – as well as our own perspectives.

Conclusion

We expect this exploration to bring forward a nuanced and well argued picture of tactical media's role in the power struggle between the cultural hegemony and counter culture.

METHODOLOGY

This section will consist of an account of the methodological considerations and tools we will be utilizing in our analysis of the three selected tactical media strikes.

ANALYSIS TOOL

The complex nature of our project aim rests on a rather unorthodox set of empirical data, as the units we are analysing do not consist of just one type of text or media. They are to be interpreted as courses of events and processes within the category of tactical media. Basically, what we want to do is not to analyse platforms (for instance websites), ideologies, traditional communication mechanisms (such as for instance sender-receiver dynamics) or try to measure actual effects and effectiveness of the communication. Rather, we want to focus on an analysis of the role of the communication in a societal perspective. As such, we see a tactical media strike as a *process*: Starting with the urge to make an appeal and the utilization of means by a practitioner, followed by the launch of a so-called ‘spectacle’ (as will be described later) with its inherent subtle message and finally a reaction and the spreading of knowledge of some level.

Unfortunately, we did not succeed in finding an analytical tool that was entirely and accurately appropriate for this particular task, which is why we have chosen to create our own tool, based on the theory behind multimodal discourse analysis, as this is the theoretical backbone we found to be closest to what we were looking for. This theory is developed by professors Ron Scollon and Philip Devine and further interpreted by Gunther Kress and Theo Van Leeuwen.

The multimodal discourse analysis is seen as a new theory of analysing communication in the age of interactive multimedia, and it can be used as a tool to understand social action – how we communicate with each other.

What distinguishes multimodal discourse analysis from other types of discourse analyses is a focus on the significance of “the multiplicity of (inter)actions that a social actor engages in simultaneously” (Norris *in* Scollon and Levine 2004: 101), as

opposed to a focus directed primarily towards linguistic research or one specific performed action.

The theory operates under the idea that “all discourse is multimodal” (Scollon & Levine 2004: 1) meaning that all language is constructed across several modes of communication, hence the word modality. What we understand by a communicative mode is, following the definition put forward by Kress & van Leeuwen, “a set of signs with meanings and regularities attached to them.” (2004: 1) The theory is inspired by social semiotics, and can be described as “a theory of sign-making which sees all acts of communication as social.” (Burn & Parker 2003: 5). Namely semiotics play a significant role, as one of tactical medias many guises is that of re-semioticisation, as we will elaborate later herein.

In multimodal discourse analysis they introduce the concept of *communicative strata* – referring to the four dimensions of multimodal communication. Originally the theory includes four strata, namely *discourse*, *design*, *production* and *distribution*. However, inspired by other communication models, and in order for us to thoroughly evaluate tactical media strikes in relation to this project, we have chosen to alter the original four strata and employ an additional one, resulting in five strata that are as follows:

- *Intent and Purpose*

This stratum maps the idea and intent behind the strike as thought out by the tactical media practitioners. We include this stratum as an introductory level.

- *Contextual Discourse*

The original Kress and Van Leeuwen stratum inspires this stratum; *Discourse –the knowledge of some aspect of reality, coded in particular communicative patterns* (2003: 6) and fused with the concept of *context*.

This enables us to determine the specific frame within which the courses of events take place – the context in which the tactical media practitioners operate.

- *Design*

This stratum underlines the importance of choosing the appropriate form by which one wishes to convey a message. The focus can be on language, images, photographs, music etc, depending on the message in question. This stratum also involves the realisation of the chosen mode: Production. Choices are made as to whether the text is best expressed in paper, picture, online or maybe by use of a sound clip. It is an important step inasmuch as it helps shape the intended meaning of the text. We have chosen to fuse what were originally two separate strata as...*the plasticity of these media in the digital era means that the dividing line between the design and production of a text [...] becomes hard to distinguish.* (2003: 8)

In the case of tactical media, this stratum often involves a type of re-semiotisation or re-contextualisation, in the sense that a new and different meaning is given to already existing symbols of meaning.

- *Primary Distribution*

Obvious channels of distribution are television, radio, cinema and the Internet, but by *Primary Distribution* we refer to the channels that the tactical media practitioners are actually in control with. The way in which they initiate the strike.

- *Secondary Distribution*

In this stratum we look at the “spin-off” of the strike when it has left the hands of the tactical media practitioners.

Analysis matrix template

Having accounted for the five communicative strata, we will now, using the inductive method, convert them into a matrix, as illustrated below, to be used for analysing our three tactical media strikes.

This means, in practice, that we through the utilization of the communicative strata, converted into the analysis tool matrix, will single out important characteristics from the three strikes, in order to reach some general results usable for juxtaposition. The matrix is meant to be a platform for the subsequent discussion and interpretation.

We realize the problematic nature of the inductive method given that the analysis will be based on a limited range of empirical data, which furthermore seldom is uncompromised. As such, we are aware of the fact that the general results we reach are not universally valid, but nonetheless usable in determining tendencies in tactical media that enables us to conduct a well-argued discussion.

The analysis matrix is shaped as follows:

	<u>Strike 1</u>	<u>Strike 2</u>	<u>Strike 3</u>
Intent and purpose			
Contextual discourse			
Design			
Primary Distribution			
Secondary Distribution			

Having established our methodological approach, we will now proceed with the theoretical accounts.

THEORY SECTION

As described in the project structure overview, this section will present the theoretical bedrock of the project. We will now account for *contemporary society* as we see it framing this project and next the characteristics of *tactical media*.

CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

Globalization's impact on contemporary society

That society changes is nothing new. Throughout the centuries the achievements of humanity has constantly changed the social, economical and technological context of how humans relate to each other. In the last half of the twentieth century, however, the changes accelerated in the course of what has been labelled globalisation. We believe that globalisation has reached a level in academic circles in which it is no longer necessary for us to explain the concept of the term from scratch, other than quote those definitions necessary for us to proceed with the specific impact it has had on the topic of this project: tactical media's role in the power struggle of Empire.

Most basically, we have chosen the definition of well-acknowledged British sociologist Anthony Giddens, who formulated globalisation as “the intensification of world-wide social relations, which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa.” (Giddens *in* Rantanen 2005: 6). Further, looking at globalisation through our prism, the definition of Martin Albrow, another distinguished British sociologist, fits even better. He says, “globalisation refers to all those processes by which the peoples of the world are incorporated into a single world society, global society.” (Albrow *in* Rantanen 2005:7). The global society that Albrow refers to is that of the network society.

Over the centuries history saw a rapidly increasing demand for faster and more flexible ways of exchanging information: A need and demand that has arguably fuelled the research and development of microelectronics and information communication technologies that today has emphasized the value of the network more

than ever. Castells goes as far as to say that “information technology is the present-day equivalent of electricity in the industrial era” (Castells 2001: 1).

Network society and Internet

So what characterizes a network? Castells explains: “A network is a set of interconnected nodes. Networks are very old forms of human practice, but they have taken on a new life in our time by becoming information networks, powered by the Internet. (...) This is why networks are proliferating in all domains of the economy and society” (Castells 2001: 1). In the Internet medium a tool was finally found to enable the communication of many to many on a global scale. More significantly, “the Internet was purposely designed as technology of free communication. (...) The Internet is a particularly malleable technology, susceptible of being deeply modified by its social practice, and leading to a whole range of potential social outcomes.” It is this baton tactical media practitioners have picked up in order to convey social change, we argue, in a world increasingly dominated by neo-capitalist influence and power.

This dimension of the Internet is also recognized by Jan van Dijk, the Dutch professor famous for coining the terms ‘network society’ and later ‘the digital divide’ (the notion pointing out that although we say that the world is networked, only about one third has actually access to the Internet). As such he stress that “the use of a network is able both to disperse and to concentrate power. However, in practice there is a particular bias: we observe a tendency towards concentration of power when no adequate measure exists for the social and legal protection of less powerful actors. After all, the centre takes the role of deciding agency in almost every new media initiative, planning, introduction and installation.” (Dijk 1999: 142). In other words, we will argue, he who is richest and most powerful will be in control.

Social implications: The rise of individualism and diffuse virtual communities

The development described above has set its mark on the way we interact – and thereby on the way we look on relationships in general. Dijk explains that “the twentieth century reveals a disintegration of traditional communities such as families, neighbourhoods and groups of workers into associations which (...) are extending as

they become more diffused and spread over greater distances.” (Dijk 1999: 159) He clarifies how people today accept this trend towards individualization and more superficial acquaintances. The introduction of virtual communities “has raised hope for the recovery of community in electronic environments.” (Dijk 1999: 159).

Much has happened in this realm since Dijk’s 1999-book where this is taken from, and without further source we feel safe to claim that virtual communities now constitute a rich, widespread sphere of interaction in especially the Western and Asian hemispheres. Although resembling the traditional type of community in many ways, virtual communities are – as also recognized by Dijk in his book – much more based on sharing of preferences and thus Dijk labels them *communities of interest* (1999: 160). This particular idea is significant in dealing with our topic, as it constitutes one of the main strengths of the network in general and for counter movements in particular. Castells, in one of his recent publications, *The Network Society*, puts it very accurately: “Weak (social) ties have been shown to be a valuable form of social capital. They provide access to diverse social circles that are separate from more ‘homophilious’ strong tie networks. At an individual level, they provide a bridge to resources that would otherwise be unavailable. (...) At a group level, they are an important factor in the ability of communities to mobilize collectively.” (*in* Castells, 2004: 228). In other words: In the network, these “weak” ties constitute a significant value and power.

Neo-capitalist structures of Empire

As mentioned in the Introduction, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri have proposed that we, in the Western world, live in what they call *Empire*: a neo-capitalist based society structure in which wealth and power are strongly intertwined, thereby setting the socio-political climate. In our interpretation, neo-capitalism in this context is referring to an increasingly diminishing role of the state in terms of economic regulation, making room for privatisation and corporate sector growth.

This structure, when paired with the development of globalization – the flow of capital, culture and information across borders – creates a social homogenization of society and further imposes this development on other cultures. Gramsci, who

focuses mainly on cultural influence, gives the following definition of what he labels the cultural hegemony of the West:

“The ‘spontaneous’ consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group; this consent is ‘historically’ caused by the prestige (and consequent confidence) which the dominant group enjoys because of its position and function in a world of production. (...)

Ruling groups impose a direction on social life; subordinates are manipulatively persuaded to board the ‘dominant fundamental’ express.” (Gramsci *in* Lears 1985: 568). It takes little insight and reason to determine that the dominant structure Gramsci refers to is that of the Western neo-capitalist societal structure established and increasingly accentuated in the Cold War and post-Cold War period. A structure permeating politics, the corporate sector, the arts/culture and all social dimensions in general, thereby forcing upon the lives of the unknowing citizens the neo-capitalistic way of life.

Although this view of the world is by far subject to discussion, this is the critical view we have chosen to use in order to setup the prism of dichotomy that accentuates the polarity between the two entities of the elite and activists; “the new power geography” (as labelled by counter movement Critical Art Ensemble 1994); a power struggle between the mainstream capital-driven elite society on one side, constituting the so-called Empire (whose ideals permeates mass media on world scale by its very discourse and influence) and the critical groups on the other, questioning the fairness of this regime of Empire and the power relationship it constitutes. As mentioned, this is the constructed prism of dichotomy through which we will investigate the role of tactical media. We will now elaborate.

According to Hardt and Negri, Empire refers to a new global order or a new “global form of sovereignty” (2004:xi). It is generally agreed upon that the sovereignty of nation-states has declined in the sense that fixed cultural or ethnic groupings are diminishing. This has happened due to recent global interactions, with the development of expanding dominant cultures that in many ways is a reminiscence of ancient European colonialism, imperialism and territorial expansion. Imperialism then referred to the processes of European nation-states expanding outside national borders, cultivating other countries in several senses of the word.

Hardt & Negri argue that the notion of Empire is different from that of imperialism seeing that it does not rely on fixed territorial boundaries, and that it “manages hybrid identities.”(2000:xii) But several parallels can be drawn between the two concepts, and it seems that Empire is the new form of imperialism. What has changed is processes of interaction and communication and global exchange of information, resulting in alterations in terms of constructing identity in a world of increased individualism. Hardt & Negri continues: “Empire is the political subject that effectively regulates these global exchanges, the sovereign power that governs the world.” (Hardt & Negri 2000:xi)

The notion of Empire draws ones focus to the current debate on so-called Westernization or Americanization even, and the ongoing discussions of the existence of a cultural hegemony.

The concept of cultural hegemony is not easily defined. Gramsci sees it as “the relation between culture and power under capitalism,” (Lears 1985:568) meaning that within neo-capitalist societies, the concepts of culture and power are interconnected. Gramsci sees hegemony as the “ideological dominance of a society” where countercultures are persuaded to sympathise with the hegemonic culture or dominant class.

Power relations

As mentioned above, we see an obvious power struggle between the elite society of empire and the critically positioned counter movements, a relation which is supported by the works of French philosopher Michel Foucault. He treats the concept of power relations and describes the very nature of how “the human subject is placed in power relations which are very complex”. (2000: 327) Foucault defines power as “the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organization; as the process which, through ceaseless struggles and confrontations, transforms, strengthens, or reverses them; as the support which these force relations find in one another, thus forming a chain or system, or on the contrary, the disjunctions and contradictions which isolate them from one another; and lastly, as the strategies in which they take effect, whose general design or

institutional crystallization is embodied in the state apparatus, in the formulation of the laws, in the various social hegemonies.” (1998: 92)

We will not delve deep into his comprehensive studies in this project, but instead use some of his thoughts in order to explain the relations between neo-capitalist Empire and counter movements, and the “apparent contradiction between the power wielded by dominant groups and the relative cultural autonomy of subordinate groups whom they victimize” (Lears 1985:568).

Counter movements

But firstly, we will briefly present evidence of the existence of counter movements, as advocated by American professor Kenneth Cushner of Kent State University. He explains that within the dominating culture of a society, in this case the Empire, several subcultures exist containing certain characteristics, which can only be understood in relation to this dominating culture. A subculture can be described as: “A social group with shared characteristics that in some way distinguish it from the larger cultural group or society in which it is embedded” (Cushner 2003).

Danish professor Finn Collin speaks of three different types of subcultures; *intensive subcultures*, *orthogonal subcultures* and *countercultures*. (In Gullestrup 2003: 168)

In this project we will look at the category of counter cultures, as this is where we find activist groups and counter movements. Characteristic of the aforementioned is that they seek to oppose the traits or the authority of the dominating culture.

To avoid confusion, however, we will refer to these groups as counter movements, since the word ‘culture’ might suggest that it is only within culture that the opposition takes place. This is not the case, as counter movements act within the entire spectrum of Empire, also including the spheres of the corporate sectors and politics.

According to Foucault, “power relations are integral to the modern social productive apparatus, and linked to active programs for the fabricated part of the collective substance of society itself” (2000: xix), meaning that power relations exist within any

society as part of the constructed reality. He also states that “where there is power, there is resistance” (1998: 93). This statement and the above-mentioned definition suggest that in society, power relations are immanent and co-dependent, and the different subjects of power incessantly challenge each other, thereby redefining themselves and the others. A subject of power is always seen in relation to either a similarity or a contradiction.

These thoughts of the power relations in society underline our hypothesis of such a relation existing between the hegemonic institutions of Empire and the opposing counter movements.

Foucault also emphasizes that in the attempt to balance the power relations, focus should not be on striking against a “group or an institution of power”, but rather on it’s “technique or a form of power” (Foucault 1982: 211), meaning, for instance, the institution’s channels of expression. This particular idea is interesting to look at when analysing the processes of tactical media, which we will elaborate later.

Digital resistance

Another significant dimension of society today is that of technology. It is clear that technology in general and the Internet in particular plays a pivotal role in communication – and thereby inherently also in tactical media. Today the Internet has granted autonomy to the individual user, making everyone capable of making ones voice heard through a wide range of new and relatively censorship free publication concepts including ao. blogging, forums, personal websites and the like. Technology, networks and the Internet are increasingly gaining momentum and are constantly spawning new ideas and ways for people to interact. The strengths of these concepts are all based on the network principle as presented earlier as the “strength through weak ties”, as what online acquaintances might lack in relationship depth is compensated for through quantity. We will use this mechanism to gain perspective in determining the role of tactical media.

Counter movement the Critical Art Ensemble suggests that “The location of power – and the site of resistance - rest in an ambiguous zone without borders” due to the fact that, “traces of power flow in transition between nomadic dynamics and sedentary structures” (Critical Art Ensemble 1994:11). According to the Critical Art Ensemble,

power has become *nomadic* – meaning mobile - concurrently with capital becoming a fluid and liquid entity, difficult to locate. They speak of the nomadic power elite: “The contemporary society of nomads becomes (...) a diffuse power field without location [... allowing] for the appearance of global economy (Critical Art Ensemble 1994: 11). On this shift in the form of power they state that, “one essential characteristic that sets late capitalism apart from other political and economic forces is its mode of representing power: What was once a sedentary concrete mass has now become a nomadic electronic flow. Before computerized information management, the heart of institutional command and control was easy to locate.” (Critical Art Ensemble 1996: 7)

Whilst capital and power have become ‘fluid’ entities, so has the people dominating over them in a sense. The nomadic elite of today is not reliant on fixed borders but can, if necessary, relocate instantly through cyberspace. But activists can still produce disturbance if they take on the fight of levelling the power distance infiltrating the (cyber) space that is the new battlefield of the contemporary society.

”Blocking the entrances to a building, or some other resistant action in physical space, can prevent reoccupation (the flow of personnel), but this is of little consequence so long as information-capital continues to flow (...) Capital rarely takes a hard form; like power, it exists as an abstraction. An abstract form will probably be found in an abstract place, or to be more specific, in cyberspace.” (1996: 9-12)

TACTICAL MEDIA

Tactical media – once labelled ‘an antidote against the rule of money over humans’ by controversial American anarchist writer Paul Lambourn Wilson (*in* Garcia & Lovink 1997A) thereby promoting our hypothesis of the existence of a neo-capitalist Empire - is, in our own definition as presented in the introduction, *the utilization of unconventional means (and unconventional usage of conventional means) in order to bring forward a thought-inspiring, non-commercial and non-authoritarian message to a large body of recipients without the cost – nor the commercial representation - normally associated with mass media.*

However, this is merely a densified definition of the highly abstract and ever-changing term in order to make it more pragmatically usable in the forthcoming analysis and discussion in this project. In this elaborative theoretical account we would like to establish a more nuanced picture of the concept, looking at its scholarly definitions and characteristics, purposes and actors, its perspectives as well as the critique it has received.

Definitions

The definition mentioned above that we have created to use for this project has been reassembled from work by leading scholars. Most profound is perhaps that of the organizers of the ‘Next 5 Minutes’ (N5M) conferences in Amsterdam lead by scholars Geert Lovink and David Garcia. The ’96 conference participants came to the definition that tactical media referred to a “a critical usage and theorization of media practices that draw on all forms of old and new, both lucid and sophisticated media, for achieving a variety of specific non-commercial goals and pushing all kinds of potentially subversive political issues.” (*in* Critical Art Ensemble 2000: 3). We have chosen to base our interpretation on this particular definition since it is also the bedrock of Critical Art Ensemble’s ‘Digital Resistance: Explorations in Tactical Media’ – a book which is widely acclaimed as perhaps the most accurate published take on tactical media to date (Garcia et. Al. 2002).

The reason why we have not appropriated this definition entirely, and rather made our own version that include fragments of this definition, is that the N5M definition does

not take into account 1) the economical congenital necessity of artists of using non-costly means, 2) the utilization of artistic creativity that makes tactical media evolve and redefine itself constantly and 3) the significance of network ties seen today in the form of for example online communities. N5M's definition suggests using 'media practices', whereas we will rather use the terms 'means' since it also covers distribution of the message through the digital network of individuals, communities and online counter culture movements. The last point has proliferated at an explosive rate during the last few years since the N5M conference and thus accentuates the ever-changing characteristics of tactical media.

Lastly, N5M's definition limits the content and purpose of tactical media by suggesting that this must be of "subversive political" character. Although often the case, pushing political awareness is not *per se* – in our perception - the only purpose of tactical media. Instead we use the term 'thought-inspiring' as to gain a spectrum more truthful to the diversity of tactical media practitioners and their multiple purposes.

When speaking of a definition of tactical media, one should keep in mind that one of the bedrock characteristics of tactical media is constant re-definition; since it's dynamics lie much in the news value (as will be elaborated later herein) of the communication, tactical media is bound to constantly seek new territory, thus inevitably breaking the borders of any given definition (Critical Art Ensemble 2000:7). The Critical Art Ensemble describes how tactical media is constituted by constant shifting of values, constant cultural context reconfiguration, containing many conjectures and self-contradictions and generally carrying very few principles that seem to have general value. In summary they point out – not without a trace of irony – that "the collection of traits from which a tactical media practice emerges is bound to change depending on who is asked what these traits are." (Critical Art Ensemble 2000:7)

Practitioners of tactical media

Determining the users, producers or practitioners cannot, in our impression, be done without a certain amount of generalization. Given the abstractness and constant change of the term, as mapped above, as well as the immensely broad range of

purpose of tactical media as described in the following, it would impossible to give a just picture of who would indulge in using tactical media. That being said, however, it is to some extent possible to indicate that tactical media is almost exclusively used in counter culture movements. Garcia et. al. assign this to the fact that practicing tactical media requires the ability of “creating effective user languages (virtual or otherwise) that engage and deploy rather than authorize and require.” (2002)

This is not to say that only a narrow range of people are qualified enough to produce tactical media. Critical Art Ensemble state that “those involved in tactical media could be any kind of cultural hybrid. Artist, scientist, technician, craftsperson, theorist, activist, etc. could all be mixed together in combinations that had different weights and intensities.” (Critical Art Ensemble 2000: 5-6).

General purpose

The purpose of tactical media, in our view and as mentioned in the introduction, is *to fabricate a ‘spectacle’ - an occurrence or phenomenon - significant enough to gain attention on a broader scale, for instance through news coverage in conventional mass media or via distribution through online network ties and thereby inherently producing food for thought through the milieus somewhat familiar to the receiver.*

Critical Art Ensemble explains further that tactical media “challenges the existing semiotic regime by replicating and redeploying it in a manner that offers participants in the projects a new way of seeing, understanding, and interacting with a given system. The already given and the unsaid are the materiale of a tactical media event.” (Critical Art Ensemble 2000: 8) – we will elaborate on this re-semiotisation process later herein.

They continue, quoting famous professor and cultural critic Stanley Aronowitz saying that tactical media “deconstruct the givenness to show the cracks that sutures have patched, to demonstrate that what is taken as privileged discourse is merely a construction that conceals power and self-interest. Much the same can be said about the tactical media practitioner, the difference being that rather than just doing critical reading and theorizing, practitioners go on to develop participatory events that demonstrate the critique through an experiential process.” (*in* Critical Art Ensemble 2000: 8)

Recognizing tactical media

So how can we characterize these occurrences – or more accurately so-called spectacles, as presented later in this text – that constitute tactical media through usage of unconventional means and unconventional usage of conventional means?

As mentioned in the introduction, tactical media wraps radical messages into unfamiliar settings. By nature, it is not limited to any one form or platform, set of aesthetics, discourse or contextual setting. Rather, “one of the most used tactical routes is hybridisation: Pairing new with old, the street and the virtual - a new realism - generative of infinity, switch between channels, mix up signals, intentions and disciplines etc.” (Garcia & Lovink 1997B). The Critical Art Ensemble describe how they “can be doing a web project one week, a stage performance at a festival the next, a guerrilla action the next, a museum installation after that, followed by a book or journal project.” (Meikle 2002: 121).

As such, tactical media does not only utilize the underground scene, but also the mainstream - moving between entities, coalitions etc. in the media landscape. Constantly creating a supply of new mutants and hybrids - taking advantage of those spaces emerging because of the pace of technological development (Garcia & Lovink 1997A). These ‘emerging spaces’, or ‘cultural opportunities’ as mentioned above – are, to use the same Stanley Aronowitz quote again, the deconstruction of “the givenness to show the cracks that sutures have patched, to demonstrate that what is taken as privileged discourse is merely a construction that conceals power and self-interest.” (*in* Critical Art Ensemble 2000: 8)

The ‘spectacle’

Tactical media’s backbone is the notion of ‘spectacle’. The term is used by ao. the Critical Art Ensemble to describe the essence that gives tactical media communication its news value and thereby gives it its broad appeal, even if the communication is scrambled ‘in tongues’ or abstract.

Geert Lovink defines the ‘spectacle’ by saying that tactical media projects are often a mixture of art and activism, which explains why many of its roots can be traced to various art movements. To summarize, he suggests that “discourse plus art equals

spectacle" to describe its striking and memorable nature. "Although there are no strict mediums through which it operates, tactical media often have very high aesthetic value, adding to its 'spectacle' and reinforcing some of its artistic roots." (Lovink 2002: 256).

Re-semiotisation and re-contextualisation

As such the design of the communication – the spectacle – can be both an original produce or created via a *re-semiotisation* (or similarly *re-contextualisation*) of something already existing being re-moulded to create the spectacle. Anne Cranny-Francis, scholar on the subject of multimedia, gives a valuable definition that we find applicable for tactical media also. She explains how "multimedia text is the reality that users and audiences encounter, and by which they make meanings of themselves and their lives." She continues, saying that her "redployment of terms such as genre, inter-textuality, discourse, embodiment and subjectivity in this study has been an attempt to discuss this re-semiotisation - the interrelation of meaning systems that have previously been held in different disciplinary areas (languages and literary studies, visual arts, musicology and audiology, performance architecture). By providing a common basic language for the meaning-making functions of these different systems of meaning it is possible to discuss their meaning-making practice in a holistic way." (Cranny-Francis 2005: 166).

This was exemplified when activist movement RTmark published an almost exact copy of World Trade Organisation's homepage on an almost similar web address, and subsequently were invited on Australian national television by an unknowing news board that were shocked to hear this alleged "WTO representative" announce the dissolution of the organisation on live TV. This was of course followed shortly after by an official press release from the WTO denouncing the statement and calling the incident imposturous, but by then the spectacle (through re-semiotisation) had already appeared and made its impact.

Multiple platforms

As also mentioned in the introduction, tactical media does not rely on only one communication channel. Rather, it moves across communication platforms and takes

use of both "the street" and "cyberspace"; meaning both off- and online communication instruments.

Further, the cultural practices that constitute tactical media practices are much older than the term itself. Pre-network communication channels included for instance medias such as t-shirts, badges, CD-ROMs, music cassettes, magazines and flyers to music styles such as rap and techno – just to name a few. Tactical media practitioners – back then labelled artists or activists – found that "political motivated activities were no longer part of a politically correct crowd, and they could intervene in pop culture." (Lovink & Schneider 2002) In other words, activists and artists entered the popular culture stage to engage receivers in their familiar milieus.

General perspectives

The discussion of tactics vs. strategy

How has the term tactical media come about and why exactly is it tactical? Some argue that it resembles a strategy more than a tactic. What's the difference?

The difference lies in the fact that "while a strategy uses space to unfold, tactics use time" (Meikle 2002: 121 / Wikipedia). Why is that significant? It becomes significant in seeing that tactical media is not a battle for space, since it exists in the same space it opposes. Instead it is focused on the time dimension, as it searches for the opportunities that appear when loopholes are found within its occupied space - loopholes for creating a spectacle.

Joanne Richardson puts it even more bluntly by asserting that strategy belongs to institutions (states, economic powers etc.), formed around a clear division of 'them' (enemy) and 'us' (the proper). Tactics, on the other hand, she says "insinuate themselves into the other's place, no separation, no frontal assault on external power - but temporary infiltrations from the inside." (Richardson 2004: 123). This is exactly the same mechanism described by Foucault in the theory section, when he addresses how one should attack a form of power rather than the institution itself.

Comparing with traditional alternative media and counter culture

What exactly differentiates tactical media from what is usually referred to as alternative media, such as the protest movements of the 60s and 70s? In a scientific paper on that exact topic, Sandra Braman puts it very accurately by stating that tactical media is radically different in the way that it shifts from “strict ideological positions to abandonment of ideology, from rejection of consumption to use of consumption for political ends, from rejection of aesthetics to use of aesthetics for political ends, and from a focus on the content of media to, as Marshall McLuhan put it, the medium as content.” (Braman 2002) (Marshall McLuhan being the well-acknowledged literature and media studies professor also famous for coining the now institutionalized expression ‘global village‘ often quoted across the globe in globalization contexts).

Critique and suggested weaknesses of tactical media

Now, we have learned the innovative and powerful traits and characteristics of tactical media that builds a portrait of a highly potent communication phenomenon. But what are its downsides? As such, there are wide ranges of critiques of both the nature, effect and disparity of both tactical media as communication as well as against its practitioners. We have, however, chosen a few of the critiques that we deem most relevant for the specific topic we are examining.

First and foremost, as pointed out by the Critical Art Ensemble using a quote by cultural artist and author Rebecca Schneider, tactical media suffers from inaccuracy in secondary representation. She points out how tactical media’s problem lies in the fact that records (photos, video etc.) are “open to capitulation and recuperation”, meaning that since a high amount of the appeal and message of tactical media lies in the so-called *spectacle* – an “immediate lived experience” – the records, thereafter standing alone, does not represent the same message or communicative power (Critical Art Ensemble 2000: 10).

Perhaps the most significant critique is that of Mark Dery, known as somewhat an activist himself, although one very critical towards tactical media in general. His main critique is that tactical media is extremely disperse and fragmented, thus making it

hard to achieve a common goal and even evoking conflicting goals (Critical Art Ensemble 2000: 14), thereby, it can be argued, criticising the very nature of tactical media. The Critical Art Ensemble, however, dismisses this critique entirely. They see this particular trait as one of the most obvious strengths of tactical media, since it in their judgment “resists bureaucratic structure as well as provide a space for happy accidents and breakthrough invention.” (2000: 15)

DATA, ANALYSIS & DISCUSSION

After having formed our theoretical foundation, we will now proceed with our analysis and discussion in order to enable ourselves to determine the role of tactical media in the power struggle between Empire and its counter movements.

This section is made up of two parts: First the presentation of our empirical data, consisting of accounts of three large-scale tactical media strikes taking place in recent years, namely RTmarks parodist duplication of then governor George W. Bush's website, The Yes Men's appearance on BBC and finally 0100101110101101.ORG's art world staging of the invented artist Darko Maver. These accounts are based on the practitioner's website themselves, as well as a wide range of newspaper articles and published scientific papers. Using our constructed analysis tool, we will end this part will by recapitulating the strikes and adding our findings into the analysis matrix. This will provide the basis of the subsequent analysis and discussion that constitutes the second part of this section.

EMPIRICAL DATA OVERVIEW

We have carefully picked out these particular tactical media strikes, because they complement each other in representing the broadness of the tactical media scope in several ways: Firstly, they operate in three different domains of Empire, namely politics (strike 1), the corporate sector and established mass media (strike 2) and the art realm (strike 3). Secondly, they use different design and distribution: the web, television, exhibitions etc.

Here is a brief overview of the strikes, followed by a thorough account.

	Practitioner	Brief strike description
<u>Strike 1</u> gwbush.com	RTMark	Parodic duplication of Bush web site to ridicule his politics and forthcoming presidential candidacy.

<u>Strike 2</u> Dow Chemicals	The Yes Men	A. Parodic duplication of the official Dow Chemical website. B. Appearance on BBC as a Dow representative
<u>Strike 3</u> Darko Maver	0100101110101101.ORG	A fake artist, Darko Maver, was invented and became massively hyped in art circles, and it caused outrage when announced that it was a hoax.

Strike 1: gwbush.com

In 1999, art group RTMark in collaboration with Zack Exley, a Boston-based computer consultant, launched a parodic duplication of the official site for then Governor George W. Bush's Presidential Exploratory Committee. The original site was located at www.georgewbush.com – whereas RTmark's version was to be found at gwbush.com, thus confusing visitors as to which site was the official one.

Thousands went to RTmark's version thinking it was the real one. The parodic web site had “the same layout and design, the same pictures. But under the slogan *Hypocrisy with Bravado*” (Meikle 2000) and thus an altered content with a humoristic approach, highly critical to George W. Bush and his political agenda. One of the most noticeable gimmicks of the site was ‘Amnesty 2000’ – in which it is presented as if it is the policy of George W. Bush that imprisoned convicts are to be released if they ‘have grown up’. This is an implicit reference to Bush's own answer to the allegations that he in his youth experimented with cocaine, and thus would be unfit for presidency; allegations to which he has answered that his youth is of no significance, as he himself has ‘grown up’ (Raney 1999A).

As soon as the Bush organisation realized the existence of this site, they immediately made a complaint to the Federal Election Commission to require “that the site's owner file with the commission as a political action committee and report the Web site as a campaign contribution. Election laws require those who spend money to support or defeat a candidate to file contribution reports.” (Raney 1999)

This seemed like somewhat of a blind alley, as the commission “declined to discuss the case, citing agency rules. Ron Harris, an FEC spokesman, said the commission [had] not dealt with many Internet-related complaints and the current case could break

new legal ground on how the Web is governed under campaign laws.” (Slater 1999) After further investigation it turned out that the rules prescribed that only initiatives costing more than USD 250 were to register as an official contribution to the election campaign. Exley explained that he only spent around USD 210 to build the site and thus were not obligated to convey to the demands set forward by the Bush organisation (Meikle 2000). Pressure, however, was also put forward in other ways as ”the committee's lawyer, Benjamin L. Ginsberg, sent Exley a cease-and-desist letter that called the site a "cavalier usurpation" of the official site, and said it violated copyright and trademark infringement laws.” (Raney 1999B). After this, RTMark and Exley did actually change the look of the site and made it more directly critical of Bush.

This complaint set forward to the Federal Election Commission, though, turned out to be a spark of the now following publicity spectacle that gave way to nationwide interest. It made the site attract hundreds of thousands of visitors, whereas before had it ”received only a trickle of traffic” (Raney 1999A). ”Mindy Tucker, a Bush committee spokeswoman, said the confusion had been so strong that reporters frequently confused the unofficial site with the official site, and that the address of the unofficial site, which contained links to material that committee officials considered pornographic, had even appeared in print.” (Raney 1999B)

But that was only the beginning. Soon the main character, Mr. Bush himself, entered the scene, being quoted that *"there ought to be limits to freedom"* - a remark that became a rallying point for his online critics (Raney 1999A). In retrospective, RTMark reflects on how they did not themselves create the news value that made the event headline media across the nation: ”To turn a domain name into a news story, more than just challenging content was needed: also essential was the active participation of George W. Bush.” (RTMark XXXX)

Scholar Graham Meikle, in his scientific paper on the topic, states how “the real success of gw bush.com was in the extent to which the Bush/cocaine issue was subsequently reported and publicised in the mainstream media, with the hook for wider coverage being Bush's own recognition of the site. His "limits to freedom" outburst generated enormous media interest - among those to cover it in the US were

ABC news, USA Today, Newsweek, and the New York Times, as well as international press from Russia to Brazil.” (Meikle 2000). The power of the Internet as medium - as tactical media - in this form has made quite an impression on experts: ”Internet political consultants, who develop methods of using the medium effectively for political communication, (...) say experience in the medium's brief history has already shown that trying to shut down critics online is a losing proposition.” (Raney 1999A). By triggering the rage of a well-established political organ such as the Bush Exploratory Committee, RTmark and Exley reached more readers than many of the major US political magazines. (Meikle 2000)

Strike 2: Dow Chemicals

In 1984 Union Carbide, now owned by Dow Chemicals leaked an enormous amount of toxic gas from a pesticide plant, resulting in the death of thousands. Union Carbide, now fused with Dow Chemicals, never accepted responsibility for the accident and offered only a slight compensation to the surviving victims.

“It was one of the worst industrial disasters in history and for years activists have called on the firm to take full responsibility for the disaster and to clean up the contaminated site.” (Democracynow.org 2004)

Activist group the Yes Men orchestrated this tactical media strike in order to shed light on the accident. The Yes Men wanted to “express what they felt Dow Chemicals should express.” (CNN.com 2004)

A web site was created, resembling the official Dow Chemicals web site, only with alterations in text and message. This resulted in, after some time, the BBC contacting the Yes Men believing that it was in fact the actual media relations centre of Dow Chemicals, and they invited a representative to discuss “the company’s position on the worst industrial accident in history” (Theyesmen.org 2006) on the 20th anniversary of the accident. The fake Dow representative went on air, proclaiming that Dow Chemicals would now accept full responsibility for the accident, and reimburse victims with a total amount of \$12 billion.

The full interview was aired twice, “and for two hours the story [was] the top item on news.google.com” (Theyesmen.org 2006). The CNN reported that “an ‘elaborate

deception' [had] led at least two news organizations to report that Dow Chemicals had accepted responsibility for the Bhopal disaster, sending the company's stock down temporarily." (CNN.com 2004). Dow Chemicals learned about the hoax within a few hours and contacted the BBC who swiftly retracted the interview.

"The company was forced to remind the world it did not take responsibility for the disaster and said there was no compensation fund set-up for the victims." (CNN.com 2004)

Strike 3: Darko Maver

In 1999-2000 the contemporary art world witnessed a rather spectacular hoax – namely the staged existence of an artist named Darko Maver. Staged in the sense that he never existed, and only made "real" through media manipulation by political art movement 0100101110101101.ORG.

In a period of under one year the group – in secrecy – constructed stories and narratives that when published created a hype unparalleled in recent years. The hype – that travelled in both media and on Internet – made Darko Maver go from completely unknown to appearing at the prestigious Biennale art convention in Venice – an achievement usually only possible for well-established artists.

The invented story of Darko Maver that was published in the media "set Italy and Europe buzzing" (Caronia 2000) and told the story of how the artist grew up as an orphan near Belgrade and was later kicked out of the art academy due to his controversial work. In the war-torn landscape of ex-Yugoslavia, the story goes, he then wandered the decaying Yugoslavia as a nomad living in cheap hotels and sleeping in abandoned houses while installing gruesome and morbid pieces of art consisting of wax-replicas of dead bodies portraying victims of torture and molestation (Pasovsky 2000).

The government, it was reported, when realizing the link between these grotesque stagings and the renegade artist, issued a warrant of his arrest for issuing anti-patriotic propaganda, which led to the imprisonment of Darko Maver. "The campaign for the freedom of art broke out on the web, calling for Maver's release from prison. In May

1999, came the almost inevitable tragic end: Darko Maver died in prison. The photograph of his body was passed around on the web and raised the questions: Was he murdered? Did he kill himself? Was that another one of his performances, this time final?" (Pasovsky, 2000). "Maver's death only added to his popularity. Galleries in Rome were showing his retrospectives, articles were written about his work, and in September 1999, he was presented in one of the most important events in the art world, the Biennale in Venice, with a documentary film about his work." (Pasovsky 2000)

0100101110101101.ORG anonymously kept feeding the media with information of this story throughout the process, while exhibiting pictures of his work at art conventions around Europe, thereby adding to the hype. This hype reached a climax in the days when the art world held their breath hearing that Darko Marko had been jailed – and the reaction was extreme when the picture of his corpse was circulated on the web. This reaction was nothing, however, compared to the outrage among sympathizers, proponents, media and the art world in general, when the group officially "announced having performed one of the biggest artistic deceptions in recent years: it invented Darko Maver, by using the propaganda of the web in a sophisticated manner and the cooperation of some of the art magazines. The group members tried to show the world an artist didn't require supposedly divine inspiration and a tortured soul." (Pasovsky 2000). The official history was blown wide open by the revelation that "Darko Maver had never, in fact, existed. He was the creation, it transpired, of the art collective 0100101110101101.ORG" (Veen 2000) –by the group characterized as "a Trojan horse that had successfully been introduced to the art scene." (Pasovsky 2000)

ANALYSIS MATRIX

Having outlined an overview of the tactical media strikes, we will now dissect and install them in our constructed analysis matrix as presented in the methodology section.

	<u>Strike 1</u> gwbush.com	<u>Strike 2</u> Dow Chemicals	<u>Strike 3</u> Darko Maver
Intent and purpose	<p>To question contemporary US politics.</p> <p>To ridicule Governor George W. Bush's politics and forthcoming presidential candidacy.</p>	<p>To question the extent to which MNC's can avoid taking responsibility for causing environmental damage and breaking human rights conventions.</p> <p>To attract attention to the alleged injustice of the aftermath of the Bhopal disaster in India.</p>	<p>To question media's role in promoting the arts and culture.</p> <p>To display how superficial they see media's evaluation and judgement of art.</p>
Contextual discourse	<p>Political discourse</p> <p>- campaigning discourse in particular</p>	<p>News discourse</p> <p>- the news media corporate discourse</p>	<p>Art discourse</p> <p>- the art hype discourse in particular</p>
Design	<p>A. Web site that in terms of design resembles George W. Bush's own site, but with content that highlights the double standards of his politics and his ineptness as a politician.</p>	<p>A. Web site that in terms of design resembles Dow Chemicals website.</p> <p>B. Appearance as Dow Chemicals representative.</p>	<p>A. The story of an imaginary artist living in ex-Yugoslavia, eventually dying as part of the story.</p>
Primary distribution	<p>A. Web site located at an URL similar to that of George W. Bush's official site.</p>	<p>A. Web site located at an URL similar to that of Dow Chemicals' official site</p> <p>B. Live appearance in newscast on BBC posing falsely as a Dow Chemicals representative, announcing the liquidation of the company and distribution of proceedings among the victims of the Bhopal disaster 1984.</p>	<p>A. Feeding the story to prominent art and mainstream media</p> <p>B. The movement announced that the entire story was a hoax.</p>
Secondary distribution	<p>A. When the Bush organisation realized the existence of the site; they immediately filed a complaint, which was rejected by the Federal Election Company and thereby gained media interest.</p> <p>B. This was only the tip of the iceberg, however, as George W. Bush's later comment on the site, "there ought to be limits to freedom" made the issue reach unprecedented heights and became a focal point for political opponents.</p>	<p>A. The BBC invites The Yes Men to appear on live TV, believing that they are in contact with Dow Chemicals</p> <p>B. Negative publicity of BBC anchor's handling of the situation and doubts of the expertise of their research as well as negative publicity of Dow Chemicals for their affirmation of the liquidation.</p>	<p>A. Substantial hype of the story created communities, mailing lists and fund raising to support Darko Maver.</p> <p>B. Outrage broke out when the hoax announcement was made. The story now gained much more attention and media coverage than ever before.</p>

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

We will now elaborate on the five communicative strata as we juxtapose the above findings in the matrix in relation to the prism of the project – the hypothesis of the power struggle of Empire and its counter movements – as well as in relation to the theory on tactical media. This will additionally be supported by expert statements as well as our own perspectives.

Intent and purpose

On the basis of our empirical data and from the above matrix it seems fair to state that the underlying intentions behind the strikes share the commonality of questioning an authoritative way of thinking or point of reference, located in the social homogenization of Empire, one of the subtle processes as described in the theory section (p. 13). In the first strike, the subject is political, and emphasis is on putting focus on a specific campaign. The mission is, however, to a certain extent concealed, as it – because of the nature of the design – requires further reading and interpreting. The second strike opens up for questioning of the corporate sector inasmuch as the message uttered by the fake Dow representative was in direct contrast to the actual views of the organization. The third strike questions the role of the media in the assessment of art, seeing that its power as arbiter of taste is biased towards valuing the container rather than the contents – and therefore being superficial and favourising artists that are financially able to hype themselves rather than those without that ability. When the group revealed the art and the figure behind it as a hoax it became clear how the art press had not assessed the art itself, but rather paid tribute to the “wrapping” – the clever staging of the invented artist conducted by the tactical media practitioners. We further interpret this strike to apply to other culture and arts spheres such as music, movies and television in which reviews carry tremendous power in determining whether a work of art is successful or not. These points will be further elaborated under the strata *contextual discourse* and *design*, respectively.

In summary, we argue that it becomes clear how the intent and purpose of tactical media strikes is to, in various shapes and forms, create food for thought rather than point fingers. By this we refer to the fact that the strikes do not directly impose a way for everyone to think or specific ways of acting, but rather offer a different, thought

inspiring perspective on a subject, giving people the opportunity to think and decide for themselves how they wish to be positioned in the matter. The nature of such intentions in the three strikes comply well with the fact that tactical media practitioners are most often counter movements (p. 21), and further are not occupied by a stable ideology but rather key issues (p. 25) – and in some cases even abandonment of ideology as a whole (p. ca. 25). Whether the latter is the case with the practitioners of our three strikes is, unfortunately, beyond the reach of our investigation.

The dynamics of providing food for thought can be seen as a means of levelling the relations of the power struggle between Empire and its counter movements in the sense that by offering a new perspective on a specific matter, wrapped in creative designs, the tactical media practitioners encourage alternative thinking. Alternative, as we see it, in opposition to commonly shared ideas broadcasted through mainstream media biased through sponsorship-funding, politically correct censorships imposed through political channels as well as religion or any other authority that might be thought of as controlling the design of messages on traditional distribution channels. This is backed up by the counter movement 0100101110101101.ORG when saying that "art works, even the most radical ones, end up strengthening the status quo because they strengthen the aptitude of people to swallow passively strict rules and visual and behavioural stereotypes. It's only disassembling these mechanisms that it's possible to both understand and refuse them; we do not need more "art objects", but works able to make people more conscious." (*In Caronia 2000B*)

Contextual discourse

This stratum refers to, as mentioned, the context within which the tactical media practitioners manoeuvre. The three strikes operate within the spectrum of four different contextual discourses, namely those of *politics*, *news media*, *the corporate sector*, and *art*, which are the main areas in which the dominating influence of Empire is expressed, seeing that these are the areas that arguably are predominantly regulated by the power elite (pp. 13-14).

As such, the three strikes operate in unfamiliar settings considering the context in which traditional activism is usually seen – such as for instance demonstrations or

spreading of propaganda – but as the theory on the fluidness of capital and power (p. 18) explained, it is exactly these unfamiliar settings that strengthen the message from the tactical media practitioners as they in this way are able to take advantage of the ungoverned spaces and so-called “cracks in sutures” (p. 21) that exist in Empire, often as a result of technological advances, as is the case of for instance strike one where the area of website plagiarism has not yet been legislated and thus the Bush organisation’s complaint was rejected by the Federal Election Commission (p. 28). Both this strike and the others managed to create spectacles out of using conventional means in unconventional ways, altering the terms of utilization; in these cases websites, television and the printed art press, that is used ao. to create re-semiotisation (strike 1: political discourse website is turned into parodical discourse) (p. 23).

As such, the strikes deconstruct the givenness to bring their message forward (p. 21). Strike 2 is another examples of this, as the Yes Men foresaw that if only they were to appear on a credible TV-news broadcast (such as BBC) looking like a corporate employee in terms of wearing a suit and tie, everyone would take for a given that they were who they were said to be (by the news anchor, not themselves) and what they said was true. In contrast, if they had appeared almost anywhere else, most people would have questioned their sincerity. Using the creative re-contextualization and re-semiotisation (p. 23) of infiltrating conventional mass media discourse, however, gave them the temporary credibility to carry through with the spectacle that went well beyond their actual appearance.

Also strike 3 emphasizes this ability on tactical media’s side. In an article in Ljubljana magazine Mladina (the ‘backyard’ of where Maver allegedly travelled around), journalist Jaka Zeleznikar makes the following perspective of the hoax, thereby underlining tactical media’s ability to both adapt to a certain discourse, but also to use re-contextualization as a means: “The paradigms of modern art are in synthesis: novelty, originality, and authenticity. The Net has changed the paradigms of communication, therefore of culture and art. The new paradigms include accessibility, fruition, and duplication of information. Culture is pure manipulation and auto-replication - culture is essentially falsification. 0100101110101101.ORG is simply highlighting this process, without adding value to the action itself. 0100101110101101.ORG, in his [at this point it was apparently not clear if the

movements was one or more persons] declared non-originality, is paradoxically more authentic than hundreds of presumed creators. 0100101110101101.ORG has never produced anything. 0100101110101101.ORG only moves packages of information from one point to another, diverts their flow, observes changes, and eventually profits from it.” (Zelevnikar 2001)

The quotation also underlines the new conditions for resistance, brought on by the Internet (p. 12 + p. 17). This development carries most significant changes in regards to distribution, and we will treat this subject further in the primary distribution stratum.

Design

Closely connected to the above stratum of contextual discourse, this stratum describes how the design of the strike in a way is predefined and fixed through assimilating the discourse in a specific context (re-contextualisation p. 23) - as well as using the design as a tool with which the entrance into a certain context of Empire is made possible. In the first strike a parodic web site of George Bush is created, but not a typical anti-Bush web site as seen numerous times. This specific web site is created to resemble that of George Bush, only with significant alterations in message, which could, however, fool the reader at first glance as they are neatly wrapped in articulate political discourse. A specific example is how one of the main features of the hoax site is a section called ‘Amnesty 2000’ as presented in the empirical data overview.

In the case of the Yes Men, the hoax originally started out with the use of similar tactics in creating a web site resembling Dow Chemicals’ web site, with altered messages as well. But as a result of the web site being taken serious and the Yes Men receiving an invitation from the BBC, a different strike took form. Now, the idea of posing as someone else *in persona* was taken to another level. The design of the strike consisted of presenting an alleged representative, wrapping the intended message in a believable ‘package’. And finally in the third strike, the design is the entire fabricated story and background of the poor ill-treated artist Darko Maver, including fabricated photos of him and his art as well as a very convincing narrative about his background and alleged whereabouts.

These mechanisms are all characteristic of tactical media strategies of expressing a message alternatively – using conventional means in unconventional way or unconventional means.

The strikes also support the notion that one of the supposed tactical medias strengths is speaking in tongues (p. 22) – that is, not explicitly expressing their message and intent, but rather using abstractness to leave the message to emerge through the interpretation taking place within the receiver.

Primary distribution

As described in the methodology section, this stratum treats the channels of distribution that the tactical media practitioners use when initiating a strike. In the first two strikes the channel or medium used for distribution is the Internet, seeing that the main design of the strikes are web sites. The web sites are located on URL's similar to those they are imitating, confusing or fooling the user trying to find the official George W. Bush or a Dow Chemicals web site. As mentioned in *Intent and Purpose*, this technique is characteristic of tactical media as the practitioners do not wish to point fingers or send authoritative messages as described in the theory section (p. 19) and as elaborated in the intent/purpose part of this analysis.

Cyberspace is an increasingly significant sphere to control, both for the elite of the Empire, but to a greater extent for the counter movements, in order for them to be able to oppose the Empire. The Internet provides flexibility in enabling the speedy communication of a small group to a larger group, or many to many (p. 12), and linking distant localities. These factors highly influence the process of tactical media strikes in the sense that the ungoverned spaces are “up for grabs” and thus being seized by tactical media practitioners as long as possible (before legislation is made, as was the case, for instance, with hacking a few years back before it became illegal).

Secondary distribution

The *secondary distribution* stratum describes the 'aftermath' of the launch of the tactical media strike. After the initiating procedures, what was the reaction?

In the case of the parodic George W. Bush web site, the actual publicity came when the Bush administration realised the existence of the web site and attempted to shut it

down. This was only the tip of the iceberg, however, as George W. Bush's later comment on the site, "there ought to be limits to freedom" made the issue reach unprecedented heights and became a focal point for political opponents.

In the case of Dow Chemicals, there were two stages so to speak. Firstly, after having made the parodist web site, the Yes Men, as mentioned, received an invitation to do an interview with the BBC. The Yes Men accepted the invite and went on national TV as a fake Dow representative. This, understandably, created massive media interest, after Dow Chemicals, and the Yes Men themselves, issued statements that revealed the interview as a hoax – and the same mechanism can be said to apply for the Darko Maver strike, when 0100101110101101.ORG announced the hoax. These processes underpin the theory on tactical media, describing how the spectacle of the strike is what gives it its news value (p. 22). The creative thinking behind the strikes is immensely important in order for the strike to gain attention in the traditional mass media.

This also accentuates how tactical media is not afraid to enter "pop-culture" (p. 24), meaning that any domain is to be seen as a possible arena for tactical media practitioners.

In general this is the stratum in which the significance of the network principle and the utilization of strength through weak ties becomes evident. An example of this is accentuated in strike 3, where aid to Darko Maver was established through the emergence of networks of support and fund-raising, thus spreading the message at the same time.

Overall perspectives

Having analysed the strikes, we will look at the more broad perspectives of tactical media seeing it through our prism in order to determine more accurately its role in the power struggle between Empire and its counter cultures.

Tactical media's importance in society is actually nothing new. As such, it is argued, the concept has existed much longer than the term itself (p. 24), which is underlined in the difficulties of defining the term accurately. In the historical light, Lovink goes as far as to say that it can be argued that tactical media is "more of an attitude than a

technical definition” (Garcia & Lovink 1997B: 2). An example of its pre-term history is the ACT UP movement’s anti-AIDS negligence initiative in 1987 that spawned a new kind of mobilization through the SILENCE = DEATH slogan printed on t-shirts and other wearable items such as badges, caps etc. Lovink & Garcia explains how wearing the slogan required completion by others in the sense that “to wear this logo was to draw people into conversation. Not a command but an invitation to discourse” (Garcia et. al. 2002). Back then it was called intimate media, and it, to Garcia & Lovink resembled the sphere that present day tactical media operates in (Garcia et. al. 2002).

Today the new main arena is not the street anymore, but rather the digital realm – cyberspace (p. 18). Many scholars seem to agree on this, and we believe Israeli journalist Uri Pasovsky made a very accurate comment when saying that ”nowadays the concept of access is replacing progressively that of property. The ’intellectual capital’ - ideas, concepts, images - is the fundamental constituent of value.” (Pasovsky 2000).

The way we see this, his statement accentuates entirely the idea behind tactical media: That the value, innovation and power of tactical media lies in the ideas and the concepts – the ability to seek and exploit the ’cultural opportunities’ and ’cracks in sutures’ (p. 21) of unregulated spaces in cyberspace. Paired with the alleged increasing fluidness of institutional power (p. 18) in terms of the elite turning into ’nomads’ (p. 18), perhaps the tactical media practitioners in their dominating the digital realm are more powerful than they even realize themselves? In other words, if the virtual, digital sphere is where power – in its new fluid form of ideas as well as capital – is to be seized, who is more apt than the tactical media practitioner?

Pasovsky has more canny views that support this idea further when he says, “that a computer connected to the Net can really modify the course of events. On the contrary the traditional cultural system can be modified only in a long period and investing a big amount of time, persons and money, because of the long tradition, which makes radical changes impossible. In the Net, investing our resources cleverly, it is possible to achieve, in a short time, cultural power, that can be used both politically and economically.” (Pasovsky 2000)

This virtual cultural power was also the main lever in 0100101110101101.ORG's Darko Maver hoax as analysed previously. They explain how they meant to take advantage of the fact that "the media universe is becoming more and more independent from reality. The fiction of TV, even strongly distorted, depends in any case from reality. In the modern media system, in particular with the development of the Internet, this condition is going to disappear: virtual existence is less and less bound to the real one. If 0100101110101101.ORG hadn't claimed the prank, Darko Maver would still go on existing, setting many people buzzing through exhibitions, documentaries, catalogues and so on." (0100101110101101.ORG *in* Caronia 2000B)

What we are seeing, however, is in no way a deterioration of the equilibrium of the mediascape – at least not the way we see it. Even though it seems that counter movements are gaining momentum with the accelerating development of the Internet, the elite circles of Empire are also capable of using events to their own advantage. An example is how terrorism – it has been argued – is not that dissimilar to tactical media, although unlike tactical media, it is clearly illegal. Other than that, of course, is the distinct difference that terrorism claims innocent lives, whereas tactical media is much more of a desktop spectacle.

However, investigating the scope of these concepts in juxtaposition with the power struggle in society, Joanna Richardsson notes that "today's fundamentalist terrorism is a mirror of the network society of a stateless, global capitalism. Western educated bin Laden militants don't belong to any specific country; they travel the globe from Bosnia to Paris and New York, use the internet and cellular phones, and have access to communication networks even in a desert cave." (Richardson 2004). What we understand Richardsson means is that not only are the terrorists aware of the power of 'nomadity', but more significantly – on the other side of the table – is the elite using the terrorism currents to secure their position of power: Namely that the counter movements are necessary for the elite to maintain the dichotomy of 'us' vs. 'them'. Richardsson explains this in the same article when stating that "opposition needs mainstream to exist - and the other way around", and giving the example of how "the image of the terrorist is now the perfect media fantasy, the face against which it can define its own values in reverse." (Richardson 2004).

But the future is not without threat to the use of tactical media. The media scope is becoming more and more fragmented and immense, Jan van Dijk explains in his book on the network society: "The power of screens is the attraction of human attention. The biggest problem in mass communication nowadays is that attention is slackening fast. The stimuli offered become ever shorter and more powerful in an attempt to prevent the slackening of attention. Short and impressive newsflashes, fast shots full of action in films or video clips and sparkling shows tend to fragment contents. Background information and reflection disappear or are pushed to the sidelines. According to many media critics this will result in shallower mass media contents, though we have seen that the form of images is becoming more complicated." (Dijk 1999: 179). This, we feel, could be a threat to tactical media, with the spectacle being so dependent on attention in order to gain broad appeal.

Through the research necessary to come to these more general views on the perspectives and role of tactical media, we have gained a wide and nuanced insight into the power struggle between the counter movements and the elitist Empire. We will therefore now proceed with our concluding section of this project.

CONCLUSION

The framework of this project and the prism through which we set out to investigate the role of tactical media was the neo-capitalist structures of Empire. By using the works of Gramsci, Lears, Hardt and Negri primarily, we were able to establish an outline of the society structures in which wealth, power and the ability to stay mobile and redeveloping are crucial elements. We described how the power relations in society are ever present, in this case between the established institutional structures of the Empire and its counter movements, and how the main areas of conflict are politics, the corporate sector and the arts.

In our analysis section we have inductively dissected the three media strikes using the tools of, mainly, multimodal discourse analysis which provided us with tangible results usable for further analysis in relation to the theory on tactical media and the structures of Empire. Additionally, we discussed these findings drawing upon suppletive perspectives in the endeavour of determining the role of tactical media in the *power struggle* between the Empire and its counter movements.

In order to conclusively answer our problem formulation we will hereby capsule the most significant points, reached in the two previous sections.

The course of globalisation has evolved technology and brought on changes in society structures, especially regarding flow of capital and forms of communication. The emergence of online communication has caused a development within the structures of tactical media as well, and with capital and power being fluid entities, tactical media practitioners need to adapt the nomadic structures of the elite.

This relates very well to the unconventional use of conventional means that we saw exemplified in the strikes, and how a strike needs to be aimed at a technique – in this case the channels through which the dominant currents of Empire and thereby power is expressed. By obtaining news coverage of the strike in mass media, wrapping the alternative message in a seemingly harmless cover, often through re-semioticisation or re-contextualisation, the tactical media practitioners are able to reach a different

audience, and in that way, as we see it, become able to level the uneven relations in the power struggle to some degree.

Originally, viewing and perceiving conventional media can be a somewhat passive process, in the sense that we see a tendency of accepting for example what is broadcasted in the news or on an "official" web site as the truth, whereas, when it comes to tactical media, the receiver is forced to make his or her own interpretation. This is an important distinction between conventional media and tactical media, and seen in relation to the power struggle. The balance is in a way pushed with every successful strike that question and de-construct the givenness, as what constitutes a successful strike is having provided food for thought.

With the increasing importance of network in a society very much based on this, the tactical media practitioners have, when controlling this arena and utilizing the strength through weak ties, obtained an important lever in the power struggle. Rather easily, it is possible for the individual to get involved and make a difference. The element of individualism, however, is also argued to be the most significant point of criticism, as the disperse nature of tactical media negates having any kind of common goal or ideology. That being said, though, it is belief that this is not the intent of any tactical media practitioner. Rather, they value the disparity and welcome tactical media's inability to become institutionalized or bureaucratized.

As our theory sections suggest, power relations are present within any society, and where there is power, there is resistance. The established structures of Empire and its counter movements are in a way co-dependent. The one mirrors itself in the other, and vice versa, meaning that they define one another in this co-dependant relationship. A subject of power is always seen in relation to either a similarity or a contradiction.

Continuing on the subject of food for thought as mentioned earlier, we have come to realise that tactical media practitioners do not wish to take over the power completely, speaking figuratively. They aim to provide grounds for the individual to imagine a different scene on his/her own –initiating resistance in the individual. In that way the role of tactical media is not to "win" or dominate the power struggle but to provide a constant and redeveloping resistance and opposition to the structure of Empire.

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APPENDIX (CD-ROM)

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Strike 3: Darko Maver

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