HUMOUR IN POLITICAL ACTIVISM

CREATIVE NONVIOLENT RESISTANCE

MAJKEN JUL SØRENSEN

Humour in Political Activism

Majken Jul Sørensen

Humour in Political Activism

Creative Nonviolent Resistance

palgrave
macmillan

Majken Jul Sørensen
University of Wollongong
Australia

Karlstad University
Sweden

ISBN 978-1-137-57345-2 ISBN 978-1-137-57346-9 (eBook)
DOI 10.1057/978-1-137-57346-9

Library of Congress Control Number: 2016949260

Cover illustration: © Maren Wischnewski / Alamy Stock Photo

Printed on acid-free paper

This Palgrave Macmillan imprint is published by Springer Nature
The registered company is Macmillan Publishers Ltd. London

For Howard Clark

Acknowledgements

Many people supported me in the process of writing this book. Brian Martin was the most supportive and encouraging supervisor one can imagine, and his gentle guidance cheered me on in moments of doubt.

The *International Postgraduate Tuition Award* and the *University Postgraduate Award* from the University of Wollongong made it possible for me to carry out this research. I'm also grateful for the two grants from the Faculty of Arts Fund for Higher Degree Research conference and research support in 2011 and 2012. When I have been in Australia, many colleagues have helped me feel at home and given useful feedback. I'm especially grateful to Ian Miles, Sharon Beder, Richard Gosden, Jason MacLeod, Jody Warren, Brendan Riddick and Mary Scott.

In Sweden, the Resistance Studies group at the University of Gothenburg welcomed me at their seminars in spite of the lack of official affiliation and also arranged for me to present and discuss my thesis at a public seminar in August 2014. Brian Palmer, Véronique Dudouet and Håkan Thörn all kindly agreed to read and comment on the manuscript at this event.

Martin Smedjeback, Janne Flyghed, Daniel Ritter and Henrik Frykberg have spent numerous hours commenting on drafts and suggested many useful changes and additions. Since 2002, Stellan Vinthagen has been my mentor when it comes to the study of nonviolent resistance. In addition to sharing valuable insights from the mysterious workings of the world

of academia during the following decade, Stellan has made constructive and critical comments on many drafts. There are no words to express how much this has meant to me.

My deeply felt gratitude goes to all the activists who have dared to experiment with humour in a world of persistent seriousness and especially to those who were willing to be interviewed and participate in workshops and so enthusiastically shared their experiences and reflections with me. Because I promised them anonymity, they cannot be named, but you know who you are. In Ofog, you all contributed to make me feel welcome and find a place to belong and laugh together.

Cecilie Fonnesbech advised me on some translation challenges. Tormod Otter Johansen helped out with how best to translate and explain legal concepts. Tormod, Anna Johansen and Malene Raben Jørgensen opened their homes to me when I was staying overnight in Gothenburg and Copenhagen to do research.

I have appreciated the support from Palgrave Macmillan, especially my editor Harriet Barker and her assistant Amelia Derkatsch. For help with translation and identifying the new examples from Thailand and Colombia, I'm grateful to Janjira Sombatpoonsiri and Javier Gárate Neidhardt. Estefanía Gómez was tremendously helpful in explaining the clown actions in Colombia, and Sombat Boonngam-anong the Red Sunday actions in Thailand. The examples from Burma, Russia and Poland which appear in Chap. 3 were also included in my article "Humorous Political Stunts: Speaking 'Truth' to Power?", published on pages 69–83 in the *European Journal of Humour Research* volume 1, number 2 in 2013. Some of the examples of Ofog's clowning in Chap. 4 also appear in the article "Radical Clowning—Challenging Militarism through Play and Otherness", published in *Humor: International Journal of Humor Research,* volume 28, number 1, 2015, pages 25–47.

I dedicate this work to my dear friend Howard Clark, who was such an inspiration as an activist and researcher and passed away suddenly in 2013. With his great sense of humour, Howard loved the subject of this book but unfortunately never got to read it.

Finally, my partner and life companion Jørgen Johansen deserves more thanks than can be expressed in words—for always loving me, supporting me and believing in my capacity to become a good researcher.

Contents

List of Tables

1

Introduction

What happens when nonviolent political activists use humour to challenge those they consider more powerful than themselves? What does it mean to the activists, and what types of responses does the use of humour generate from opponents, media, police, bystanders, and other activists? These questions first started to interest me in 2003 when a Serbian activist told me about his experience with using humour to oppose the rule of the Serbian dictator Slobodan Milošević some years before. According to the young man, who had been active in a group called Otpor, humour had been an effective way to make Otpor different from other opposition groups and attract new young activists. Humour also lowered levels of fear and created situations it was difficult for the regime to find an adequate response to. This was indeed intriguing news, which pointed me in the direction of investigating how subordinate and marginalised political groups use humour to expose, ridicule and influence those they consider more powerful than themselves, both in dictatorships and in democracies. It is explorative research that raises more questions than it answers. The guiding question throughout this book is:

M.J. Sørensen, *Humour in Political Activism*,
DOI 10.1057/978-1-137-57346-9_1

What role can humour play in facilitating resistance to dominant discourses and powerful institutions and people?

When discussing this question, I have been met with two types of reactions. So-called "ordinary people" and political activists have generally reacted with enthusiasm and believed political humour to be a useful tool for political change. Most of these "ordinary people" share the view that is prevalent in many societies—that humour is something positive and valuable in human interaction. They have no doubt that humour can have an effect on politics and rarely question the more troublesome sides of humour. However, in the literature on humour, it has for decades been a persistent claim that humour cannot "really" have an impact on relations of power and that it is "just" a way of letting off steam. This discrepancy between an everyday understanding and part of the scholarly work on humour is to me an indication that here lies an interesting research question that deserves more attention. In addition, such different views not only are interesting from a theoretical point of view but can have implications for the decisions activists struggling for a better world make about which methods to use.

The data I have relied on indicate that the positions of unbridled optimism and strong scepticism are both inadequate and that the reality of real-world activism is complex. It is not straightforward to use humour in order to achieve political change, and it can be extremely difficult to convey the message that activists want to send to the intended audiences. However, the sceptic's idea that humour cannot really change anything might look simple but raises a whole set of questions about what "real change" is and how one is to know when it has happened. The contrast between seeing political humour as a form of subversion versus perceiving it to be a vent for frustration which cannot pose any "real" threat sets the stage for Chapter 2. Here, the concept of "humorous political stunts" is defined and shows how some forms of publicly displayed humorous actions can indeed contribute to undermining the apparently powerful (for instance, when dominant ideas about what is true and right are ridiculed or turned upside down). Although such pockets of resistance might not have immediate effects, they can be attacks in the *discursive guerrilla war* which cannot easily be ignored.

In Chapter 3, humorous political stunts are divided into five different types, depending on the way they position themselves in relation to the dominant discourses' claim to rationality and truth. Although humour is always bound by a certain context and can make sense only to audiences that are familiar with the points of reference, humorous political stunts have been used in a range of different political situations. Ten examples from around the world, performed between 1974 and the present, illustrate what is meant by *supportive*, *corrective*, *naïve*, *absurd* and *provocative* stunts.

Humorous political stunts can facilitate outreach and mobilisation and contribute to sustaining a culture of resistance. This is the theme of Chapter 4, in which examples of supportive, corrective and absurd stunts performed by the Swedish anti-militarist network *Ofog* serve as the starting point for examining these aspects. Although Ofog operates within a specific context, the conclusions regarding mobilisation and cultures of resistance are relevant for a much wider range of political situations. The Swedish activists' experiences are compared with other studies about humour (in particular, Serbian Otpor mentioned above).

Chapter 5 investigates how humorous political stunts can confront the state. In Norway, the group *Kampanjen Mot Verneplikt* (KMV) combined humorous and non-humorous activities during the 1980s in its struggle for a change in the law on conscientious objection. The chapter explores how KMV and other groups have used humorous political stunts to create a spectacle that appeals to mass media and results in favourable coverage. Additionally, KMV sued the Norwegian state for violation of the constitution and their human rights and together these strategies resulted in the desired outcome in 1990, when the law was changed by parliament.

Activists experimenting with humour face dilemmas and potential risks linked to the use of humour, something which is explored in Chapter 6. First of all, there is a possibility that people who engage in humorous political stunts might not be perceived as serious about the issue. A second risk is that humour might be misunderstood and taken literally, especially when irony is used to say one thing but mean another. Third, some activists consider it unwise to mix the humorous with the non-humorous, but in a world where rational argumentation persists to be the norm, it is difficult to experiment with humour without combining

it with non-humorous activities. Fourth, ridicule might be experienced as abuse, something which requires ethical considerations regarding when it might be acceptable to ridicule those who represent dominant discourses. The final dilemma to be discussed is the claim that satire might make people disillusioned rather than encourage them to take action.

Chapter 7 discusses the relationship between humorous political stunts and the theory of nonviolent action. Taking as its point of departure Stellan Vinthagen's theory of nonviolent action, this chapter explores how humour interacts with each of the four dimensions of nonviolence identified by Vinthagen. The strength of humorous political stunts is their ability to temporarily or symbolically break power when pranksters for a moment take control of the political scene. Some types of humorous political stunts are also strong on the aspect of utopian enactment when they demonstrate a future with more room for spontaneity, generosity, love, carnival and fun. Many humorous political stunts, at least compared with a violent alternative, are also oriented towards facilitating dialogue. However, the communicative aspect is not aimed at the "opponent" as envisioned in Vinthagen's theory but is directed towards other audiences. Like most other temporary nonviolent actions, humorous political stunts do show signs of normative regulation, but their shortness prevents them from reaching their full potential.

2

Humour and Pockets of Resistance

Introduction

Jennifer Louise Lopez lives in Harlem in New York. In 2014, she passed The ATLAH Worldwide Missionary Church, which is well known for its condemnation of homosexuals. Outside the church was a sign that said "Jesus would stone homos", and since she is a lesbian, Jennifer decided to take action, but with an unusual twist to it. The next day, Jennifer knocked on the door, and with a video camera in hand, she told the man who opened the door that she had come for her stoning. After some initial confusion, it turned out that the man did not have any stones, so he asked her to come back the next day. Jennifer posted the video on her Facebook account and it soon went viral.[1]

On Christmas day 2015, the Danish author Christian Mørk sent a letter to the Danish minister of integration together with his grandmother's ring. The letter was a reaction to a law proposal from the government which would make it possible for Danish authorities to confiscate valuable belongings from asylum seekers.[2] Cash, jewellery or other items which could be sold to pay for the asylum seekers' stay in Denmark while their cases were pending were part of the new law. The proposal

M.J. Sørensen, *Humour in Political Activism*,
DOI 10.1057/978-1-137-57346-9_2

was applauded by people who wanted to reduce the number of refugees seeking asylum in Denmark, but also created enormous outrage.[3] Some people drew parallels to the Nazi confiscation of Jewish property, and it was called a violation of international human rights law. In his letter, Mørk explained that his great-grandparents came to Denmark as refugees and as far as he knew they were never asked to deliver their belongings at the border. On the contrary, Mørk wrote that he is grateful for all the privileges he and his family have had in Denmark. He continued that he did not know what the ring was worth but wanted the minister to keep it as a retrospective pledge because "I have much to be Denmark grateful for. Not least its citizens' ability to act with consideration and dignity instead of blindness".[4]

Lopez and Mørk are two individuals who got upset about a political issue and decided to take action. They both created a stunt with an ironic, humorous twist which they shared with others via social media like Facebook and YouTube. Actions like these raise questions about how political humour affects its audiences and what happens when public political humour is used as a form of resistance without necessarily having any immediate results. Lopez and Mørk's stunts got considerable attention when the stories about them went viral and were picked up by mainstream media as well. However, as it seems from interviews they have given, neither of them was part of an organised group or campaign but acted completely on their own. In contrast, the other examples included in this book were carried out as collective efforts by groups of people, many of whom self-identify as "activists". Some come together just to perform humorous political actions, but many are driven by concerns about a particular political issue and include humour in their activism as one method or tactic among many others. What meaning does humour have for activists when it comes to facilitating outreach to the general public, mobilisation of new activists or sustaining a culture of resistance within the group? Just as important is the question of what role humour can play in creating change when it is combined and intertwined with non-humorous forms of activism. Before dealing with these topics in later chapters, I start with clarifying my understanding of the term "humour" and its possibility for subverting existing relations of power. In order to discuss the latter, I introduce the notion of *humorous political stunts* and

the analysis of them facilitated by a metaphor of *play of politics* and the concept of *discursive guerrilla war*.

What Is Humour?

Humour is a special way of communicating which is based on ambiguity and incongruity. In itself, humour is neither good nor bad. Like any other method or medium for communication, it can be used to hurt other people, just as it can serve to make them happy. This ability to both unite and divide has been called "the paradox of humour".[5] The impulse to laugh appears to be biological[6], but although all cultures have a sense of something that is funny, far from everyone finds the same things amusing.[7]

Today, incongruity theory dominates within humour studies. It is a theory which focuses on the cognitive aspect of how we recognise and mentally process something to be funny. That it is cognitive simply means that it concerns our capacity to understand and perceive the world. In incongruity theory, humour is found to include a discrepancy or ambiguity which forces us to think in more than one dimension at the same time. I find psychologist Rod Martin's definition of humour with four components useful:

1. Humour has a social aspect, which is associated with play. When using humour, people operate in a different mode than when they talk "seriously".
2. Secondly, there is a cognitive-perceptual component of humour. This is the mental process which needs to happen in order for people to perceive something as funny.
3. Humour also has an emotional aspect. People do not just react to something funny intellectually; it also creates a good feeling: *mirth*.
4. Finally, the emotion of mirth is frequently expressed through laughter. Laughter is a signal that this is play and not "serious".[8]

This is a useful operational definition, but it has one limitation: The way the humorous is contrasted with seriousness makes this a problematic way

of talking about political humour which has a serious intent. Although political humour operates within a play frame and generates laughter and amusement, this should not be confused with not being serious. Thus, what Martin labels the "serious" mode, I prefer to call "non-humorous".

Two other ways of theorising about humour are *relief theory* and *superiority theory*, and both come with their own underlying assumptions of what humour is and how it should be explained.[9] *Relief theory* focuses on how humour can reduce tensions and how it is used to express forbidden ideas and deal with taboo topics. *Superiority theory* has been heavily criticised but claims that humour is a way of showing who is superior.

Although some theorists see their own theory as a way of explaining *all* humour, each of these three perspectives contributes something to the understanding of humour, but no single one provides the full explanation. Humour is not one thing, but a label which has relations to both cognitive processes, emotions within the individual, interpersonal relations in small groups as well as broader social relations in our societies. As Jerry Palmer has suggested, it seems unrealistic to demand that one theory should explain all this.[10]

Incongruity theory explains the cognitive process that needs to be present in order to generate humour. Relief theory is one way of explaining why an individual chooses to use humour in a certain situation or laugh at a particular joke. Superiority theory can explain some forms of aggressive humour.

Political Humour as Subversion or a Vent for Frustration?

For decades, it has been debated whether humour is subversive and can contribute to resistance or whether it is bound to remain a vent for frustration without any "real" impact. A number of authors are sceptical about humour's ability to contribute to change, whereas other studies have documented that under some circumstances humour can play an important role for the "under-dogs" in political struggles.[11]

One of the problems with the debate about humour's conservative/subversive potential is that some of the sceptics write about "humour" as if it is one thing and jump from findings about their studies of jokes to all

humour. To take a recently published example, Tsakona and Popa call it a popular myth that humour is subversive and can be a rebellion against political oppressions and injustice. They claim that even when humour conveys criticism, it "recycles and reinforces dominant values and views on politics".[12] This might be a reasonable conclusion based on the data they have studied, but it should not be generalised to all political humour. However, even more problematic is the sceptics' apparently dichotomous understanding of power, resistance and change. They do not take into account studies that have found power, change and resistance to be multifaceted and not a question of either-or.[13] With a point of departure in this understanding of power and resistance, it seems more reasonable to assume that resistance requires multiple strategies and to ask under what circumstances humour can contribute to undermining the hegemony of dominant ideas.

The focus here is on political humour which is expressed publicly and aims to criticise power—what I call "humorous political stunts". I explore pranks, happenings and actions which are initiated mainly by grassroots organisations who "kick upwards" and criticise abuse, self-righteousness and dominant truths and world views. It can be to criticise particular people in power or systems of power—for example, dictators, elected politicians considered to take themselves too seriously or dominant "-isms" of any kind. Humorous political stunts can also bring attention to issues that are neglected or a company profiting from environmental exploitation or human suffering. Therefore, it should be no surprise that many examples of humour which some people would call aggressive—that is, humour which criticises, humiliates, ridicules or in some way aims at "speaking truth to power"—are included here.

That humour can be used with the intent to improve society does not exclude the fact that it is frequently used to ridicule minorities and humiliate those at the bottom of society as well[14] or that it can contribute to reinforce the status quo.

Humorous Political Stunts

A demining team of approximately 10 people used orange and white tape to close off the headquarters of the Belgian bank AXA. They displayed signs saying "Danger, mines" and "Demining in progress". A video of the

event shows the employees in AXA to be everything from bewildered and surprised to amused and worried.[15] It seems apparent that they do not know what to do with the deminers, since mine searches in major banks are unusual. The group behind this action wrote in a press release that:

> Today, 18th October, activists from the campaign "My Money. Clear Conscience?" symbolically demined the headquarters of AXA in Brussels. A landmine clearance team went in search of landmines, cluster munitions and other controversial weapons. This action is needed more than ever, as research from Netwerk Vlaanderen reveals that AXA invests heavily in two new US landmine producers.[16]

Landmines and cluster monitions are serious issues, and there should be no doubt that the organisation behind this action, Netwerk Vlaanderen, is serious in its critique of AXA's continued investment in this type of weapon. At the time of the action, the Ottawa Treaty, an international ban on anti-personnel landmines, had been in place for eight years. Netwerk Vlaanderen had been campaigning for more ethical investments for three years, and while most banks had decreased their investment in weapons, AXA had not been willing to cooperate with the group.[17] To make this more public, the group decided to do the demining action.

Although this was only pretence and the employees seemed more bewildered than scared and we as viewers of the video know that the landmine clearance team would not find any landmines or cluster munitions at the AXA headquarters in Brussels, it is obvious that the activists approached the conflict with a logic which differed from conventional protest.

This is an example of a "humorous political stunt", which I define as

> *a performance/action carried out in public which attempts to undermine a dominant discourse. It either is so confrontational that it cannot be ignored or involves a deception that blurs the line between performers and audiences. It includes or comments on a political incongruity in a way that is perceived as amusing by at least some people who did not initiate it.*[18]

Dominant discourses are those well-established "truths" and taken-for-granted knowledges which rule a certain domain without being appreciably

affected or displaced by challenges. Others have studied in detail how the dominant discourses manifest themselves and to what degree they dominate. Sufficient for the purpose here is to recognise that some people consider them dominant enough and are disturbed enough by this dominance to set out to challenge them.

The discourses which are challenged can be major and all-pervading discourses like militarism, consumerism or neoliberalism or can be more limited discourses controlled by a powerful political party or company. In the case above, the deminers challenged the discourse which legitimises investment in mines and cluster monitions. The challenge can be directly aimed at a person or institution considered an opponent, such as AXA bank, or can be communicated to other audiences by using a variety of media. That the humorous political stunt takes place in public means that this is more than a humorous critical comment or joke whispered in secret. One can observe someone doing something without hiding it, although they might try to hide their identity. The stunts are political in the broad sense that they comment on a political theme of how society should be organised. Humorous political stunts also have to be humorous, meaning that they include an incongruity or ambiguity which forces the audiences to think in more than one dimension in order to grasp the humour. When it comes to Netwerk Vlaanderen's stunt, the incongruity can be found in the idea that investment in landmines and cluster monition would result in the mines turning up in the headquarters.

Among nonviolent activists and scholars, the types of activity which I refer to as *stunts* are known as *actions*, but within cultural and performance studies terms such as *performance*, *happening*, *hoax* or *ironic activism* are more common. The term "stunt" is used to avoid association with one particular activist or academic tradition. Later, I compare humorous political stunts with *conventional/ordinary* protest. With these terms, I refer to the stereotypical ideal type of non-humorous, rational routine demonstrations, speeches, posters, blockades and leafleting. Of course, non-humorous protest can be creative, disruptive and everything but ordinary and conventional, but nevertheless a rather big proportion of political activism usually consists of these stereotypical activities.

Humorous political stunts seem primarily to be a tactic chosen by those who communicate critiques or alternatives to the prevailing order

from a subordinate or marginal position, aiming to disrupt or transform the status quo. I have not identified any stunts in favour of the status quo, but this possibility is not excluded by the definition. Most of the activists who appear in the examples are from groups concerned with social justice, peace, anti-consumerism and the environment since they appear to be the ones using humorous political stunts in their activism. However, activists can just as well be marginalised people with right-wing or conservative world views and I do not exclude the possibility that they can use humorous political stunts as well. However, I do not personally find it amusing when these types of groups express views that devalue people on the basis of, for instance, gender, skin colour, or religion. Sometimes, humorous political stunts are also performed by professional comedians, such as Michael Moore from the US, Mark Thomas from the UK and the Australian Chaser team.[19]

The logic of humorous political stunts differs from what goes on in theatre performances, graffiti, stand-up comedies, and cartoons that can also be examples of political humour. The stunts include a confrontation or blurring between audiences and performers which is usually absent in political humour that uses these traditional mediums.

Related research traditions and practices of activism that frequently include humour and, sometimes, humorous political stunts are *culture jamming*, *pranks*, *the carnivalesque* and *tactical carnival*.[20] These genres share a playful attitude towards expression of dissent and use various creative or artistic ways of communicating. Humorous political stunts have much in common with these phenomena as well as some examples of oppositional counterculture like graffiti painting or protest music. Some of the examples from the literature on these concepts obviously fit within the definition of humorous political stunts, and numerous groups have performed humorous political stunts not included here.[21]

Some authors have suggested that pranking, culture jamming and creative activism are becoming more frequent, constitute a new type of activism and are spreading all around the world.[22] It is difficult to judge to what extent it is global since primarily European, US and other "Western" examples have been studied. However, academic interest in the phenomena certainly seems to have increased, at least as measured by the number of publications.[23] Another problematic aspect of this assumption is that it is not difficult to find examples of humorous political stunts that are

almost 50 years old, making the "newness" questionable. A well-known example happened on August 24, 1967, and included Abbie Hoffman, later to become famous as one of the American *Yippies*. Hoffman and a group of people entered the New York Stock Exchange and from the gallery threw dollar bills down on the floor. What actually happened and how the stockbrokers reacted have been the subject of much mythmaking—and Hoffman has deliberately been vague about it. However, the lack of exact documentation has most likely caused many to imagine greedy stockbrokers crawling around on the floor to grab the money. No media were inside, and there are no photos of the event. One person claimed that they threw $1000, others that it was just 30–40 one-dollar bills. Hoffman himself wrote that the stock dealers "let out a mighty cheer",[24] whereas the *New York Times* reported mixed reactions of smiles and shouts.[25] Although this was certainly not the first time performers tried to blur the line between audiences and performers, the demonstration created "a form of protest that happened in the midst of the spectators, whether the spectators wanted to be involved or not".[26]

Another important inspiration for many activist-artists was the *Situationist International*, which originated in France from 1957 and attempted to undermine the way that society had become a *spectacle*, a phrase introduced by Guy Debord.[27] As part of the spectacle, citizens were expected to consume ready-made cultural products instead of inventing their own. The situationists found that people were no longer important as workers and producers; their major role was as consumers. Responding to this development, the situationists aimed to deconstruct the ready-made and had several strategies for this. The most well known is *détournement*, which Harold has defined as "a detouring of pre-existing Spectacular [sic] messages and images in an effort to subvert and reclaim them".[28] Thus, in *détournement*, original concepts are altered into something different that can express a deeper message.

The "Play of Politics"

Because humorous political stunts are performed in public, they literally make political issues into a piece of theatre when their attacks on dominant discourses disrupt, subvert, oppose and transform business as

usual.[29] In the analysis of the humorous political stunts, I draw on a theatre metaphor which I call "the play of politics". Theatre metaphors have been used to describe both how individuals stage their own appearance in front of others and how social movements interact with their audiences.[30] Benjamin Shepard, Larry Bogad and Stephen Duncombe write (with a reference to Richard Schechner) that "Much of the politics of play involves shifting debate about who plays, on what terms, by whose rules, and on whose playing field".[31]

Dominant discourses operate almost unchallenged on the political *scene*. Under all political circumstances, there are also some people who will insist on playing roles such as opposition, protesters and critical journalists. In democracies, these roles have been written into the play, although representatives of dominant discourses do their best to control or sideline them. Journalists are handled through carefully scripted press conferences and well-prepared answers in interviews, and protesters are tolerated or even welcomed as a sign of true democracy. Mass demonstrations and marches get police escorts and the organisers cooperate with authorities for the protest to be carried out in an orderly manner without risks for the participants. These types of protests are all part of the ordinary play of politics, and although the participants might be satisfied by this staged opportunity to express their opinion, it can also be understood as what Herbert Marcuse called *repressive tolerance*.[32]

Sometimes, someone shows up and interrupts the ordinary drama, insisting on playing a part not included in the script at all. What is at stake during the interruption is the ability to determine what is right and wrong, true and false regarding the issue. The surprise does not have to be humorous, but one type of unexpected disruption is the humorous political stunt. When the usual rules of the game are broken, the ordinary play being performed changes, since the challengers on stage have to be dealt with somehow. How the play unfolds in these cases depends on many factors, some controlled by the newcomers, some outside of their control. Four major aspects for the theatre metaphor can be identified—(1) the *stage*, (2) the *actors*, (3) the *audiences* and (4) the *timing*. These four aspects are ideal-type analytical categories developed to assist the analysis, but since they are all part of the play of politics they are closely

linked to each other and the choices activists make in relation to one will influence what is possible in the others.

1. What type of *stage* is it that the pranksters attempt to enter or create? Is it a physical location, or is it a virtual stage like a TV show or a web page? What significance does this stage have? Is it a major, established stage with high symbolic value such as a national parliament or a world-famous building already closely observed by media, politicians and political commentators? Is it a little scene outside of the spotlight? Or do the challengers try to establish their own stage and capture attention from there, regardless of which venues others consider important?

   Space and location have a high significance for many forms of resistance. Certain places are associated with those in power, whereas other locations are traditional sites of protest.[33] As will be apparent in some of the examples, there is a high symbolic value when certain places are "invaded" by pranksters.

2. Who are the *actors* performing in the play of politics about to be disrupted? Lead actors considered very important, such as presidents, royalties and other celebrities, or minor characters who might be important on their own little stage? Occasionally, it can be difficult to separate the factors of stage and actors since lead actors have a tendency to create a major stage wherever they go because of their fame. The identity of the new actors in the show, the *challengers* who initiate the stunt, matters as well. Are they already famous or well known from other plays, such as professional comedians? How many are they, how unexpected is their appearance, how convincing are they in their new roles, and what is it that they do once they have gained access to the stage? How much have they prepared their script, and how good are they at improvising?

   Although the challengers are those who disrupt the usual play, they are not the only ones "playing". Also those who are already on the

stage representing a dominant discourse perform and enact a drama when they are conducting "business as usual". Looking at both the apparently powerful and the challengers as people performing roles highlights how much impressions of who is powerful are in the eye of the beholder. It becomes obvious that in order for a discourse to remain dominant, the actors who uphold it also have to convincingly perform as if they believe the discourse to be right and true.

3. The *audiences* include many different people who can be friendly, hostile or indifferent from the outset.[34] Audiences include both people who already know about the issue and those who are new to it, and the humorous political stunt is always constructed by the interaction between the initiators and the various audiences.[35] The initiators of the stunts have perceptions about who their audiences are and how they want them to think and react, and this image of the audience is seldom neutral. If the audiences are not constructed as people who can fulfil a need for the group, such as providing more activists or serving as allies, then they are seen as "needy" of knowledge and information.[36]

In some instances where a stunt is about to take place, the audience is not aware that a piece of theatre is going on at all. In other cases, the audience has already directed its attention towards a stage or an actor, expecting something to happen. Stages with a significant symbolic value are frequently under constant surveillance, and major actors have a tendency to draw a big audience wherever they go. An interesting question is also how the challengers treat the audience—as an audience, or as part of the play? Challengers frequently design their stunts to appeal to the type of audience with access to media, in order to be able to reach larger audiences, but some challengers are more concerned with reaching out to the general public and communicating directly with them.

Perhaps the most important aspect regarding the audience is how they interpret the performance according to their own previous knowledge, cultural references, experiences and expectations. What do audience members think is happening and what does it mean to them? In order for a humorous political stunt to succeed in reaching

its goal, the challengers almost always depend on challenging audience expectations. The interruption of the ordinary drama includes a surprise which turns the world upside down.

4. Finally, the *timing* of the whole affair matters: Is the stage already occupied when the new actors enter, or do they sneak in while the spotlight is off? How long do they stay, and how frequently do they appear? The answers to these questions determine how the dynamic of the power relations between the challengers and the old actors will develop. The timing can also be analysed in a broader perspective—are the humorous political stunts part of a social movement expressing similar kinds of critique, or is it a one-time event?

The theatre metaphor does not in any way indicate that the play of politics is not serious. All the actors, both those who represent a dominant discourse and the challengers, consider this game highly serious. As discussed previously, that some activists decide to use humour does not imply that they are not serious about the issue. However, using the theatre metaphor allows us to take a step back in order to better see what happens in the unscripted meeting when the "non-protesting protesters" enter the stage.

Power, Resistance and Discursive Guerrilla War

Power is one of the most contested terms in social science. My approach to analysing the humorous political stunts assumes both power and resistance to be multifaceted and to manifest themselves in numerous ways. In addition, power and resistance shape each other.[37]

Authors like Steven Lukes, Michel Foucault and Pierre Bourdieu have been at the forefront of investigating the manifestations of power as multifaceted[38] but have paid little attention to how this power can be and is resisted, although Foucault did point out that resistance is a place to start investigating how power works.[39]

James C. Scott's concepts of hidden transcripts and everyday resistance are among the most nuanced yet also very concrete ways of explaining

resistance that takes the complexity of both power and resistance into consideration. Scott developed the idea of the *hidden transcripts* as a way to describe how people in extreme subordinate positions, such as slaves and serfs, resist behind the backs of their masters. In the *public transcript* which they display to their masters, they might appear humble, subdued and passive, but when they are out of sight, they might work slower, steal and ridicule the master. In Scott's opinion, they are wise to do this behind the scenes. These sorts of resistance activities might never become an open confrontation, but according to Scott it is unlikely that a public declaration of resistance is going to happen without being preceded by a well-developed hidden transcript.[40]

Asef Bayat is another author who has nuanced perceptions of what resistance can look like and how organised it has to be in order to have an effect. Although Bayat criticises Scott for his emphasis on intention, they do have much in common. Bayat has coined the expression *quiet encroachment of the ordinary* to describe the way, for example, street vendors and slum dwellers in the cities of the Global South carve out niches of public space for themselves in order to improve their lives. They spread out their businesses on the pavements, sell merchandise comprising major brands, build their homes without permission and illegally tap into the power grid. People do this as part of their everyday lives, individually and fragmented and without guidance from ideology or leaders. Because they are so many, the practices change societies. This quiet encroachment of the ordinary Bayat calls *social nonmovements.* What they do is not an obvious political protest, since they are not protesting on the streets *demanding* to get a better life, but day by day *creating* it.[41]

Humorous political stunts are not part of ordinary, daily activities that Bayat describe and are seldom carried out by people in such extreme subordinate positions as those studied by Scott. In Scott's and Bayat's concepts, it is significant that resistance is invisible and happens under the radar of those considered powerful. In the humorous political stunt, it is a characteristic that it takes place openly and can be observed by various audiences, frequently attempting to temporarily control a space usually controlled by others. In contrast, the resistance carried out by the slaves, serfs and urban poor is more successful the more discreet and unnoticed it manages to be. However, a major implication of Scott's and Bayat's

work is that hidden resistance that is covert and opportunity-based and goes on behind the scenes might have an influence even if it does not lead to immediate results or is organised. Thus, resistance can be very meaningful and have an impact even when there is no noticeable immediate result. Such a perspective is of direct relevance to the study of humorous political stunts. It is a nuanced understanding of resistance which is not taken into account by the humour researchers who claim that political humour can only be a vent for frustration and reinforce the status quo.

Another field of study which has taken an interest in resistance is the theory of nonviolent action which has inspired my investigations of humour in political activism. Since the 1970s, this field has been dominated by an approach which emphasises the strategic aspects of nonviolent action. This perspective takes its point of departure in understanding power to be based on consent, meaning that power does not come in a certain amount where more power to one person automatically means less power to someone else. Gene Sharp, who has been the front figure of this approach, pointed out that even the most brutal dictators are dependent on the cooperation of numerous people—such as police officers, prison guards and executioners—in order for the dictatorship to function smoothly. Because power is a relationship, people always have the possibility to withdraw their consent.

However, since the daily news provides abundant evidence of brutal repression, violence and injustice, a central question is: Why do people obey? Of course, fear of sanctions plays a role, but that is not the whole answer. Habit, self-interest or the idea that obedience is a moral obligation also kick in. In addition, potentially disobedient persons might lack the self-confidence and belief in their own ability to achieve change. Nevertheless, obedience is not eternal and inevitable, even in dictatorships where it has persisted for decades. In Sharp's opinion, each individual always has a choice to disobey[42], a point of view that has received some criticism. Such a position assumes people to be free-floating individuals and neglects the fact that they are embedded in complex social relationships. For some, the possibility to disobey is an abstract theoretical possibility that has no bearing on their life in practice.[43]

Stellan Vinthagen, in a more recent theoretical approach to understanding nonviolent action, has taken these criticisms of the consent the-

ory into consideration. With inspiration from sociologists like Foucault and Bourdieu, he criticises Sharp's view on power for being too simplistic. Although individuals have a possibility to change their behaviour, this is not something they just do. Deciding to resist is not just an individual choice, and in the context of resisting dictatorship, someone can be subordinate but nevertheless occasionally benefit from the system.[44] Through their upbringing, people become subordinated to power, and the power is so much a part of them that they do not think about it—people just continue to act as they have always done. Obedience and submission are so infiltrated in everyone's life that they become part of their bodies, what Bourdieu calls *habitus*. For Vinthagen, power is something which people give away, often unconsciously and out of habit and conventional thinking. They are obedient because they have always been that, and "one has to follow the rules". However, Vinthagen does not imply that resistance is not possible because power is everywhere. To some degree, individuals are free to make choices about what is best for them.[45] But everyone aiming to tackle systems of domination needs to understand the processes of submission. In order to be able to empower and liberate themselves, they need to fight actively and systematically against their internalised submission.

In the context of the humorous political stunts, it is relevant to take a closer look at possible resistance to two of the forms of power that Foucault wrote about. First, there is the sovereign power, the type of power which forbids certain behaviours and does not tolerate any dissent. This is the power exercised by force or violence which creates obedience through fear of the consequences. The main point of the concept of sovereign power is that some people exercise power in ways which demand submission. Because such sovereign power is relatively easy to identify, it is also rather clear how it can be resisted. In Mona Lilja and Vinthagen's investigation of resistance to the forms of power outlined by Foucault, sovereign power can be resisted through open rebellion and the hidden resistance described by Scott.[46]

The other form of power which is relevant here is the disciplinary power which interested Foucault much more than the "old fashioned" sovereign power.[47] Disciplinary power attempts to correct what deviates from the norm. This form of power can be productive and constructive and com-

bines the carrot and the stick. It uses pressure and coercion to try to form and improve people, and such improvements are rewarded. One of the ways that disciplinary power works is through dominant discourses which encourage self-monitoring and self-censorship which make people adapt themselves better to the norm. Disciplinary power creates people who are useful for whatever purpose the power seeks to achieve (for instance, effective workers for production or willing consumers). Where sovereign power is easy to spot, disciplinary power is much more difficult to identify and even more difficult to challenge. Although those who deviate too much from the norm end up in institutions such as prisons and psychiatric wards, most people live most of their lives firmly within the limits of disciplinary power. However, there are ways to challenge disciplinary power by not making oneself "useful" through withdrawal, avoidance and de-stabilisation of disciplinary power. An example of withdrawal from the norm of consumption is people in wealthy societies who decide to live on the countryside, relying on what they produce themselves. The key is that they have chosen to live in relative poverty and without luxury although they had a choice. This challenges the norm of maximising wealth and luxury for oneself as much as possible. Lilja and Vinthagen mention how participants in civil disobedience actions who willingly surrender to the police and accept the punishment meted out by society with pride manage to deviate from the norm without accepting the system of rewards and punishments.[48] Foucault himself suggested "reversed discourses" as a way to challenge disciplinary power and mentioned the changing discourse of homosexuality as an example. When homosexuals began to speak on their own behalf but using the same language which had disqualified them as abnormal, it was a parasitic relationship between the former dominant discourse and its new challenger. Another concept resembling reversed discourse is *mimicry* developed within post-colonial studies. It describes how the colonised apparently adopted the behaviour and norms of the colonisers but in a slightly different form. Such mimicry resulted in a de-stabilisation because it exposed how the differences were constructed and not naturally given.[49]

Sovereign power and disciplinary power often work together, and even quite ruthless dictatorships depend on much more than brutal force in their exercise of power. Take, for instance, the situation in Serbia under

Slobodan Milošević in the 1990s. Although this regime was brutal in many ways, frequently relied on violence from the police to beat up demonstrators, and severely limited possibility for the opposition to exist, it was also concerned with upholding an image of democracy. An independent radio station and some print media were able to exist and although this existence was not easy, it could circulate alternative ideas and keep a counterculture alive through difficult times.[50] As pointed out above, even dictatorships much more brutal than the Serbian regime cannot have total control. Although dissent is not considered desirable, it might be tolerated if it does not seem dangerous, because it starts out as marginal or a regime thinks it will be able to control it.

Some humorous political stunts directly challenge forms of sovereign power. However, many of them are more concerned with challenging dominant ideas. Still others expose that even the almighty cannot have total control. Some stunts might seem "irrational" because they do not contribute to any immediate goal, but as Lilja, Mikael Baaz and Vinthagen have pointed out, depicting "the other" as irrational is also an attempt to control and discipline her.[51] Additionally, many humorous political stunts are better understood as attempts of de-stabilising the dominant ideas than as conscious attacks on sovereign power. When talking about effect and impact, one of the most important aspects of the humorous political stunts is to what degree they can be understood as a *guerrilla attack*, but not a violent physical attack. Instead, they are usually attacking a dominant discourse as part of the *discursive guerrilla war*.[52]

One of the major "achievements" of a dominant discourse is that when it truly dominates, it has to a large degree succeeded in limiting what it is even possible to think. It becomes almost unimaginable to consider any alternatives to the prevailing order of things and thus also impossible to discuss them or explore them. Understood this way, humorous political stunts can be a way to stir up people, and because of its ambiguity, humour might be especially suited for this purpose. Of course, there is a long way to go from creating a moment of uncertainty and confusion, to get people to change their behaviour and take action.

Recognising the potential of the humorous political stunt, there is no reason to assume that all stunts reach this potential. Not all humorous political stunts are carried out in a way which makes them ideal as

guerrilla attacks. Even when the intentions are good, humorous political stunts are not streamlined undertakings. As with all other forms of resistance, there is even a risk that it contributes to *recreating* and *renovating* power.[53]

However, without trying, there will never be any change. Some humorous political stunts appeal to reason and logic after having taken a detour, but many appeal more to emotions and the multiple meanings and truths that exist simultaneously in the world. Stephen Duncombe, in his book *Dream: Re-imagining Progressive Politics in an Age of Fantasy*, calls for progressives to make more use of imagination and speak to people's fantasies when they do politics.[54] Humorous political stunts with their discursive guerrilla attacks are one answer to this. Duncombe argues that Enlightenment was once a progressive dream, but in democracies progressives now need bigger dreams that can speak to people's longing for drama and spectacle if they want to seriously challenge the dominant world order. Appealing to reason, logic, restraint and moderation the way many social movements working on issues like climate change and global justice do today is doomed to fail. Duncombe writes that "truth and power belong to those who tell the better story".[55] His book illustrates vividly how desires and dreams are manufactured and constructed, not a self-evident constant that can be taken for granted.

Duncombe does not consider himself a postmodern provocateur claiming there is no truth. On the contrary, he is very firmly grounded in the reality of an unjust world order that causes early death and suffering for many. However, it does not matter that this is the truth, and that that this truth is available for people to know, if they don't care or don't want to believe it. The consequence is that if progressives want to reach the hearts and minds of people, truth and reason are not enough: they need to speak to the imagination as well. Duncombe suggests looking to places like Las Vegas and popular video games and analysing what is so attractive about them. What type of desires do they promise to fulfil, and what spectacles can progressives offer instead that appeal to the same desires? Duncombe is very critical of the dreams sold in Las Vegas and violent video games, but suggests that progressives have to let go of their fear of the spectacle and find ways to make their own participatory spectacles that can make people dream. Duncombe almost echoes peace researcher

Elise Boulding in her book *Cultures of Peace: The Hidden Side of History*[56] when he suggests that "without dreams we will never be able to imagine the new world we want to build".[57]

In spite of what Foucault wrote about disciplinary power's ability to recreate itself, even the most dominant and persistent ideas about how the world could and should be organised have crumbled. Colonialism and Patriarchy come to mind as two ideas which at a certain point in history seemed insurmountable. Nevertheless, although both neo-colonialism and patriarchy persist in various forms, it turned out to be both possible and worthwhile to challenge them. This was possible only because some people thought out of the box and imagined that another way of organising society ought to be possible. And in order to think about the steps necessary to create a different future, it is also necessary to have some idea about what this future should look like, to dream about it. It does not have to be a finished picture, but the people working for change must have some raw sketch in mind.

Dreaming about a different future does not necessarily involve any humour—it can be a perfectly non-humorous endeavour. Nevertheless, there is something about the ambiguity of humour which makes it an especially suitable way to question the old assumptions and probe new ideas. Exactly because humour requires thinking in more than one dimension at the same time, it is possible to keep both the old and the new insight simultaneously. As will become apparent through the examples of humorous political stunts presented in the next chapter, this form of action has a potential to shake up and disturb and to suggest a surprising alternative cause of action.

The conclusion to this brief tour through the theme of power/resistance and nonviolent action is that power is not something people have or do not have, and therefore resistance cannot be a question of either-or. Nevertheless, some people appear more powerful than others. A person or a group of people might perceive themselves to be in power, and others might view them as extremely powerful. If this dominant group control resources and can induce other people to do things that are in the interest of these apparently powerful, then this becomes a self-reinforcing cycle. Those already in power get the opportunity to set the agenda and become the representatives of dominant discourses. This does not imply that the

resisters are powerless, that alternative discourses are non-existent or that the power relations cannot change. Dissenters always manage to carve out small niches outside of the apparently almighty's control, and these pockets of resistance are important for expanding resistance. Nevertheless, the activists themselves experience their position as marginal, subordinate and asymmetric. The apparently powerful can experience moments of slipping control, but under most circumstance this is only temporarily.

In most arenas, the activists are subordinate towards representatives of the state and big companies who control resources like money, land, legal violence, and well-educated employees and have the law on their side. In spite of these enormous obstacles, activists are fighting against not just people and groups who are more powerful than they are but also the discourses of what is true, right and just that the apparently powerful uphold.

As shown in the introduction to this chapter, an individual can carry out solo humorous political stunts as acts of resistance. However, it is common for individuals to join with others to plan and undertake actions. Some choose informal networks; others decide to form or join formal organisations. Some of these groups work towards a clearly defined goal—for instance, to change a particular law—whereas other groups have particular issues they are concerned about. Netwerk Vlaanderen, the group that carried out the demining action at the AXA bank, uses a variety of methods to address the issues of responsible banking and ethical investments.

When groups and researchers talk about what activists do, they use a variety of terms, like strategy and goals. "Social movements" is a sociological term used to describe organised efforts to create change through extra-parliamentary means.[58] A sociologist might say that Netwerk Vlaanderen was an organisation that was part of the global social movement working against landmines; members of networks and organisations might also refer to "the movement".

Well-organised groups usually have a strategy for how they aim to reach their goals. A strategy consists of the ideas and plans concerning how to go from the present situation to a desired future. Groups with a well-developed strategy usually have a common vision and have set both a long-term goal and shorter-term sub-goals. Netwerk Vlaanderen has

a vision of a just and sustainable society where people take responsibility for how their money is invested and where "money can be used to create a society that benefits people and the environment".[59] However, Netwerk Vlaanderen is perfectly aware that this is a vision and that in order to move in the right direction, more concrete objectives (sub-goals) have to be set. An organisation's objectives sometimes vary considerably; for Netwerk Vlaanderen, an objective was to raise public awareness about the investment practices of major banks. Another objective was to provide money to sustainable projects. Thus, Netwerk Vlaanderen has simultaneously provided economic support for what it considers good and campaigned against what it considers undesirable.[60] A group with well-developed strategic thinking may draw up a plan outlining the sorts of methods (types of actions) and tactics (particular actions) it will use to reach its objectives and goals.[61] In its action involving a search for landmines, Netwerk Vlaanderen used the method of nonviolent direct action in an event that did not last very long but provided publicity. Although such actions can be onetime events, most groups plan and undertake a series of related actions and events which can be said to constitute a campaign, which can last for months or years. In the next chapter, we shall see how Netwerk Vlaanderen also created an elaborate humorous political stunt with its fictional ACE bank which together with the search for landmines was part of the campaign "My Money. Clear Conscience?".

Conclusion

Within humour theory, it has been debated whether humour really poses a challenge to those in positions of power or whether it is merely a vent for frustration. I indicated that it is necessary to leave the either-or dichotomy behind and instead discuss what role humour can play under what circumstances. Looking at one particular form of political humour, the humorous political stunt, is a way to probe the complexities of humour. Also, the play metaphor and the cases in subsequent chapters can contribute to illustrating how complex it can be to analyse the effect of humorous political stunts on relations of power.

A number of factors are involved in determining the impact of a humorous political stunt. It is not just a question of directly challenging established relations of power but also concerns the initiators themselves and their commitment to a cause, as well as media, other activists and the general public.

The following three chapters investigate more thoroughly how humour facilitates outreach, mobilisation, a sustainable culture of resistance as well as challenging power by engaging in the "discursive guerrilla war" with "hit-and-run attacks" of humorous political stunts.

Notes

1. Nichols, James. "Jennifer Louise Lopez Asks Anti-Gay Harlem Church to Stone Her". *The Huffington Post* March 20, 2014. Accessed February 5, 2016 from http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/03/20/lesbian-stoning-anti-gay-church_n_5000239.html.
2. B. T. "Kendt Forfatter I Det Røde Felt: Værsgo Inger Støjberg, Her Er Min Farmors Ring!" *B.T*, December 25, 2015. Accessed February 5, 2016 from http://www.bt.dk/politik/kendt-forfatter-i-det-roede-felt-vaersgo-inger-stoejberg-her-er-min-farmors-ring.
3. Jørgenssen, Steen A. "Støjberg Efter Nazi-Sammenligninger: Kun Rimeligt at Tage Værdier Fra Flygtninge". *Jyllands-Posten*, December 18, 2015. Accessed February 6, 2016 from http://jyllands-posten.dk/politik/ECE8313942/St%C3%B8jberg-efter-nazi-sammenligninger-Kun-rimeligt-at-tage-v%C3%A6rdier-fra-flygtninge/.
4. B. T. "Kendt Forfatter I Det Røde Felt: Værsgo Inger Støjberg, Her Er Min Farmors Ring!".
5. John C. Meyer, "Humor as a Double-Edged Sword: Four Functions of Humor in Communication", *Communication Theory* 10, no. 3 (2000): p. 323. Regarding paradoxes of humour, see also Michael Billig, *Laughter and Ridicule*: *Towards a Social Critique of Laughter* (London: Sage, 2005). p. 176.
6. Rod A. Martin, *The Psychology of Humor*: *An Integrative Approach* (Burlington, MA: Elsevier Academic Press, 2007). pp. 2–3.

7. Billig, *Laughter and Ridicule*: *Towards a Social Critique of Laughter*: p. 176.
8. Martin, *The Psychology of Humor*: *An Integrative Approach*: Chap. 1.
9. This division into three schools is a common way of categorising the different theories, done, for example, by Linda E. Francis, "Laughter, the Best Mediation: Humor as Emotion Management in Interaction", *Symbolic Interaction* 17, no. 2 (1994); Meyer, "Humor as a Double-Edged Sword: Four Functions of Humor in Communication"; Billig, *Laughter and Ridicule*: *Towards a Social Critique of Laughter*; Simon Critchley, *On Humour* (London: Routledge, 2002).
10. Jerry Palmer, *Taking Humour Seriously* (London: Routledge, 1994). p. 5.
11. For examples of the "vent for frustration" perspective, see Gregor Benton, "The Origins of the Political Joke", in *Humour in Society*: *Resistance and Control*, ed. Chris Powell and George E. C. Paton (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988); Billig, *Laughter and Ridicule*: *Towards a Social Critique of Laughter*; Christie Davies, "Humour and Protest: Jokes under Communism", *International Review of Social History* 52, no. S15 (2007); Nathaniel Hong, "Mow 'Em All Down Grandma: The 'Weapon' of Humor in Two Danish World War II Occupation Scrapbooks", *Humor*: *International Journal of Humor Research* 23, no. 1 (2010); Villy Tsakona and Diana Elena Popa, "Humour in Politics and the Politics of Humour: An Introduction", in *Studies in Political Humour*: *In between Political Critique and Public Entertainment*, ed. Villy Tsakona and Diana Elena Popa (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2011). On the other hand, numerous studies have found humour to occasionally contribute to resistance under various circumstances: Colin Barker, "The Making of Solidarity at the Lenin Shipyard in Gdansk", in *Passionate Politics*: *Emotions and Social Movements*, ed. Jeff Goodwin, James M. Jasper, and Francesca Polletta (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001); Marty Branagan, "The Last Laugh: Humour in Community Activism", *Community Development Journal* 42, no. 4 (2007); Pamela J. Downe, "Laughing When It Hurts: Humor and Violence in the Lives of Costa Rican Prostitutes", *Women's Studies International Forum* 22, no. 1 (1999); Suzana B. Rodrigues and David L. Collinson,

"'Having Fun'? Humour as Resistance in Brazil", *Organization Studies* 16, no. 5 (1995); Kathleen Stokker, *Folklore Fights the Nazis*: *Humor in Occupied Norway*, *1940–1945* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997); Kathleen Stokker, "Quisling Humor in Hitler's Norway: Its Wartime Function and Postwar Legacy", *Humor* 14, no. 4 (2001); Majken Jul Sørensen, "Humor as a Serious Strategy of Nonviolent Resistance to Oppression", *Peace* & *Change* 33, no. 2 (2008); Phil Taylor and Peter Bain, "'Subterranean Worksick Blues': Humour as Subversion in Two Call Centres", *Organization Studies* 24, no. 9 (2003); Robert I. Westwood and Allanah Johnston, "Humor in Organization: From Function to Resistance", *Humor*: *International Journal of Humor Research* 26, no. 2 (2013).

12. Tsakona and Popa, "Humour in Politics and the Politics of Humour: An Introduction", p. 2.
13. Asef Bayat, *Life as Politics*: *How Ordinary People Change the Middle East* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010); Michel Foucault, "Disciplinary Power and Subjection", in *Power*, ed. Steven Lukes, *Readings in Social and Political Theory* (New York: New York University Press, 1976); Michel Foucault and Paul Rabinow, *The Foucault Reader*, 1st ed. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984); James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak*: *Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985); James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*: *Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990).
14. Critchley, *On Humour*.
15. Netwerk Vlaanderen, "Demining Action 18/10/2005", (2005).
16. Netwerk Vlaanderen, "Demining Team Begins Its Work at Axa", Netwerk Vlaanderen http://www.netwerkvlaanderen.be/en/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=47&Itemid=268.
17. Netwerk Vlaanderen, "Demining Team Begins Its Work at Axa".
18. For a description of how this definition was developed, see Majken Jul Sørensen, *Humorous Political Stunts*: *Nonviolent Public Challenges to Power* (Sparsnäs, Sweden: Irene Publishing, 2015), PhD thesis, School of Humanities and Social Inquiry, University of Wollongong, Australia.

19. For an analysis of stunts performed by the last two, see Sørensen, *Humorous Political Stunts*: *Nonviolent Public Challenges to Power*.
20. See, for instance, Christine Harold, *Ourspace*: *Resisting the Corporate Control of Culture* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2007). pp. 2–3. Amber Day, *Satire and Dissent*: *Interventions in Contemporary Political Debate* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2011). Early writings regarding culture jamming were Kalle Lasn, *Culture Jam*: *The Uncooling of America*, 1st ed. (New York: Eagle Brook, 1999). Naomi Klein, *No Logo*: *No Space*, *No Choice*, *No Jobs* (London: Flamingo, 2001). However, the practice of culture jamming, especially in the form of *billboard liberation*, is much older. In Australia, *Billboard Utilising Graffitists Against Unhealthy Promotions*, or B.U.G.A U.P. for short, targeted cigarette commercials in the 1980s and was influential in changing the laws regulating cigarette advertising. The term *tactical carnival* was introduced by Bogad as a description of activism that confronts some of the dogmas within the traditional left and can contribute to opening up public space by creating a joyful counterculture. See, for instance, L. M. Bogad, "Tactical Carnival: Social Movements, Demonstrations, and Dialogical Performance", in *A Boal Companion*: *Dialogues on Theatre and Cultural Politics*, ed. Jan Cohen-Cruz and Mady Schutzman (New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 52. L. M. Bogad, "Carnivals against Capital: Radical Clowning and the Global Justice Movement", *Social Identities* 16, no. 4 (2010): pp. 542–543. Benjamin Shepard, L. M. Bogad, and Stephen Duncombe, "Performing Vs. The Insurmountable: Theatrics, Activism, and Social Movements", *Liminalities*: *A Journal of Performance Studies* 4, no. 3 (2008): p. 2.
21. See, for instance, Joel Schechter, *Satiric Impersonations*: *From Aristophanes to the Guerrilla Girls* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1994). Nato Thompson et al., *The Interventionists*: *Users' Manual for the Creative Disruption of Everyday Life* (North Adams, MA: MASS MoCA, 2004). Andrew Boyd and Dave Oswald Mitchell, *Beautiful Trouble*: *A Toolbox for Revolution* (New York: OR Books, 2012). Famous US examples include Reverend Billy and his "church of life after shopping", the Yes Men, and Billionaires for Bush. Read more in L. M. Bogad, "A Place for Protest: The Billionaires

for Bush Interrupt the Hegemonologue", in *Performance and Place*, ed. Leslie and Helen Paris Hill (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006); Day, *Satire and Dissent*; Angelique Haugerud, "Satire and Dissent in the Age of Billionaires", *Social Research* 79, no. 1 (2012); Angelique Haugerud, *No Billionaire Left Behind*: *Satirical Activism in America* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2013). A well-studied Canadian example is the Raging Grannies. See Carole Roy, "The Irreverent Raging Grannies: Humour as Protest", *Canadian Woman Studies* 25, no. 3/4 (2006); Carole Roy, "When Wisdom Speaks Sparks Fly: Raging Grannies Perform Humor as Protest", *Women's Studies Quarterly* 35, no. 3/4 (2007).

22. Silas Harrebye, "Cracks: Creative Activism—Priming Pump for the Political Imagination or a New Compromising Form of Democratic Participation Balancing between Critique, Cooperation, and Cooptation on the Margins of the Repertoire of Contention?" (PhD Thesis, Roskilde University, 2012), p. 4; Day, *Satire and Dissent*: pp. 150–151. Romanos, Eduardo. "The Strategic Use of Humor in the Spanish 15m Movement" In *Crisis and Social Mobilization in Contemporary Spain*: *The 15m Movement*, edited by B. Tejerina and I. Perugorría. Farnham: Ashgate, 2015, in press.
23. See some of the previous footnotes.
24. Quoted in Ashley Duree, "Greed at the New York Stock Exchange and the Levitation of the Pentagon: Early Protest Theatre by Abbie Hoffman and Jerry Rubin", *Voces Novae*: *Chapman University Historical Review* 1, no. 1 (2009): p. 56.
25. Duree, "Greed at the New York Stock Exchange and the Levitation of the Pentagon: Early Protest Theatre by Abbie Hoffman and Jerry Rubin", p. 57.
26. Duree, "Greed at the New York Stock Exchange and the Levitation of the Pentagon: Early Protest Theatre by Abbie Hoffman and Jerry Rubin", p. 58.
27. Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle* (Detroit: Black & Red, 1970).
28. Harold, *Ourspace*: p. 8.
29. I am grateful to Stellan Vinthagen for his suggestion to explore this metaphor of theatre and the play of politics.

30. When it comes to individuals, Goffman did the ground-breaking work. See Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1959). Regarding social movements, see, for instance, Kathleen Blee and Amy McDowell, "Social Movement Audiences", *Sociological Forum* 27, no. 1 (2012).
31. Shepard, Bogad, and Duncombe, "Performing vs. the Insurmountable", pp. 20–21.
32. Herbert Marcuse, "Repressive Tolerance", in *A Critique of Pure Tolerance*, ed. Robert Paul Wolff, Barrington Moore, and Herbert Marcuse (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969).
33. Anna Johansson and Stellan Vinthagen, "Dimensions of Everyday Resistance: An Analytical Framework", *Critical Sociology* (2014).
34. Hariman, for instance, writes about the audience as "unruly, mixed, possibly drunk or stoned, maybe crazy, and at times also stupid, deluded, out of work, or otherwise deviant from the norms of serious, respectable, daytime routine". See Robert Hariman, "Political Parody and Public Culture", *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 94, no. 3 (2008): p. 255.
35. Blee and McDowell, "Social Movement Audiences", p. 4.
36. Blee and McDowell, "Social Movement Audiences", p. 16.
37. Mona Lilja and Stellan Vinthagen, "Sovereign Power, Disciplinary Power and Biopower: Resisting What Power with What Resistance?", *Journal of Political Power* 7, no. 1 (2014): p. 111.
38. Lukes's classic essay *Power*: *A Radical View* and the three views on power he presents are a good starting point for a multifaceted understanding of power. See Steven Lukes, *Power*: *A Radical View* (London: Macmillan, 1974). See also Foucault, "Disciplinary Power and Subjection".
39. Michel Foucault, "The Subject and Power", *Critical Inquiry* 8, no. 4 (1982): p. 780. An interesting application of Foucault's perspective in relation to nonviolence is Bleiker's concept of *transversal dissent.* See Roland Bleiker, *Popular Dissent*, *Human Agency*, *and Global Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).
40. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*: *Hidden Transcripts*.
41. Bayat, *Life as Politics*: *How Ordinary People Change the Middle East*.

42. Gene Sharp, *The Politics of Nonviolent Action* (Boston: Porter Sargent, 1973). p. 26.
43. April Carter gives a good overview of the limitations with the consent perspective dominant in theory of nonviolence in Chap. 4 of her book *People Power and Political Change*. See April Carter, *People Power and Political Change*: *Key Issues and Concepts* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2012).
44. Brian Martin, "Gene Sharp's Theory of Power", *Journal of Peace Research* 26, no. 2 (1989): p. 217.
45. Stellan Vinthagen, *Ickevåldsaktion*: *En Social Praktik Av Motstånd Och Konstruktion* (Göteborg: Institutionen för freds- och utvecklingsforskning (PADRIGU) Göteborgs universitet, 2005), PhD thesis. p. 261.
46. Lilja and Vinthagen, "Sovereign Power, Disciplinary Power and Biopower: Resisting What Power with What Resistance?", p. 113.
47. Michel Foucault, "Two Lectures", in *Power/Knowledge*: *Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*, ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980).
48. Lilja and Vinthagen, "Sovereign Power, Disciplinary Power and Biopower: Resisting What Power with What Resistance?", p. 115.
49. Lilja and Vinthagen, "Sovereign Power, Disciplinary Power and Biopower: Resisting What Power with What Resistance?", pp. 115–116.
50. For an interesting introduction to the situation in Serbia through the 1990s from the perspective of the independent radio station B92, see Matthew Collin, *This Is Serbia Calling* (New York, NY: Serpent's Tail, 2001).
51. Mona Lilja, Mikael Baaz, and Stellan Vinthagen, "Exploring 'Irrational Resistance'", *Journal of Political Power* 6, no. 2 (2013).
52. The inspiration for the term is Oriol Pi-Sunyer, "Political Humor in a Dictatorial State: The Case of Spain", *Ethnohistory* 24, no. 2 (1977). Pi-Sunyer refers to "oral guerrilla warfare" that everyone could participate in during the Franco dictatorship in Spain. However, with the term "discursive guerrilla warfare", I want to emphasise not just that everyone can contribute to resistance but that the whole issue of what is true, right and just is at stake.

53. Lilja, Baaz, and Vinthagen, "Exploring 'Irrational Resistance'", p. 209.
54. Stephen Duncombe, *Dream*: *Re-Imagining Progressive Politics in an Age of Fantasy* (New York: New Press, 2007).
55. Duncombe, *Dream*: *Re-Imagining Progressive Politics in an Age of Fantasy*: p. 8.
56. Elise Boulding, *Cultures of Peace*: *The Hidden Side of History*, 1st ed. (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2000).
57. Duncombe, *Dream*: *Re-Imagining Progressive Politics in an Age of Fantasy*: p. 25.
58. See, for instance, Tarrow, Sidney G. *Power in Movement*: *Social Movements and Contentious Politics*. Rev. & updated 3rd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).
59. FairFin. "Vision". Accessed February 11, 2016 from http://www.fairfin.be/en/about-fairfin/vision. FairFin is Netwerk Vlaanderen's new name.
60. FairFin. "History". Accessed February 11, 2016 from http://www.fairfin.be/en/about-fairfin/history.
61. A good introduction to activists' perception of terms like goals, strategy, tactics and campaigns is WRI. *Handbook for Nonviolent Campaigns*. 2nd ed. London: War Resisters' International, 2014.

3

Humorous Political Stunts from Around the World

Introduction

A central feature of humorous political stunts is that they either blur the distinction between the performers of the stunts and their audiences or include an element of disruption which is impossible to ignore. As a way of investigating the dynamics of humorous political stunts more closely, they can be divided into five different types, depending on the way they position themselves in relation to the dominant discourses' claim to rationality and truth. Although humour is always bound by a certain context and can only make sense to audiences that are familiar with the points of reference, humorous political stunts have been used in a range of different political situations. Below, 10 examples from around the world, performed between 1974 and the present, illustrate what is meant by supportive, corrective, naïve, absurd and provocative stunts. In all but one, the initiators of the stunts are grassroots activist groups aiming to challenge, disrupt or transform the status quo. The theatre metaphor is used to analyse the examples and at the end of the chapter a table sums up what characterises the different types of stunts.

M.J. Sørensen, *Humour in Political Activism*,
DOI 10.1057/978-1-137-57346-9_3

Supportive Humorous Political Stunts

Supportive humorous stunts are framed as attempts to help, support, protect from harm, or celebrate. Those who carry out supportive stunts appear supportive and "rational", but what happens is that the target is invalidated. On the political scene, those assumed to be in power and control are joined up front by the pranksters. Apparently, the pranksters do not dismiss or criticise the dominant discourses or their representatives; instead, such discourses are exaggerated and overemphasised. Usually, irony plays an important role in supportive humorous stunts, since they are not supportive at all. The targets will know that they are being watched, and the audiences are presented with an image of their vulnerable sides. Here, the protesters do not appear irrational in their relation to what they actually oppose; they are constructive, helpful and supportive. By acting in this way, they attempt to undermine their opponents' claims to truth and transcend the unequal relations of power. Compared with conventional political protest, supportive stunts look at first glance like real support, but a closer look reveals an underlying message that exposes and disconfirms. An Australian example will illustrate this type of stunt.

Housewives Celebrate the Australian Prime Minister

Australia's conservative prime minister from 1996 to 2007 had an extraordinary fan club consisting of four young women plus their driver and camera women. In character as Bea Wight, Bea Wright, Bea Rich and Bea Strait, they were the *John Howard Ladies' Auxiliary Fan Club*. They mocked Howard and his politics during the last part of his time as prime minister. In an interview, the women explained how the names "reflect the key pillars of Howardism—being white, right, rich and straight".[1] The women were provoked by Howard's conservative politics and what they saw as his attempt to take Australia back to the 1950s. They set out to confront his politics in an unusual manner, starting with the

2004 election. Dressed up in silly hats, pearls, long white gloves, lots of makeup and frocks, representing the stereotypical Australian housewife of the 1950s, they tried to confront him with these ironic personas. In 2004, they did not get closer than 50 metres, but in the following years the characters were developed. Prior to the 2007 election campaign, the women did their first public performance on a tram. Here, they launched the "White blindfold campaign" and explained to the passengers "Now, this is the official John Howard view of history. What happens with the white blindfold is that you put it on and you can't see a thing. It completely whites out everything. All you can see is white".[2] Then they had a "patriotic" Australian history quiz, satirising Howard's perception of what Australia's history was like. Responses from the passengers were positive, and even Howard supporters thought it was funny.[3]

Getting a chance to get close to Howard during the election campaign was difficult, since his schedule was kept secret, but in 2007 they finally found themselves at the right hotel. While the journalists were waiting for Howard, the women got a chance to introduce themselves as the John Howard Ladies' Auxiliary Fan Club. They had a number of gags, such as playing on the electoral Viagra they had prepared for Mr. Howard and the race card that he could play during the election (which Howard had done in previous elections) and uranium export to Iran and North Korea. Later that day, they finally met him in the botanical gardens in Melbourne. Bea Wight asked Howard whether he would like some yellowcake, referring to a form of uranium concentrate powder, and Howard's recent signing of an agreement with Russia about export of Australian uranium. Bea Wight explains what happened: "He looked at us and smiled as though all his dreams had come at once. He smiled. He was happy, just for one split second, and then he realised—'Electoral Viagra'—that we were evil".[4]

The fan club managed to get away with many stunts without being arrested or fined and made it to the national TV news.[5] They think that because they presented themselves as absolute Howard-lovers and behaved so non-threateningly, they were perceived more as performers than as activists. It also helped that they were four small white women.[6] And they were convincing. A news reporter starts her account of the offering of yellowcake "Even if their message is not quite your cup of tea,

it's hard not to admire the commitment of the four mothers of the John Howard Ladies' Auxiliary Fan Club".[7]

Challenges Camouflaged as Support

Conventional protest can easily be identified as such by the use of leaflets, posters, critical speeches, blockades and so on. Ordinary protesters use rational argumentation in their efforts to convince others to join them. In contrast, the activists performing supportive stunts can offer help, concern for other's safety, or in this case—a supportive fan club to encourage their hero through difficult times.[8]

Applying the theatre metaphor, it is obvious that the fan club tried to enter the stage where "Australian politics" was being played, casting one of the main actors—the prime minister. He did what he could to ignore his fan club but could not prevent them from getting attention. Because they used irony and said they were his biggest supporters, it was difficult to force them into the ordinary protester role and the political play was disrupted in a way that transformed the meaning of support and opposition. The challengers from the fan club had an immediate audience of bystanders, but the event was also filmed, making it possible for many more to watch the confrontation. When it comes to the factor of timing, it was important for the fan club to time its activities around the schedule of the prime minister.

In other supportive stunts, the challengers have entered stages where they were not expected at all or established a "sub-stage" where they were in control of the rules. When the challengers can create their own stages, it also makes timing less of a concern.

Corrective Humorous Political Stunts

Corrective humorous stunts aim to transcend the inequality in power by presenting an alternative version of "the truth". They hijack the identity or the message of their target in order to reveal a correction. This type of stunt unmasks the dominant discourse by disclosing a more nuanced

version of persons, institutions or messages. Just like in the supportive stunt, this happens when the discourse and rationality of the target are exaggerated and overemphasised. The pranksters do not enter the scene right in the face of the powerful as in the supportive stunt, but sneak in behind their back while the main actors look the other way or are busy somewhere else. Then they reveal what they consider a more correct version of who the target really is. In cases where there is no specific target, the scene might be used to draw attention to a neglected issue. In corrective stunts, challengers frequently choose a scene usually controlled by the powerful, communicating to the power-holders that they are being watched. Nevertheless, the corrections are usually more directed towards the audience to whom the true colours of the target are revealed. Corrective humorous stunts frequently share their goal with conventional protests—they want to inform the public about an alternative version of the truth.

Corrective stunts subvert a dominant message by displaying a distorted version of it. A decade ago, the *Yes Men* became the front figures of this "identity correction" under the motto "It takes a lie to expose the truth" when they revealed the shortcomings of the World Trade Organisation and various multinational corporations.[9] Here, the corrective stunts are illustrated with two examples: The Belgian group Netwerk Vlaanderen created a bank that invested in arms, oil and child labour, and in The Netherlands the major news broadcaster created a hoax show to bring attention to the lack of organ donors.

Arms Export and Child Labour as Ethical Investments in Belgium

ACE bank was created in 2006 by Netwerk Vlaanderen, a Belgian organisation concerned with banks' responsibilities for what they invest in. ACE bank was an elaborate deception and had an office in central Brussels, parodying other banks. It claimed to be investigating whether there was a market for its special way of doing banking. The bank wanted to specialise in investments in dubious areas such as arms and oil production

as well as child labour. It claimed to be ethical and transparent because in contrast to other banks it did not try to hide what it invested in. On the contrary, they exclusively invested in these areas in order to provide the best possible interest rate to their customers. In a video about ACE bank, the viewer sees potential bank customers being introduced to the idea. Some are very sceptical, others appear seriously interested and some thought it was a parody. The new bank made headlines in the TV news and in newspapers—but after a week of speculation, it was closed down by the Belgian bank authorities. Apparently furious about the decision, ACE bank called for a press conference. Here, they named all the major banks and their investment in similar products and demanded that if ACE bank had to close because of its investment practices, then all the other banks had to be closed as well.[10]

Kidney Donations as Public Entertainment in The Netherlands

In 2007, when reality shows were getting increasingly popular, the Dutch public broadcaster BNN announced that it was going to have a show about organ donation. A woman who was terminally ill with cancer was going to decide who would get her kidney when she died. People who were waiting for a kidney transplant were competing for the great prize, the dying woman's kidney.[11] The show caused much debate in advance, also outside The Netherlands, and critiques considered it highly unethical to have sick people compete for a new kidney this way. The show was aired on June 1, with the cancer patient asking the competitors all sorts of questions, similar to the way it is done in reality dating programs. At the moment when the cancer patient was about to pick the lucky recipient of her kidney, the host of the programme revealed that it was in fact a hoax and that the cancer patient was an actress.[12] However, the people competing for the kidney were real patients on the waiting list for an organ transplant. They had agreed to participate in the show knowing that it was a hoax in order to draw attention to the lack of organ donors.

Revealing Wrongs and Suggesting Alternatives Through Corrections

On the surface, the corrective stunt seems to be acting within the frame of logic and rationality. A new bank is established and a TV station broadcasts a reality show, nothing unusual here.

Again, the metaphor of theatre can be useful for illustrating what is going on. The stages that the pranksters enter can vary a lot—in this case, ACE bank set up an alternative stage and lured their audience inside. No one appeared to be playing a protester role, neither did they want to "help" in the way the participants in the supportive stunt did. For Netwerk Vlaanderen, the general public was the main target, which they reached out to both directly and through mass media. It is difficult to know whether members of the general public changed their investment habits because of the stunt, but it is striking that many of the examples of corrective stunts I have come across have been very effective in getting media attention.[13]

The Big Donor Show is an atypical example of a corrective stunt because it was initiated by BNN itself, not something which can be done by an activist group. The show was a ridicule of reality shows, but the main target was not reality TV, but the general public's inaction when it comes to take a stand about organ donation. It was not a critique of anyone in particular, but criticised the lack of concern for the issue. Those who were deceived were the general public who thought it was a real reality show and the commentators who were outraged over the idea behind the show.

Because BNN was already in control of the stage where they wanted to perform the stunt, there was no need to sneak onto a stage, and they did not have to worry about the behaviour of main actors and timing the way an activists group would have had to do. Thus, for this unusual case, it is only the audience aspect of the theatre metaphor which is relevant. The show certainly included an element which turned audience expectations upside down, and although we cannot know exactly how people reacted to the unexpected twist the show took, this is a case where it is possible to see that it did have an impact. Within 24 hours, 30,000 people had

requested donor forms and a month after the show was broadcast, 7300 new donors had been registered in The Netherlands alone. Also, in other places (for instance, Denmark), a high increase in the number of donors could be registered.[14]

In spite of their differences, these two cases share the commonality that the humorous political stunts reveal what is usually hidden. BNN revealed the forgotten patients waiting on the organ transplant lists, and ACE bank revealed the investment practices of all the ordinary banks in Belgium. In these cases, the solutions that ordinary citizens can easily contribute to are also quite clear—to sign up as organ donors and to ask questions to the banks about their investments and change bank if the answer is not satisfactory.

Naïve Humorous Political Stunts

Naïve humorous stunts deal with the truth and rationality in a way which differs from the supportive and corrective stunt. By appearing naïve and innocent, protesters pretend not to understand that their actions can be interpreted as a protest and this way point to the unequal relations of power by only hinting at them. Where the supportive and corrective stunts exaggerate and overemphasise the rationality of dominant discourses in order to get their message across, those who carry out naïve stunts pretend that they are not aware that they have challenged anyone or anything. In terms of the theatre metaphor, they enter a scene but pretend that they are not aware that there was a play going on. If anything looks like a protest, that must be a coincidence. The story of the good soldier Svejk who challenged the authority of the army without ever framing his actions as protest is a classic literary example of a naïve prankster.[15]

The purpose of the naïve stunt is not to present a more correct version or unmasking, but under the disguise of naïveté to simply utter a dissenting message. Below, three examples illustrate the naïve stunt. In Denmark, Santa came to town just before Christmas in 1974. In Burma, support for the opposition was disguised behind the result of a football match, and in Thailand, participants in *Red Sunday* events have simply

carried on with everyday activities such as shopping and jogging in the park.

Santas Hand out Gifts from the Shop Shelves in Denmark

In the week leading up to Christmas 1974, 100 Santas visited Denmark's capital, Copenhagen. This week-long action/performance was created by the theatre group *Solvognen*, which wanted to bring public attention to the rising unemployment and commercialisation of Christmas.[16] The action had many different parts, ranging from friendly Santas singing to the elderly and giving away hot chocolate to a symbolic attack on the court of industrial relations which was renamed a class court.

The culmination came in the late afternoon on December 22, when the army of Santas visited the shopping centre Magasin. The place was filled with people buying last-minute presents, and here Santa set out to do what Santas are supposed to do, hand out presents. The Santas had brought some books with them but also picked books from the shop shelves and handed them to the customers with a "merry Christmas" and words like "no, today it does not cost anything, today it is free".[17] A film about the event shows how some customers smile and laugh, some ignore the Santas, and over the loudspeaker system the management of Magasin declares:

> "Announcement to all our customers. Please be aware that the persons in Father Christmas costumes that hand out goods from the shelves, do *not* belong to the staff of Magasin. We kindly request our customers to return items they have already received at the checkout counters. The police have been called".[18]

The police arrived and children cried when the Santas were arrested and rather roughly led out with their arms behind their backs. Outside the shopping centre, the passers-by which had stopped to watch were on the side of Santa. They sang Christmas carols and tried to prevent the police from taking the Santas to the waiting police vans.[19] A group of

Santas who had not been arrested proceeded to another shopping centre called Illum, where they repeated the performance before they were arrested as well.

The shopping centre did not want to press charges against the Santas for theft, but the prosecutor raised a case for disturbing public order against 45 Santas. In the first trial, they were acquitted, but when the prosecutor appealed the case they were later convicted and received small fines.[20]

During the week of the action, Solvognen succeeded in gaining extensive media coverage.[21] The media reported that many of the customers who witnessed the event were supportive, although many were confused about what was going on and some accused the Santas of stealing. Later, there was much debate and even more coverage after Solvognen received a grant from a state art fund. More than 30 years later, the stunt became part of the Danish cultural canon. The performance is considered one of 108 cultural expressions that is part of the Danish cultural heritage.[22]

Announcement of Sports Result Disguises Opposition in Burma

In Burma, any kind of open criticism of the military junta which rules the country was discouraged for decades and everyone doing it ran a great risk. But in spite of the persecutions and harassment of all dissidents, one could always find political humour thrown right in the face of the regime. In 2010, on the day that opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi was to be released from her house arrest, a magazine which follows international sport made a remarkable front page. The magazine, called *First Eleven*, had a headline which said: "Sunderland freeze Chelsea" and "United stunned by Villa & Arsenal advances to grab their hope", something which referred to well-known British soccer teams and was all completely correct. But what made this headline so special? Some of the letters were printed in a different colour, to reveal a different version of the text: "SU free. Unite and advance to grab the hope".[23] Above the headline was a

photo which added to the subversive message—"a striker going for goal as the opposing team moves in to block him".[24]

For this action, the newspaper was suspended for two weeks. This is a punishment which is comparatively light when the history of repression in Burma is taken into consideration.

Aerobics Dance as "Protest Without Protesting" in Thailand

On a Sunday in July 2010, around 400 people dressed in red and wearing ghost makeup gathered for an aerobics dance in the biggest park in Bangkok in Thailand. At a time when public expression of protest was forbidden, this action by the Red Sunday group was a courageous undertaking, since the ghost masks were a commemoration of protesters who had been killed by the regime a few months earlier. The aerobics instructor led the dancers through a number of silly steps to the tunes of songs from the Red Shirts movement, and at the end of the show the artist and founder of the group, Sombat Boonngam-anong, performed a pantomime and unfolded a banner proclaiming "If you want to forbid me to speak, you need to stop me from breathing".[25] Around 100 security officers were observing the event but did not intervene at any point.[26]

Red Sunday was a loose network of activists which had been affiliated with the Red Shirts movement in Thailand. The Red Shirts and their organisation United Front of Democracy Against Dictatorship (UDD or Nor Por Chor) had their background in protesting the military coup that ousted Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra in 2006. The political turmoil that followed the coup included nonviolent actions and increasingly violent tactics from movements both for and against the coup. After elections in 2008, the turmoil continued with demands for new elections. The Red Shirts' street protests started peacefully but grew increasingly disruptive and with incidents such as vandalism and stone throwing. As a response, the Thai government violently crushed the protests, causing the death of approximately 90 protesters in May 2010. After this, all protest was forbidden under the emergency decree, and any signs of its

re-emergence were closely monitored. Although many activists wanted to maintain the nonviolent character of the protests, there were also worries that the Red Shirts would develop into an armed guerrilla group. In this atmosphere of distrust, intimidation and fear, the Red Sunday network started to meet and express themselves in ways that were not explicitly protest but nevertheless carried significant meanings of protest for the participants. People would gather to eat red (brown) rice, go to the shopping mall dressed in red, and go cycling collectively.[27]

The silly actions of Red Sunday were a response both to the regime that wanted to frame the Red Shirts as terrorists as well as to the militant elements within the Red Shirts movement.[28] The silliness made it possible to continue some level of organised protest because the "protest without protesting" strategy was hard for the authorities to get a hold on. It was not clear whether the people dressed in red were actually violating a law when they were eating, shopping and exercising—all everyday activities for many people in Bangkok.[29] Sombat also explains that he sometimes wore very casual dress like a T-shirt and flip-flops in order to appear harmless.[30] Because the police were hesitant to interfere, Red Sunday was successful in claiming some political space for itself.

Janjira Sombatpoonsiri, who has written about the playful subversion of Red Sunday, explains how the absurdity and ambiguity open up a much less antagonistic style than what the Red Shirts movement before the crackdown displayed. Although Red Sunday was expressing criticism, this existed side by side with playfulness. In addition, Red Sunday was reaching out to the general public:

> Red Sunday's satires provoked the Thai public to start to question the moral claims of the powers-that-be. Although actions were limited in number, they epitomized the people's courage to subvert aristocratic institutions publicly.[31]

Red Sunday organised an event almost every Sunday for more than a year, until the 2011 national elections, which were won by the Red Shirts party Pheu Thai Party.[32] Some of these events were naïve humorous political stunts in the form of "protest without protesting" such as the

ones mentioned above, but Red Sunday had in its repertoire many other unpredictable and attention-grapping activities which were covered by the media. Sometimes, the Sunday actions were commemorations of the people who died during the May 2010 crackdown; at other times, the point of departure was festivals from the Thai calendar where Red Sunday twisted the official rhetoric. Some of the actions were humorous, and all of them involved some creative or artistic aspect. Sombat describes how

> every action we carried out attempted at conveying a political message. Their different characteristics depended on purposes such as whether or not we wanted to draw increased attention to our campaigns, whether we wanted to get away with repression or whether we wanted to disarm the security officers.[33]

On purpose, Red Sunday decided to differentiate themselves from the Red Shirts movement. The authorities knew that the actions by Red Sunday would usually involve a relatively small number of people, and in contrast to the protests by the Red Shirts, theirs would not last for days and be disruptive to the economy.

Sombat also managed to make the authorities make a fool of themselves. About 10 times he tied a red ribbon to the street sign on the Rachaprasong intersection where the violent crackdown in May 2010 had taken place. Sombat explains how

> one day around 200 policemen rounded up the street sign to prevent me from undertaking this activity. And that was the first time that I could see that the government was trapped in my game, the game of tying the ribbon. They assumed that if they could prevent me from tying the red ribbon, I would lose. (…) I came back there to tie the ribbon at midnight that day after all the police had gone home. On the following day, the authorities removed the entire street sign.[34]

To Sombat, this was a victory because it showed that the government was actually afraid of Red Sunday. For him it was a way of showing the media and the general public that even when the government was pointing a gun, they could still be laughed at.[35]

Sidestepping Confrontation with Naïveté

These types of stunts are naïve—not because the activists would be called naïve by their opponents but because they frame what they do in such a way that on the surface they are not doing anything wrong at all. They pretend to avoid the logic of power and protest altogether through pretended coincidence and innocence. Solvognen's army of Santas played on Danish mythology, in which Santa is naïve, friendly, helpful and more than anything else associated with giving away gifts to children. The humour in the stunt arises when Santa performs his role in a way which clashes with other societal norms, such as not stealing. When the police were called out to perform their law enforcement role and did that dutifully, it became funny because Santas in handcuffs being taken away by police is completely incongruous with the image of the naïve gift-giving Santa.

The Red Sunday group did sometimes combine the daily activities of aerobics, jogging, and eating red rice with more overt forms of protest (for instance, when Sombat ended the aerobics dance with unfolding a banner with an obvious political message), but for Red Sunday it was a question of trying to see how close to the line it was possible to get without actually crossing it. With time, it became possible to push it even further.

To return to the theatre metaphor, the activists in these cases are not aiming for the major stages, but whatever possibility that seems to be within reach. They establish themselves at a scene of ordinary life—shopping before Christmas, the front page of a magazine, doing an aerobics dance in the park. At first glance, what the newcomers do at the stage looks like a normal part of daily life and not something political. In the Burmese case, there were no other actors present. On occasions where random passers-by got involved, as in the Danish Santa case, then this would usually not involve any major actors like presidents or royalties. The audiences are faced with a situation where they have to figure out for themselves if what is before them should be interpreted as a protest. In some naïve stunts, such as the Danish Santa case, circumstances force authorities to react, but when it comes to Red Sunday in Thailand,

authorities frequently turned a blind eye to what the group was doing, probably aware that interfering would make the police look ridiculous. In the Burmese case, the authorities also had the option of pretending that no protest had happened. When it comes to timing, how precise the naïve stunts have to be depends on the context. The Thai examples were a result of an oppressive crackdown and only made sense in relation to that, whereas the gift-giving Santas would have been a bit out of place in July and the Burmese case was bound by a specific political event.

Most of the examples of naïve stunts that I have come across took place in situations of relatively severe oppression and the Santas in Denmark are an exception. For those living with oppression, framing oneself as naïve might be the only possibility for protest they consider available at all.

The naïve stunt has a different way of refusing the rationality of those in power than the corrective and supportive stunts; those who carry it out simply appear not to be aware of how the play of politics works. However, since there is logic to what they do, which sometimes presents an alternative message, they do leave themselves vulnerable to persecution, and the authorities can respond accordingly as they did in the Burmese case.

Absurd Humorous Political Stunts

In absurd humorous stunts, the activists frame themselves as innocent clowns who point towards society's absurdities. Their relation to the rationality of the dominant discourse is to defy it altogether. The absurd stunt shares some similarities with the naïve stunt regarding the apparent naïveté of the activists, but whereas the participants in the naïve stunt appear not to understand, the absurd pranksters instead refuse to acknowledge any kind of rationality. Those who carry out absurd stunts can capture any stage, anywhere. They might invade a major scene right in the face of an authoritarian regime, or they might sneak in behind someone's back on a smaller and less guarded scene. Their message is that the whole world is absurd, including the apparently powerful. All claims to power and truth are challenged with silliness, slapstick or total craziness. Everyone is assumed to be participants in the play and no one

is being chased away, but the previously prevailing rules and roles are altered. The absurd pranksters are unlikely to suggest that this has anything to do with protest; it is only the context and the audience's interpretations which can reveal any critical intent. The *Orange Alternative's* happenings in Poland during the late 1980s and clowns intervening in a military parade in Colombia serve as examples of this type of stunt.

Carnival and Candy Disrupt Communist Control in Poland

During martial law in the early 1980s in Poland, graffiti in favour of the now-illegal trade union Solidarity was quickly painted over by the authorities. This left "blobs" on the walls, so that everyone knew that they covered graffiti. Activists who identified with a new group called the Orange Alternative started to work on the blobs by giving them arms and legs so that they became little elves. According to Kenney, who has written about the Orange Alternative and its place in the fall of the communist regimes in central Europe, elves made passers-by "consider the point of the struggle over wall space, and wonder why little elves were threatening to the communists".[36]

Several years later, on June 1, 1987, the elves came to life at an Orange Alternative happening on Children's day, one of the happenings which became what Kenney calls a "catalyst" for the Orange Alternative. An invitation to the happening was distributed at schools and universities around the city of Wroclaw, and almost 1000 young people showed up. Here, they got a red cap, and then they became elves. Since it was Children's day, they handed out candy to people, danced and sang children's songs. The leader of the Orange Alternative called himself Major Fyderych, but he could not be present himself this day, since he was arrested just before the happening began. Nevertheless, the happening went ahead and the guitar player Jakubczak, another central person in the Orange Alternative, played and sang with the crowd. When the police started to take the elves to the police cars, they followed without protesting, kissing the police and throwing candy out through the windows.

Then the crowd started to shout "elves are real". Accounts of this surreal celebration of Children's day went around Poland in the underground press, providing new images of what protest could look like.[37]

The Orange Alternative was a small group that worked mainly in the city of Wroclaw but later spread to other cities in Poland. They initiated happenings which brought colour and carnival to the greyness which characterised both the communist regime and the opposition in Solidarity. Instead of staging a protest march or a fast as other protesters did, they arranged events which involved the audience. In addition to handing out candy, on other occasions they handed out toilet paper or sanitary pads (scarce under communism). The concept of *socialist surrealism* mocking the socialist realities guided the happenings, but the Orange Alternative was a co-organiser of events, not *the* organiser, since the police and passers-by also had a say in what was to happen.[38] The happenings were never an open expression of dissent, but *any* independent organising, no matter the reason, was a threat to the communist desire for total control.

In 1987 and 1988, there was a happening on average once or twice a month,[39] and another major event took place on February 16, 1988. This was carnival time, and the Orange Alternative invited everyone to the surreal version of carnival in socialist Poland—the "ProletaRIO Carnival". This time the dress code was carnival costume, and the crowd of 3000 to 5000 people included a skeleton, Ku Klux Klan men, smurfs, and Red Riding Hood together with a wolf. Official radio first reported the invitation, thinking it was an idea invented by the authorities. Finally, blue-helmet police joined the crowd, but they were not there to party, but to take the carnival to the police station. In the official press, the event was framed as student foolishness that had to be stopped in order not to create traffic chaos in the afternoon peak period.[40]

In contrast to Solidarity, the Orange Alternative was unpredictable and the regime never knew what would come next. The little elves did not resist arrest, but they kissed the police and gave them flowers. This way, they became difficult for the regime to suppress, since arresting someone for playing an elf seems ridiculous, even for the communists. In the beginning, the Orange Alternative was critical not just of the communist regime but also of Solidarity and the church because of its belief that the

Bible provided the answers. It was the regime itself which pushed the Alternative more and more in the direction of protest.[41] The happenings became a training ground for protest and socialised people to the idea of speaking out. They encouraged people to come out on the streets where they noticed that a few hours of detention was not that dangerous after all.[42] This way, by lowering levels of fear, the Orange Alternative prepared people for toppling the regime a few years later.

Clowns and Children Interview Soldiers in Colombia During Military Parade

A strange conversation took place on the Colombian day of independence in July 2011 in Bogota during the military parade where all the military machinery is displayed. A group of clowns started a conversation with some soldiers and children who were out to watch the parade. This resulted in the clowns and children asking a series of innocent but revealing questions to two soldiers. A child with a large plastic syringe as an improvised and absurd microphone asks most of the questions, supported by a group of children and clowns. The video of the event shows how the soldiers, sometimes clearly amused, answer in a relaxed and friendly atmosphere:

Child: Is there a way to help people without weapons?
Soldier: To not engage in war.
Child: Why does war exist?
Soldier: Because of power?
Clown in the background: Whose power? … Maybe the politicians', the businesses'?
Child: Would you like to do something different?
Solider: Rest.
Child: Would you like to not carry arms?
Solider: Of course.
Child: If you were not soldiers, what would you like to be then?
Solider 1: Civilian.
Solider 2: A student.

Child: Who kills who in war?
Solider: Is it the good people against the bad people?
Clown in the background: And who are the good people?
Solider: Us.
Child: And the boys in FARC [armed guerrilla group], do they have a lot of money?
Solider: No.
Child: Who kills who?
Solider: The poor people against the poor people.
Clown in the background: Ask what he would advise you to do?
Solider: Study.
Child: Don't you miss your family?
Solider: Very much.[43]

The military parade is a popular event where many people come to look at the uniformed soldiers and all the equipment. Three organisations—*Conscientious Objector's Collective Action*, *Cuerpo Con-Siente* and *Ejército Garzonista de Liberación Clown*—got together with other clowns and people interested in conscientious objection, art and clowning for this occasion. They used the absurd clown figure as a "gateway" to question the logic of the militarised status quo.[44] Using a naïve approach, they went out on the street during the parade to engage the soldiers and the spectators in conversations about independence, freedom, and what is good and bad. The conversation above was just one of the many intriguing exchanges which took place this day and exposed the absurdity of militarism. The group had also designed a leaflet encouraging soldiers to demobilise. It was a parody of government messages encouraging guerrilla soldiers to quit. The clowns gave the same invitation to the soldiers in the national army in an attempt to emphasise how peace requires everyone with a gun to demobilise.[45]

Vulnerabilities Exposed with Absurdity

The incongruity which the Orange Alternative exposed was between the everyday life under communist rule and the propaganda of the regime. The technique they relied on primarily was absurdity, evoking images

from people's childhood which were transformed into the socialist surrealism of the Alternative. Sometimes they also made parodies of communist slogans and ideology. The clowns in Colombia operated in similar fashion, using the naïve side of the clown figure to pose innocent questions which exposed how militarism is connected to power and politics where poor people are sent to kill other poor people.

The absurd stunt is usually not a direct confrontation, but an attempt to be an eye-opener. It is the type of stunt which is furthest away from protest, since it might just as well expose hierarchies, rigidity and domination within a protest movement. To the degree it is possible to talk about design at all with this type of stunt, it is designed to make people question everything they hear and see. The absurd stunt does not provide any answers, but questions dogmas.

The absurd stunts refuses rationality altogether, and in this tradition the activists respond to all reactions from those in power with further absurdity, as the Orange Alternative did. When trying to give rational responses, the opponent finds herself confronted with even more silliness and absurdity, with the world turned upside down. The only thing predictable is that the performers will continue to be unpredictable. All attempts to deal with this as conventional political opposition will only contribute new components to their absurd plays. However, since the absurd is bound to remain within the absurd, it cannot suggest alternatives and improvements without leaving its position. If the participants in an absurd stunt suddenly should decide to suggest solutions to a problem in a rational way, they leave themselves vulnerable to critique that they are (mis)using the absurdity for their own purposes and not ready to criticise all and everyone.

Through their happenings, the Orange Alternative took their play right into the everyday life of the Polish people. They did not depend on what others did, since any reaction, also being ignored, contributed one way or the other. Everyone who came along, such as police and "ordinary" passers-by, was treated as partners in the show. Being arrested just added to the absurdity that the activists attempted to point towards. After all, elves and carnival figures should hardly pose any threat to a communist regime. These absurd stunts did not depend on any particular timing—the Orange Alternative could always find an excuse for a happening,

although its particular design could be fitted to the circumstances. In Colombia, this particular event took place during the military parade on Independence Day and this required a certain timing. However, clowns in Colombia have staged numerous actions during other events.

Provocative Humorous Political Stunts

Provocative humorous stunts are the type of stunt closest to conventional protest since they generate their humour simply by daring to directly confront those in power, usually without the pretence that is so central to the other stunts. The pranksters do not deny the unequal relations of power as in absurd stunts or present any alternatives like the supportive or corrective stunts; they simply appear not to care. In this way, they amuse and impress parts of their audiences with their boldness and devil-may-care attitudes. The "almighties" become ridiculous when they turn out not to have total control anyway. The activists openly act as provocateurs in order to expose vulnerabilities and hurt big egos. They capture any scene, openly or secretly, and aim to control it long enough to humiliate the target. They speak a message of lack of fear both to the target and to other audiences. Two examples from Russia and Belarus illustrate what humorous provocations can look like when the secret police forces are insulted and teddy bears fall from the sky.

Insulting Bridge Painting in Russia

In Russia, an art collective called *Voina* has made itself loved and infamous because of its creative stunts that expose Russian authorities. In June 2010, they painted a giant penis on Liteiny Bridge in St. Petersburg in just 23 seconds. Liteiny Bridge is a bascule bridge, and the action was done just before it was opened to let a ship pass. When that happened, the penis was standing erect for several hours just in front of the unpopular secret police (FSB) headquarters in St. Petersburg. Members of Voina faced prison sentences for this and similar actions.[46]

Teddy Bears Parachuting in Support for Human Rights Over Belarus

In July 2012, a small airplane took off from Lithuania and flew over Belarus. On board were two Swedish PR management consultants turned human rights activists. The plane also carried 879 teddy bears each in a parachute with the message "We support the Belarusian struggle for free speech" in English and Belarusian. The stunt was a response to naïve stunts performed inside Belarus earlier in the year. Local activists from the campaign "Tell the Truth" had arranged stuffed animals at Minsk's Independence Square with little signs telling President Alexander Lukashenko to "free the people!", asking "Where is freedom of the press?" and saying "Toys against lawlessness" and "Cops tore my eye out".[47] One person, who says he was just watching the toys, was later sentenced to 10 days in prison for holding an unsanctioned toy protest.[48]

One of the Swedes who dropped teddy bears over Belarus in support of the stuffed animals said to a Norwegian TV station, "Our campaign was to support the teddy bears [in Belarus], from teddy bears all over the world".[49] To Euronews, he said "A dictator can be feared and he can be hated, but when people start to laugh at him, his days are numbered. So, that was the objective".[50] He and his colleagues run *Studio Total*, a Swedish PR and marketing company. On its web page, the company says that they did this pro bono in support of the Belarusian opposition and tells how the PR consultants became interested in the fate of the Belarusian opposition by a coincidence. When it turned out that no pilot was willing to risk dropping the teddy bears, they decided to learn how to fly and bought a little airplane.[51]

Belarusian authorities first denied that the stunt had taken place but soon said that it was a provocation. The stunt had direct consequences for high-ranking officials and journalists in Belarus. The heads of border control and the air force were sacked,[52] and two people were detained and later accused of assisting the Swedes and publishing photos of the teddy bears on the internet.[53] The affair also turned into a diplomatic crisis between Belarus, Sweden and other members of the European Union. Although the stunt was not mentioned specifically, shortly afterwards the

Swedish ambassador to Belarus was expelled from Belarus and accused of having too close relations with the opposition. As a response, the new Belarusian ambassador to Sweden was no longer welcome.[54]

For this stunt, there is a little information available about Belarusian citizens' support for the event. The group *Independent Institute of Socio-Economic and Political Studies* made a survey shortly afterwards about Belarusian attitudes to Russia and the European Union which included the question: "In July a group of Swedish citizens made an unauthorized flight to Belarus and dropped teddy bears over Ivenets and Minsk with slogans that called for freedom of speech in Belarus. How do you evaluate this action?"[55] Around One thousand five hundred were asked were asked, and about one third replied that they did not know about the action, and 13.8% that it was a provocation by Western intelligence; 23%, almost one in four, considered it "a courageous protest against the violation of human rights". However, the largest group (31.7%) responded that "it was a silly action". This category is rather ambiguous and reflects the general problem with both academic and everyday understandings of humour mentioned previously. The categories in the survey are not mutually exclusive since it is quite possible to think it was a silly action and in addition consider it either a courageous protest or a provocation by Western intelligence. In spite of this methodological problem with the possible answers, the 23% that express a supportive attitude by accepting the word "courageous" can be understood as a relatively high level of support for the action.[56]

Confronting Power with Provocation

Like the absurd stunt, the provocative stunt refuses rationality. As described in the examples above, the provocative stunts display a devil-may-care attitude which causes amusement when the almighty, such as the Russian secret police and Belarusian regime, are shown to be unable to prevent such attacks right under their noses. Even those supposed to exert total control can be brought down from their pedestals. In terms of the theatre metaphor, the activists have invaded a scene openly without any attempt to sneak in or hide their presence. In these particular cases,

they did not need a special scene or major actors in order for their stunts to work. In the Russian case, timing was important in order for the activists to reach their goal of finishing the painting just before the bridge opened, but timing seems to have been less important in the Belarusian case.

Although the supportive, corrective, naïve and absurd stunts are confrontational as well, the provocative stunts appear to depend especially on whether the audiences recognise the irreverent attitude of the activists. The rising bridge is a direct insult which involved considerable risk for those involved. The case with dropping teddy bears over Belarus is also provocative, but because the Swedes behind it are not a local activist group that has to continue working inside Belarus, the edge of "we don't care" is not so sharp as it would have been had it been initiated by Belarusian activists. Although there certainly was a risk involved, as soon as the Swedes' plane left Belarus they were safe, meaning that the typical statement of "what are you afraid of?" to the audience was lost. People who live in Belarus would have reason to be afraid if they had done this; just publishing the photos on the internet got one blogger in trouble.[57]

In provocative stunts it is typically ridicule and insults which causes amusement, but this is different in the Belarusian case. Although the authorities are insulted, the stunt would not have been humorous if the Swedes had violated the airspace just to show that they could. It is the teddy bears—a symbol of naïveté—that cause amusement when they parachute to Belarus in an absurd show of solidarity from the teddy bears around the world.

From sympathetic bystanders, provocative activists get a "wow, how courageous" reaction. However, many other nonviolent actions can generate that feeling without being humorous at all. For instance, the *Freedom Flotillas* that since 2010 have attempted to break the Israeli blockade of Gaza were also considered bold actions. In 2010, nine activists were killed during this attempt to bring humanitarian aid to Gaza. The convoy was attacked by Israeli soldiers while it was still in international waters.[58] *The Ploughshares* is another example of a nonviolent movement that has not involved any humour and might be considered courageous by some. Using hammers as a symbolic reference to the

Bible verse of turning swords into ploughshares (Isaiah 2:4), they enter arms factories and military areas in Europe and the US in order to start the disarmament process themselves. Afterwards they await the police. Especially in the US, these actions have resulted in long prison terms, causing numerous people within the peace movement to understand these acts as bold and courageous.[59] They are also provocative but not humorous at all, so there is more to the provocative humorous stunt than boldness and courage.

What makes the provocative stunts different is the initiators' attitude towards those they attack and their expectations of reactions. The Freedom Flotilla movement and the ploughshare activists care a great deal about the reactions of states and companies and thereby indirectly recognise their power and the rationality they represent. Although their actions use much symbolism, their approach to their opponents is non-humorous. In contrast, the participants in a provocative stunt do not appear to be concerned about the power of the institutions they attack at all and deny them their claims to rationality. The provocative stunts do not seem to have any other purpose than to provoke and communicate to a large audience: "We do not care very much about potential consequences". The actions by Voina and Studio Total tease and humiliate the target with the message "You are not that powerful after all, because we can do this right under your nose, and we refuse to be scared of you". And to the wider audience, it adds "Why are you so scared?" and "See, they just pretend to be powerful! Why do you believe that?" With this refusal to be intimidated, they contribute to transcending the rationality of the so-called powerful. If one should attempt to rationalise the provocative stunt, the philosophy behind it could be that when someone finally says that the emperor has no clothes, people's fear may start to decrease.[60]

The provocative stunt is the least friendly and dialogue-oriented type of stunt. The laughter it generates is not based on wittiness and inclusiveness but on establishing a clear we-and-they divide, in which "the other" can be mocked and ridiculed. Although it happens without violence and against violence, there is no aspect of the type of nonviolence that aims to include the opponents and win them over.

Humorous Political Stunts and the Play of Politics

Humorous political stunts are games of pretence, interpretation and appearance. They operate within a play frame and depend on establishing a resonance with one or more audiences that this is humorous and that ambiguity and multiple meanings and interpretations are acceptable. Nevertheless, the play frame and humour do not mean that stunts are not serious, in some cases even deadly serious for the people involved. The examples provided here point to the need to question the idea within humour studies that the contrast to the humorous is the serious.

The five different types of stunts provide a starting point for analysing how pranksters relate to those they confront. The essential aspect of this typology is the way the activists present themselves and position the different stunts in relation to the rationality, logic and claims to truth that the representatives of power aim to uphold in this play of politics.

In this typology, there is nothing preventing activists from combining aspects from the different types of stunts. The dropping of teddy bears over Belarus in support for the opposition was mainly a provocative stunt but did also include absurd and naïve elements—the teddy bears are naïve, and the idea of their protesting and showing solidarity is rather absurd. Likewise, clowns are mainly absurd, but in the Colombian example the conversations between the soldiers, children and clowns were carried out in a naïve mode. However, in most cases, there is an internal logic within each type of stunt, and the stunts dilute their meanings if this coherence is abandoned. The Orange Alternative did not suddenly start explaining rationally what the happenings are about, and John Howard's Fan club did not step out of character to announce "we don't really mean this".

As previously mentioned, the incongruity tradition is today considered the most important theoretical perspective when explaining what causes amusement. The humorous political stunts fit well within this theory. When it comes to humorous political stunts, the incongruities that cause the audiences to smile and laugh are closely connected to the relations of power. Those who consider these episodes funny are likely to enjoy watching the pranksters from the marginal position outsmarting the

apparently powerful and almighty companies, governments, institutions and agencies. A reason for the enjoyment is for a short while seeing the roles turned upside down and the established relations of power challenged. At least temporarily, these representatives of vested interests with so much money or force (or both) at their disposal are brought down to earth by a few clever activists.

In most examples, pretence is a central element, since no one wants to play the ordinary protester on the stage of the political theatre. These five types of stunts represent different ways of attempting to undermine dominant discourses and thereby transforming the play of politics, at least temporarily. They try to disrupt, subvert or transform relations of power because they highlight the contradictions and weaknesses of a dominant discourse by using a format that is recognisable and accepted as humorous.

Table 3.1 schematically sums up the characteristics of each type of stunt and how the theatre metaphor can be applied to analyse the pranksters' way of relating to dominant discourses and those they consider powerful.

Both the supportive and corrective stunts position themselves as rational and logical but exaggerate, play along with and overemphasise the discourse of those in power. In the corrective stunt, this is usually done by hijacking the message or the identity of the target, whereas in the supportive stunt identification with the target to help and support is the key, as in the fan club stunt from Australia. The supportive stunt happens right in the face of the powerful, whereas a characteristic of the corrective stunt it that it usually happens behind the power-holders' back. The Big Donor Show is an exception to this, since it was the unusual circumstance that the organisers of the prank in fact were in control of the Dutch TV station already. This is a situation that activist groups are unlikely to experience; instead, they have to create a stage for themselves, such as the ACE bank organisers did, or hijack a scene. In the supportive and corrective stunts, the messages to the audiences are also similar—to expose those considered powerful or their worldview and to bring out the true colours of something—be it an individual politician, a number of banks or simply the lack of interest in an issue, such as organ donation. On the surface, both of these types of stunts appear as if their statements should be taken at face value. But that is only at first glance. After that

Table 3.1 Schematic overview of five different types of stunts

Type	Description	Position in relation to dominant discourse	Theatre metaphor	Statement to those considered powerful	Statement to audience	Relation to non-humorous protest	Example
Supportive	Organisers appear supportive and pretend to support, celebrate, help, protect from harm etc., but stunt is a way of invalidating the target.	Exaggerate the dominant discourse, play along with it, overemphasise it	Pranksters invade any scene right in the face of the power-holders.	We join you on the scene to invalidate and disconfirm you, beware that we watch you and are ready to expose you.	See who they really are.	Opposite of conventional protest, celebration rather than protest	John Howard Ladies' Auxiliary Fan Club
Corrective	Organisers appear rational but hijack the identity or message of their target in order to reveal a correction.	Exaggerate the dominant discourse, play along with it, overemphasise it	If they don't control it already, the pranksters invade a scene usually controlled by someone else, and hold it temporarily behind their backs in order to reveal a correction.	We hijack your scene to show you that we watch you, and reveal your true colours to others.	See who they really are.	Conventional protest also attempts to control the stage.	ACE bank

Naïve	Organisers appear naïve and innocent and pretend not to understand that their action can be interpreted as a protest.	Appear not to understand dominant discourse	Pranksters establish themselves on any stage.	Sorry, was that wrong? We did not know there was a play going on.	Look at them.	No apparent protest	Santas hand out gifts.
Absurd	Organisers appear as innocent clowns but point towards absurdities.	Ignore dominant discourse altogether	Pranksters get on stage by capturing it, invading it or sneaking in, in power-holders' face or behind their backs.	Let's all play together in this absurd world.	The world is absurd, including the apparently powerful.	No apparent protest	The Orange Alternative
Provocative	Organisers openly act as provocateurs in order to expose vulnerabilities.	Don't care about dominant discourse	Pranksters capture or invade any scene.	Fuck you. This is our scene too, and now we control it.	What are you afraid of?	Obvious protest	Voina's penis on bridge

initial apparent acceptance of the discourse of the powerful, they base their challenge to power on the moment where the audiences must ask themselves whether this is meant to be taken literally or whether someone is joking. Although this is an area that has not been studied yet, the people who carry out these stunts assume that something important happens in that moment of uncertainty. When a reader or viewer asks herself "is this serious? Do they really mean this?", the perception is that she is more open to new information and new perspectives. When political arguments are presented rationally by using traditional ways of disseminating information such as leaflets, posters and speeches, most people meet the arguments with an already-formed opinion. However, humour might provide a cognitive "detour" or a "psychological circuit breaker" creating this moment of openness. Whether that moment will really change a person's view and deepen the insight depends on a number of factors, but at least there appears to be a possibility for getting the audience to re-examine its assumptions. This is why humorous political stunts are frequently attacks in the discursive guerrilla war.

The naïve, absurd and provocative stunts each have a different way of relating to the discourse of those they aim to challenge. Those performing naïve stunts appear not to understand that what they do can be interpreted as a challenge, whereas the absurd pranksters defy rationality altogether. Initiators of provocative stunts seem not to care about the rationality and logic of the powerful at all.

In both the absurd and naïve stunts, the pranksters appear as innocent clowns. In the absurd stunts, those who carry them out can partly protect themselves from prosecution because there is usually little logic to what they do, as in the case of the Orange Alternative. This possibility is not available to those performing a naïve stunt, since there is frequently a logic behind their naïveté which can be disclosed, as in the Burmese sports magazine's front page. It is not the mistakes of the authorities which cause laughter, because they are not fooled, but the daring to challenge and hide behind the innocence which appeals to friendly audiences. This boldness is something the naïve stunt has in common with the provocative, but they differ in how they display their courage. Whereas the provocateurs of the provocative stunt seem not to care, the naïve appear not to understand.

Through the theatre metaphor, other differences between the stunts become visible. In the supportive stunt, the pranksters invade any scene right in the face of those considered powerful in order to show their apparent support, just like the fan club did. For this type of stunt, there would be no point in hiding away, and they are depending on the sharing of the scene with the representatives of the dominant discourse. If the power-holders are not there, they cannot offer their help, support and protection. In many political situations, it is simply too dangerous to invade a scene right in the face of the power-holders, and the supportive stunts appear to take place in democracies with a certain degree of acceptance of protest.

In the corrective stunt, the pranksters also aim for a scene usually controlled by those considered powerful, although exceptions such as the Dutch case exist. Usually, in order to display the correction that they want to communicate, initiators of corrective stunts depend on capturing and holding this scene for a while. In order to do this, they calculate on not being discovered or removed from the scene for as long as it takes to generate the confusion about whether this is a joke or not.

A characteristic of several naïve stunts is that the pranksters sneak onto the stage and display their message more or less in secret; if they did it openly, it would instead be a provocative stunt. However, the Santas are an exception since the logic of their stunt depended on the gifts being given away openly. In their case, the naïveté was generated by the use of the mythological Father Christmas figure. For the absurd stunts, there is no specific scene to aim for, and the absurd performers can stage their play anywhere. Everyone who happens to be present or show up will become part of the absurdities. Depending on the situation and what point they want to make, they can be bold and invade a scene, or they can sneak onto the stage and remain discreet until it suits them to reveal themselves. A characteristic of the provocative stunt is that the provocateurs attempt to capture or invade a scene as loudly as possible; it would be a contradiction if they tried to be discreet.

The audiences of the humorous political stunts are numerous. They can include the target/butt of the prank, media, people on the scene, random passers-by and other activists. Sometimes those who initiate a stunt have a specific audience in mind, but most of the stunts presented

here appear to have the general public as their main target and the aim is to encourage a critical perspective on the dominant discourse. In many of the stunts, the initiators deliberately aim to blur the line between audiences and performers. Everyone who happened to be present on the street when the Orange Alternative staged their happenings became part of the event. Likewise with the Santas in Copenhagen: the costumers in the shopping centre were not treated as passive observers but were included in the performance when they became the receivers of gifts.

Within social movement research, there has been much focus on how activists frame their activities and messages, but relatively little is known about how audiences actually perceive it. From media studies, it is well known that audiences are not "empty vessels" waiting to be filled with propaganda, but actively interpret what they see and hear depending on their own previous knowledge, experience and expectations.

Whether audiences accept something as humorous is not straightforward and self-evident. There is a struggle over what meaning to attribute to what is said or done, and the outcome depends on the context, as pointed out by sociologist of humour Jerry Palmer.[61] However, humour is a fragile thing that can easily collapse. Palmer does not say that the butt of the joke or prank has to agree that something is funny, but either the situation demands or the audience agrees that this was humorous.

That protesters manage to interrupt the ordinary play of politics so much that they take over the scene is not unusual. This happened in Seattle in 1999, when the neoliberal discourse was under attack and the World Trade Organization meeting was disrupted by 60,000 protesters. Many aspects of these protests had a carnivalesque atmosphere (for instance, the 250 *turtle people* who contributed to reducing potential violence).[62] However, from the point of view of the World Trade Organization, these 60,000 still performed the usual protester roles; they just got out of control. And as long as most of the activists frame their actions as protest, this image will not be changed by a minority of clowns, Santas and turtles.

In most of the examples provided here, the situation is different from conventional protest because of the pretence that this is not a protest. The disruption through pretence opens up possibilities for transformation rather than opposition. Maybe except for the provocative stunt, the

use of humour means that it is much more difficult for representatives of the dominant discourse to frame these actions as ordinary protest, although they certainly try and frequently succeed. Since non-protesting protesters cannot easily be categorised with the other protesters, the show on the scene is interrupted in a different way. The fan club was not protesting Howard's politics, they were celebrating him. The Santas did not steal, they were giving away gifts. Netwerk Vlaanderen did not blockade the banks they disapproved of, they opened their own bank. The Orange Alternative did not criticise the Communist Party in Poland, they gave away candy and toilet paper and invited people to carnival. Therefore, they did not fit into the two ordinary plays called "dominant discourse tolerates protest" and "dominant discourse represses all critique".

But what is different? The humorous techniques bring in new ideas on the stage, and if they cannot be considered part of the usual show, something else has to happen. Actors cannot continue playing Shakespeare when someone appears on the stage performing a children's play. Then they have to either stop playing and wait for security to remove the new actors or improvise a completely new play.

Some of the factors that are important when it comes to understanding humorous political stunts and relations of power can be approached through the theatre metaphor: Was the scene empty or were there already lead actors on the stage when the humourists attacked? How long did the disruption last? How frequent were the disruptions? How many people wanted to play a role not included in the script? How did those in power respond to the challenge? Were the lead actors put in a situation where they felt they themselves had to stop the play, or did the humourists stop it?

It seems that the more the challengers managed to enter the stage when there were already lead actors present, the easier it was to get attention from the mass media and a large audience, something which the John Howard Ladies' Auxiliary Fan Club experienced. But if it is too difficult or too dangerous to interrupt lead actors, potential pranksters will have to be creative and invent attention grabbing actions which are less risky.

The use of pretence combined with the ambiguity, incongruity and contradictions necessary for generating humour means that the attack

on the dominant discourse can be both direct and indirect at the same time. The pretence that this is not a protest means that it is indirect. But sometimes there is a direct link between the technique used to generate the humour and the discourse to be undermined. The humorous techniques directly contribute to the deconstruction, at least for a little while, and serve to illustrate that the dominant discourse is not as almighty and unchallengeable as it appeared. The fan club used impersonations of a stereotypical idea of what women were and should be to satirise and exaggerate what they considered Howard's old-fashioned vision for Australia. However, the link is not that strong in all cases; for instance, Voina's ridicule of the FSB via a bridge painting did not communicate what in particular they thought was wrong with the FSB.

Not surprisingly, the representatives of these dominant discourses did not agree to improvise a new play, but sometimes they were forced to do it. They did not accept the children's play but insisted on continuing with Shakespeare. In some cases, it was possible to ignore the new actors because they were too few or because they presented themselves when no important actors were already on the stage. With ACE bank, Netwerk Vlaanderen could gain the attention of the general public, but they did not disrupt the functions of the major banks whose practice they wanted to criticise, and the banks could ignore them. However, that those in power are not directly affected does not necessarily mean that a stunt has no effect. Other audiences might be directly or indirectly affected when they encounter the stunt on the street or through a YouTube video.

In some of the other cases, the activists interrupted the ongoing play so much that the representatives of the dominant discourses felt some kind of reaction was needed. The fan club, the Orange Alternative and the Santas were physically prevented from being present on the stage where they wanted to be.

Conclusion

Humorous political stunts vary a great deal. The 10 examples here illustrate some of the diversity regarding, for instance, where they take place, who carry them out, the political context and what outcome they might

have. The question of how "effective" a stunt is is important but extremely difficult to estimate. In some cases, the pranks can be disruptive enough to catch world attention and force a reaction from those being undermined, as happened with Voina's bridge painting.[63] However, even when humorous political stunts are "just" short and symbolic interruptions, they might still contribute to the discursive guerrilla war that the activists are engaged in. Dividing the stunts into five different types which each have their own logic is one way of understanding what is happening. The theatre metaphor is another tool for analysing humorous political stunts.

Notes

1. Iain McIntyre, *How to Make Trouble and Influence People*: *Pranks*, *Hoaxes*, *Graffiti* & *Political Mischief-Making from across Australia* (Melbourne: Breakdown Press, 2009). p. 118.
2. McIntyre, *How to Make Trouble and Influence People*: p. 118.
3. McIntyre, *How to Make Trouble and Influence People*.
4. McIntyre, *How to Make Trouble and Influence People*: p. 119.
5. McIntyre, *How to Make Trouble and Influence People*; Michael Brissenden, "7:30 Report—Australian Broadcasting Corporation—Campaign Focuses on Rates Fallout", (Sydney: Australian Broadcasting Corporation, 2007).
6. McIntyre, *How to Make Trouble and Influence People*: pp. 117–121.
7. Julie Szego, "Four Play First Thing in the Morning: That's Some Fan Club", *The Age*, November 2, 2007.
8. For more examples of supportive stunts, see Majken Jul Sørensen, *Humorous Political Stunts*: *Nonviolent Public Challenges to Power* (Sparsnäs, Sweden: Irene Publishing, 2015), PhD thesis, School of Humanities and Social Inquiry, University of Wollongong, Australia.
9. Andy Bichlbaum, Mike Bonanno, and Bob Spunkmeyer, *The Yes Men*: *The True Story of the End of the World Trade Organization* (New York: Disinformation, 2004). p. 11. Amber Day, *Satire and Dissent*: *Interventions in Contemporary Political Debate* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2011). p. 146.
10. Pieter De Vos, *The Ace-Bank Hoax* (2006).

11. Andrew Boyd and Dave Oswald Mitchell, *Beautiful Trouble*: *A Toolbox for Revolution* (New York: OR Books, 2012). pp. 294–295.
12. Boyd and Mitchell, *Beautiful Trouble*: *A Toolbox for Revolution*: pp. 294–295.
13. Another example of a corrective stunt that was effective in getting media attention was the Swedish peace organisation SPAS's parody web page of a government agency established to support arms export. Majken Jul. Sørensen, "Humorous Political Stunts: Speaking "Truth" to Power?", *European Journal of Humour Research* 1, no. 2 (2013). For more examples, see also Sørensen, *Humorous Political Stunts*: *Nonviolent Public Challenges to Power*.
14. Boyd and Mitchell, *Beautiful Trouble*: *A Toolbox for Revolution*: p. 294.
15. Jaroslav Hašek, *The Good Soldier ŠVejk and His Fortunes in the World War* (New York: Crowell, 1974).
16. The Santas from the theatre group Solvognen, "Solvognen: Derfor Malede Vi Byen I Folkets Farve", [Solvognen: The reason we painted the city in the colour of the people] B.T., December 23, 1974. Solvognen, "Solvognens Julemandshær (Synopsis Og Invitation)", (1974).
17. The most detailed description about the week-long action is Nina Rasmussen, *Solvognen*: *Fortællinger Fra Vores Ungdom* (Copenhagen: Rosinante, 2002). pp. 192–217. The only source in English is Aage Jorgensen, "Touring the 1970's with the Solvognen in Denmark", *The Drama Review*: *TDR* 26, no. 3 (1982).
18. Jon Bang Carlsen, "Dejlig Er Den Himmel Blå [Beautiful Is the Blue Sky]", (C&C productions Aps, 1975).
19. Else Sander, "Julemænd Anholdt under Gaveuddeling", *Ekstra Bladet*, December 23, 1974.
20. Rasmussen, *Solvognen*: *Fortællinger Fra Vores Ungdom*: pp. 192–217.
21. I did an extensive search and analysis of the media coverage from the seven national Danish newspapers *Aktuelt*, *B.T*, *Berlingske Tidende*, *Ekstra Bladet*, *Information*, *Jyllands-Posten* and *Politiken*. These are all the major national Danish newspapers from this time period.
22. Kanonudvalget, "Julemandshæren [the Santa Claus Army]", Det danske kulturministerium, http://kulturkanon.kum.dk/scenekunst/julemandshaeren/Begrundelse_Julemandshaeren/.

23. Radio Australia, "Burma and the Difficult Art of Humour", *blogs.radioaustralia.net.au*, November 22, 2010.
24. Radio Australia, "Burma and the Difficult Art of Humour".
25. Janjira Sombatpoonsiri, "Playful Subversion: *Red Sunday's* Nonviolent Activism in Thailand's Post-2010 Crackdown", *Peace & Policy* 20 (forthcoming).
26. Personal communication with Sombat Boonngam-anong translated by Janjira Sombatpoonsiri, December 30, 2015.
27. Sombatpoonsiri, "Playful Subversion: *Red Sunday's* Nonviolent Activism in Thailand's Post-2010 Crackdown".
28. Personal communication with Sombat Boonngam-anong translated by Janjira Sombatpoonsiri, October 23, 2015. Sombatpoonsiri, "Playful Subversion: *Red Sunday's* Nonviolent Activism in Thailand's Post-2010 Crackdown".
29. Sombatpoonsiri, "Playful Subversion: *Red Sunday's* Nonviolent Activism in Thailand's Post-2010 Crackdown".
30. Personal communication with Sombat Boonngam-anong translated by Janjira Sombatpoonsiri, October 23, 2015.
31. Sombatpoonsiri, "Playful Subversion: *Red Sunday's* Nonviolent Activism in Thailand's Post-2010 Crackdown".
32. Personal communication with Janjira Sombatpoonsiri November 12, 2015.
33. Personal communication with Sombat Boonngam-anong translated by Janjira Sombatpoonsiri, October 23, 2015.
34. Personal communication with Sombat Boonngam-anong translated by Janjira Sombatpoonsiri, October 23, 2015.
35. Personal communication with Sombat Boonngam-anong translated by Janjira Sombatpoonsiri, October 23, 2015.
36. Padraic Kenney, *A Carnival of Revolution—Central Europe 1989* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002). p. 158.
37. Kenney, *A Carnival of Revolution*.
38. Mirosław Peczak and Anna Krajewska-Wieczorek, "The Orange Ones, the Street, and the Background", *Performing Arts Journal* 13, no. 2 (1991): p. 51.
39. Bronislaw Misztal, "Between the State and Solidarity: One Movement, Two Interpretations—the Orange Alternative Movement in Poland", *British Journal of Sociology* 43, no. 1 (1992).

40. Kenney, *A Carnival of Revolution*: p. 1.
41. Misztal, "Between the State and Solidarity", p. 61.
42. Misztal, "Between the State and Solidarity", p. 62; Kenney, *A Carnival of Revolution*: p. 190.
43. Kino Rama, *Eglc—Orgullo Patrio* (YouTube: 2011).
44. Personal communication October 26, 2015, with Estefanía Gómez, founder of the group CUERPO CON-SIENTE which participated in the action.
45. Personal communication October 26, 2015, with Estefanía Gómez.
46. Marina Galperina, "Why Russian Art Group Voina 'Dicked' a St. Petersburg Bridge", http://animalnewyork.com/2010/06/why-russian-art-group-voina-dicked-a-st-petersburg-bridge/; Nick Sturdee, "Don't Raise the Bridge: Voina, Russia's Art Terrorists", *The Guardian*, 12 April 2011.
47. RFE/RL, "'Police Detain Stuffed Animals' in Minsk Toy Protest", *rferl.org*, February 10, 2012. The toy protest was inspired by toy protests first carried out in the town of Barnaul in Siberia in Russia in January 2012, where teddy bears, plastic figures and others toys carried anti-Putin slogans and demanded freedom and respect for human rights. See Oleg Kupchinsky, "Toys for Democracy: In a Siberian City, Activists Find a Creative Way to Protest", *rferl.org*, January 16, 2012.
48. RFE/RL, "Belarusian 'Toy Protest' Inmate Goes on Hunger Strike", *rferl.org*, February 22, 2012.
49. Birger Henriksen, "Svensker Teddy-Bombet Hviterussland" [Swede teddy-bombed Belarus], *www.TV2.no*, August 2, 2012.
50. Euronews, "Swedish Activists Behind Belarus Teddy Bear Stunt", *euronews.com*, August 2, 2012.
51. Studio Total, "Why We Did It", http://www.studiototal.se/teddy-bears/why-we-did-it.html.
52. Henriksen, "Svensker Teddy-Bombet Hviterussland".
53. Belarusian Human Rights House, "Two Belarusians Detained on Charges of 'Teddy Bear Drop'", *humanrightshouse.org*, July 23, 2012.
54. Mats Carlbom, "Vitryssland Utvisar Sveriges Ambassadör", [Belarus expels Sweden's ambassador] *dn.se*, August 3, 2012.

55. Independent Institute of Socio-Economic and Political Studies, "Teddy-Bear Landing—How the Belarusians Evaluated It", (Independent Institute of Socio-Economic and Political Studies, 2012). The Independent Institute of Socio-Economic and Political Studies describes itself this way: "Independent Institute of Socio-Economic and Political Studies (IISEPS) was established in February 1992 by group of academics, journalists, politicians and businessmen. Now IISEPS is registered as public institution in the Lithuanian Republic. IISEPS' mission is to promote formation of civil society and free market economy in Belarus through study socio-economic and political process of transition from totalitarianism to democracy and active promotion of values and principles of liberalism". Quote downloaded from http://www.iiseps.org/o_nisepi/lang/en September 3, 2013. There is no apparent reason to doubt that the survey was not done using accepted survey methodology, but the reader should keep in mind that Belarus is a dictatorship and respondents might have been doubtful about revealing their attitudes to a stranger.
56. Independent Institute of Socio-Economic and Political Studies, "Teddy-Bear Landing—How the Belarusians Evaluated It", p. 2.
57. Belarusian Human Rights House, "Two Belarusians Detained on Charges of 'Teddy Bear Drop'".
58. Majken Jul. Sørensen and Brian Martin, "The Dilemma Action: Analysis of an Activist Technique", *Peace & Change* 39, no. 1 (2014).
59. Sharon Erickson Nepstad, *Religion and War Resistance in the Plowshares Movement* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008).
60. For an analysis of how humorous nonviolent actions contributed to decrease fear in Serbia during the last years of Slobodan Milošević's rule, see Majken Jul. Sørensen, "Humor as a Serious Strategy of Nonviolent Resistance to Oppression", *Peace & Change* 33, no. 2 (2008).
61. Jerry Palmer, *Taking Humour Seriously* (London: Routledge, 1994).
62. M. Lane Bruner, "Carnivalesque Protest and the Humorless State", *Text and Performance Quarterly* 25, no. 2 (2005).
63. For more examples, see Sørensen, *Humorous Political Stunts: Nonviolent Public Challenges to Power*.

4

Facilitating Outreach, Mobilisation and a Culture of Resistance

Introduction

Humorous political stunts can facilitate outreach, mobilisation and contribute to sustaining a culture of resistance. Information from interviews and participant observation and examples of supportive, corrective and absurd stunts performed by the Swedish anti-militarist network Ofog serve as the starting point for examining these aspects of humorous political stunts. Although Ofog operates within a specific context, the conclusions regarding mobilisation and cultures of resistance are relevant for a much wider range of political situations. The Swedish activists' experiences are compared with other studies about humour, in particular Serbian Otpor, which was decisive in ousting Slobodan Milošević from power in 2000.

The Anti-Militarist Network Ofog

Ofog, which means "mischief", is a Swedish network of anti-militarist individuals and affinity groups doing direct action for peace in Sweden and abroad. The targets of its anti-militarism include NATO, Swedish

M.J. Sørensen, *Humour in Political Activism*,
DOI 10.1057/978-1-137-57346-9_4

arms production and export, military exercises and militarisation of Swedish society. The network has used methods such as participation in public debates, education and training in nonviolence as well as civil disobedience in its attempts to simultaneously challenge and raise awareness about the discourse of militarism and the institutions that uphold this worldview.

The network was formed in 2002 when a group of Swedes began to participate in international civil disobedience actions in various places in Europe. Ofog carried out its first action in Sweden in 2007 with a disarmament camp in Karlskoga, near the headquarters of one of Sweden's biggest arms producers, Bofors.[1] At this point, Ofog already had a tradition of combining the serious issues of anti-militarism and opposition to nuclear weapons with prankish ways of carrying out protest.

Inspired by action research methodologies, I worked with Ofog between 2011 and 2013 during my investigations into humorous political stunts.[2] I have conducted semi-structured interviews with 13 Ofog activists, been a participant observer in a number of humorous political stunts and facilitated workshops on humour together with Ofog.[3] These sources have provided facts about many humorous political stunts as well as the participants' perception of the role humour plays in their activism. The information from Ofog is particularly useful as a point of departure to discuss what role humour can play in reaching out to the general public and potential new activists and in helping to create and sustain a culture of resistance.

Reaching Out Through Humour

Frequently activists are striving with their actions to gain media attention from mainstream media, seeing it as a way to disseminate information to the general public about the issue they are concerned about. Ofog also belongs to those who aim for such media reports, but in addition many Ofog activists consider it important to speak directly with the general public, without being filtered through the mainstream media. Humorous political stunts have been one attempt to get in contact with so-called ordinary people. Below, the two supportive humorous political stunts

Reality AB and Svensk Vapenfadder exemplify an approach to catch people while they are off guard in order to by-pass the immediate scepticism towards particular political issues. Adbusting of the military's recruitment campaign is a corrective stunt designed to challenge the dominant discourse of militarism upheld by this institution.

Reality AB

In the north of Sweden, the Swedish Defence Materiel Administration (FMV) operates Europe's largest overland military test site.[4] In 2009, NATO had permission to use this huge area, something which Ofog considered a sneaking erosion of Sweden's tradition of neutrality.

Some Ofog activists pretended to start a new company called "Reality AB", which saw this NATO exercise as an opportunity to do business. Although NATO had, of course, done everything possible to make its exercise realistic for its soldiers, Reality AB would help them make it even more realistic. With the company slogan "We die for you", what they could offer were the missing civilian victims—dead, wounded or traumatised. On the main street in the town of Luleå, Ofog activists showed up dressed as serious businesspeople to provide information about this new opportunity for a summer job in Luleå as a civilian victim of "collateral damage". Reality AB was especially eager to recruit women and children and had a questionnaire for people to fill in where they could write about the kind of job they would prefer—did they want to die, be injured or get post-traumatic stress disorder? On a couple of occasions, Ofog created a scenario in the main street in Luleå of civilians getting killed. Once they enacted the bombing of a wedding in Afghanistan, another time the NATO bombing in 1999 of a train with civilians in Grdulice in the South of Serbia. At the bottom of the invitation to participate in this scenario, it also said "With us, everyone is welcome. Even *you* can become a civilian casualty". An idea was also to take the civilians to the military base, but this part of the plan was never carried out.

This is an example of a supportive humorous political stunt. Ofog framed its protest as an attempt to help NATO make its exercise more realistic and improve it. There are similarities with the way the John

Howard Ladies' Auxiliary Fan Club (presented in the previous chapter) supported John Howard. Irony was used to draw attention to the fact that most people killed in war are civilians. A large majority of the people Ofog met on the street also understood this irony, but two persons took everything literally and thought they had applied for a real summer job.

The incongruity Ofog aimed to expose was the military's attempt to present war as "clean" and a fight for human rights and development whereas the reality on the ground is that civilians are wounded and killed. Since Ofog's show was on the street and not directly confronting NATO, it could be ignored by the military alliance, but had Ofog instead chosen to take the play to a place where NATO or Swedish authorities could not ignore it, the spectacle would have been different. Since they were not playing the ordinary protester role, it would with all likelihood have been difficult to respond adequately. However, Ofog did blur the line between who were performers and who were the audience in its attempt to increase the general public's awareness of NATO's role in causing civilian suffering.

It is difficult to know whether Ofog got the message across better through the use of irony, and one can only speculate whether Reality AB managed to reach a different segment of the general public or whether they reached them at a deeper level. Johanna, who was one of the recruiters on the street, reflects about how the general public usually knows in advance what types of arguments they will meet both from the military and from protesters:

> I think it is difficult for most of us to reflect critically on the militarism we live in and get fed with every day. Therefore it is important to think about strategies that make people reflect. It can be easy for people to "switch off" and I think [the style of Reality AB] is a strategy one can use not to end up in this for and against. When we hand out leaflets about the tragic consequences of war and so forth, I think it is easy for people to switch off and kind of let go. However, you reflect on something that seems to be somehow twisted. (…) Although I am angry at an unjust world order, I think it can be very difficult to get sympathies when you are angry. I think it can be easier to get people to join you if you make them laugh, and [make them see] that you have some kind of self-distance.

Here, Johanna describes how she experienced Reality AB to be a strategy to reach out to people in a way that differed from conventional leafleting. Although she is angry about the state of the world, her experience is that it is more constructive to channel this anger into a type of action that is "twisted" and therefore makes people reflect about what Ofog "really" means.

During interviews, Reality AB is a stunt several people within Ofog have mentioned as Ofog's best humorous action. The stories about Reality AB have become part of Ofog's "heritage" and are shared when humour is discussed within the network. However, it is not so pervasive that everyone I interviewed had heard about it.

Svensk Vapenfadder

Svensk Vapenfadder means "Swedish weapon sponsors"[5] and is the name of a satiric not-for-profit association and a web page launched by Ofog activists on May 27, 2012. Under the heading "What is Svensk Vapenfadder", the campaign is explained this way:

> Svensk Vapenfadder is a not-for-profit association, started with the purpose of increasing the knowledge about Swedish arms export. We are religiously and politically independent, and united by our decision to change the negative attitude towards arms export found in the Swedish society.
>
> We believe that as a nation, we can and should be proud of the achievements of the Swedish conflict resolution industry. Swedish products for combat and surveillance are market leading both when it comes to efficiency and profit. Sweden exports most weapons in the world per capita. We think that is something to celebrate and as Swedes feel personally involved in.
>
> As a weapon sponsor you become a sponsor of your very own weapon. You also become a member of the association Svensk Vapenfadder. For a modest sum you really make a difference, create public opinion and in addition you get a warm and personal relationship with your weapon that usually only the soldier in the field has.
>
> As a weapon sponsor you will—no matter what weapon you personally have chosen—regularly receive reports about your weapon. Is it fully

> assembled? What conflict will it be shipped to? Has it contributed to any deadly shootings yet? In the case of deadly shootings we of course give an immediate update, something like that you should not go and wonder about!
>
> We continuously work on expanding our offers, so that you easily can find a weapon that fits your personal style. There is a weapon for every taste!

The campaign slogan was "Swedish weapons—in war for you", and the web page contained everything one would expect to find on a web page for such a not-for-profit organisation. This included a list of frequently asked questions and information about the weapons one could sponsor. Under the heading "proud weapon sponsors", the page listed 11 politicians and civil servants closely linked with the arms industry, who were given a VIP sponsorship as a present during the launch of the campaign. All the facts about the weapon manufacturing, where they were sold and the information and quotes about the politicians and civil servants were correct and thoroughly researched but presented with irony and dry black humour.

The campaign was launched in May 2012 in two different ways: The VIP sponsors received a letter explaining that they had been chosen as VIP sponsors, including the text about their "achievements" published on the web page. Ofog also organised two stalls in Gothenburg and Stockholm, where Ofog activists in disguise recruited potential weapon sponsors in public spaces with many pedestrians. For the occasion, Ofog had produced a flyer telling about the campaign, brought along a little table where Svensk Vapenfadder offered coffee and displayed some of the descriptions about the VIP sponsors.

People reacted to the recruitment effort in very different ways. Most people who passed were not interested in talking at all, but some would engage in conversation with the recruiters, either on their own initiative or when they were approached. Among those who stopped to talk, the reactions were very mixed. Some agreed that the war industry was disgusting and were relieved when they figured out that Svensk Vapenfadder was satire. Then they said that what Ofog did was great and wished the activists good luck. Others liked weapons or supported the armaments industry, and some did not get the irony.[6]

The weapon sponsor campaign was a parody of the child sponsoring campaigns where people can sponsor a child and follow that particular child through its school years. However, the target here was not these child sponsorships but the Swedish arms industry. It is an example of a supportive stunt, in which the critique was disguised as an opportunity to show support for the arms industry. For those of us who participated, it created a steep learning curve about how to use irony in a way that the general public will understand it. We were very surprised by how hard this part was.

The launch of this supportive stunt differs from some of the other supportive stunts by not directly confronting the armaments industry. During the launch, Ofog did not try to invade a scene where major actors were present, but instead established a private scene among the general public. Because Ofog considered the general public the main audience in this action, it was no problem for the industry and the politicians exposed through the VIP sponsorships to ignore Svensk Vapenfadder. The number of people from the general public Vapenfadder got in contact with was quite modest. Since the concept was used only a couple of times and it never went "viral", Vapenfadder shows a potential and a learning process but probably did not have much effect. The peak number of daily visitors to the web page, 598, on the Monday after the launch was pretty good but not spectacular.

In preparations for the launch, the aim had been to get some media coverage, and a press spokesperson was ready for calls on the phone, but the deception was not picked up by mass media. It is hard to judge whether this is because the web page was not convincing enough to pass for the real thing or whether media decided not to cover it for other reasons. Nevertheless, this part of the stunt was a complete failure, documenting that not all humorous political stunts are covered by the mass media. Nevertheless, it is a telling example of attempting to reach out directly to the general public.

Refining Recruitment Ads from the Armed Forces

Ofog has also been working with "ad refinement" or "ad sabotage" of the Swedish military's public recruitment campaigns. Sweden ended conscription in 2010, and ads for the Swedish military, Försvarsmakten, were

new in public space. To recruit enough soldiers, Försvarsmakten spends roughly 1 billion Swedish crowns every year on recruitment campaigns. The institution is acutely aware that it needs to build a brand that appeals to young people and that there is a huge difference between this brand and selling commercial products.[7]

Companies rely on branding to sell their products—Coca-Cola is not just a soft drink and Nike not just a shoe, but brands that aim to sell an image of a cool lifestyle filled with beauty, youth and happiness. Likewise, the Swedish armed forces aim to sell their "brand" of an exciting job with good career opportunities. Försvarsmakten's first recruitment campaign had the slogan "Do you have what it takes?", and it included references not just to having the right physical and mental capacities but to having the right opinions. These ads stated things like "Your grandmother does not think it's a big deal if Sweden's airspace is violated. What do you think?" and "Your friend does not want any help during natural catastrophes. What do you think?" Ofog activists did a refinement of the ads by manually adding more text. The text "Your grandmother does not think it's a big deal if Sweden's airspace is violated" was supplemented with "But she is fucking outraged that USA is practicing bombing in Norrland" [area in the north of Sweden]. "Your friend does not want any help during natural catastrophes" was corrected with "By the military. Other help is welcome". "Do you have what it takes to have an opinion" and its reference to Försvarsmakten's web page was modified with "We have what it takes" and a reference to Ofog's web page. The ironic press release about the action began this way:

> Ofog shows that we have what it takes to have an opinion and refine Försvarsmakten's many million crown ad campaign. The military's colourful posters with biased messages were tonight expanded with a little more facts the military itself forgot to mention.[8]

This type of ad refinement is an example of a corrective humorous political stunt and has many similarities with culture jamming. Instead of just openly criticising the Swedish military forces, Ofog corrects the image that Försvarsmakten tries to portray of itself with a different version of what military reality is about. When the military attempted to sell

itself as a helper during natural disasters, Ofog suggested that this should be a civilian task. When Försvarsmakten referred to violation of Swedish airspace, Ofog tried to draw attention to the fact that NATO is allowed to practice war in Swedish airspace. The provocative assumption in the posters—that if you do not agree with Försvarsmakten's interpretation of reality, it means that you don't dare to have an opinion—is openly rejected. By the very act of ad refinement, Ofog activists showed that they disagreed and that they certainly had what it takes to have a different opinion.

Returning to the theatre metaphor, Ofog snuck onto the scene behind the back of Försvarsmakten, something which is a typical characteristic of the corrective stunt. There are no major actors present to be challenged, and there are no special requirements regarding timing, apart from doing the modification while Försvarsmakten's campaigns were running. Just like with Reality AB and Svensk Vapenfadder, Ofog's intended audience is the general public, specifically the young people that Försvarsmakten is targeting in their recruitment campaigns. To my knowledge, no one in Ofog has been caught doing ad refinement and there has never been any other reaction from authorities and companies that provide spaces for ads than to remove the changes as quickly as possible. Lena, an experienced ad-refiner, has noticed that when she does the corrections openly on smaller posters on public transport, it becomes a way to discuss militarism with the other passengers.[9] Sneaking onto the stage without a direct confrontation while having the general public as the main audience means that it was unproblematic for authorities to ignore Ofog.

In Ofog's ad refinements, there are many similarities with traditional billboard liberators and adbusters but also some important differences. Most culture jammers have focused on resisting corporate control of public space; Ofog is challenging the discourse of militarism and in particular the way the Swedish armed forces have been marketing themselves.

When companies and an institution like Försvarsmakten spend millions of dollars on developing their brands, the brands also become vulnerable to attack by so-called *subvertising*.[10] When it comes to commercial products, well-done subvertising does not just express a general critique of consumerism, but uses parody to attack the vulnerable aspects of a particular product. Subvertising uses the brand's own

imagery to talk back to it and reveal consequences of consuming the product or the production methods which the producers would prefer to keep away from the public mind. This can be to connect cigarettes with cancer or Nike with *sweatshop* production where workers in the Global South work long hours in degrading working conditions and are paid wages they cannot live on. The parodies deconstruct the brands by making potential consumers associate the brand with something other than what was intended.[11] Likewise, Ofog aimed to remind the public of some of the aspects of their work that Försvarsmakten conveniently forgot to mention.

In her writing about subvertising, Christine Harold has pointed out the limitation of this type of activism—it does not provide alternatives, since there is no suggestions of how to replace the desires the brands tempt with. There is also a risk of co-optation, of the anti-logo becoming the new cool logo for those who are the avant-garde trendsetters. Already the situationists were aware of this risk. They wrote that the spectacle was so sophisticated that it would be possible for the companies to take over the critique and make it their own, re-package it in a slightly different version and sell it back as the latest trend.[12] Today, the rebels, culture jamming and anti-logo culture itself become cool and you can buy merchandise with jams, something which has caused Harold to ask whether the "rhetoric and imagery of rebellion [are] bankrupt?"[13]

Ofog's modifications were a critique of this use of public space and an attempt to interfere with a newly established brand—the Swedish armed forces. But although Försvarsmakten has worked hard to create its own brand, Ofog's refinements were not a critique of consumerism like most adbusting. It also differed from the type of adbusting that Harold criticised for not presenting alternatives. It suggested joining Ofog instead of the armed forces, and this way showing that you have what it takes to have an opinion, just not the one Försvarsmakten would like to see. Ofog's modifications were not graphically and technically sophisticated like the culture jamming the magazine *Adbuster* creates, but they provided a much more controversial message than reminding the audience that cigarettes cause cancer or that skinny models might contribute to young people's eating disorders.

Facilitating Outreach to the General Public

Both activists and academics assume that creativity and humour contribute to reaching out to other people. Several accounts of creative activist groups report about this ability, but when outreach is discussed, the focus is usually on mass media[14], a theme which will be covered in the next chapter. However, it is important to recognise that there are many different types of audiences and that there are multiple ways to reach them.

Several comments from my interviews and workshops with Ofog activists reveal that activists frequently consider humour to be one way to reach the general public. Although the comments below do not specify whether the remark concerns direct communication or outreach through mass media, knowing Ofog activists I suspect they usually mean direct communication with the general public. This does not exclude that humour can have the same effect when filtered through mass media. One informant said:

> …I think it is easier for an "ordinary person" to sympathise with civil disobedience actions if they are carried out in a humorous and clear and evidently non-aggressive way.[15]

Other respondents focused on how humour can catch attention and wake people up:

> Partly to make one's message more accessible to those who are "watching".[16]
>
> You reach new groups, that you in other cases can't reach. People who think politics etc. is dry and boring can be carried along with the help of humour.[17]

Along similar lines, someone suggested that humour can be a way to reach people in a different way:

> I think that you get out to more/*reach* to more. Humour tears down people's "protection walls" and it can be easier to accept/realise something you actually don't want. In addition I think humour can demonstrate absurdity that can be difficult to realise because conventions and patterns in society are habits.[18]

Also, my interviews with people who were active in the Serbian group Otpor revealed that humour can be a good way to reach out to new people, as both members of the general public and potentially new activists. During the late 1990s, Otpor was decisive in ousting Slobodan Milošević from power. Otpor used a combination of provocative humour and "black" actions to confront Milošević's regime.[19] An important element in Otpor's success was that the network of primarily young people managed to show how it differed from the political parties in the opposition. One activist explained how humour contributed to make the organisation stand out:

> [humour] made a difference between our politics and the politics of parliament and official dry politics. We also wanted to show ourselves as the children, and using humour made things more memorable for people.[20]

Returning to Ofog's experiences, the activist Lena gave a very sophisticated explanation for why she thinks humour is an effective way of communicating. When asked whether something can be achieved by using humour which cannot be achieved otherwise, she spontaneously said yes. She elaborated that in a society like contemporary Sweden where irony is used so frequently, it is almost necessary to use this type of communication. When people are presented with a sort of puzzle which they cannot solve straight away, it makes them feel smart, special and capable when they are able to figure it out within a reasonable time frame and are not tricked. Like Johanna mentioned above, Lena thinks that the general public finds it difficult to take in all the pain and suffering in the world. If you just tell them about everything that is wrong, how Sweden contributes to war and how war starts here, most people just close their ears. So, she explained, you have to take a *detour* in order for them to take it in, and humour and irony which they have to crack and which make them feel smart can be one way of constructing this detour.

A similar comment was made by an activist in Carole Roy's study of the *Raging Grannies* in Canada. The Raging Grannies formed in the late 1980s when a group of elderly women actively started to use their age and gender as a catalyst for action. Traditionally, elderly women are not the ideal type of an activist, but angered over issues such as war, corrup-

tion, and environmental destruction, the Raging Grannies have primarily used satiric songs performed publicly to gain attention. Granny Barbara Calvert Seifred said:

> Humour breaks down barriers… [and] eases the interactions. We're basically preaching in a way, but not in a preachy way… I think they're disarmed a little bit at first, then they understand the message and it's too late.[21]

Seifred thought that the humour disarmed the audience, created a crack where the message could get in, and when the message was understood it was too late for that person to withdraw from the message. Roy also quoted Regina Barreca about humour's potential as an eye-opener:

> Humour can be a shortcut, an eye-opener… to get to the truth of the matter (…) When we can frame a difficult matter with humour, we can often reach someone who would otherwise withdraw.[22]

The comments resemble the logic behind the Situationists International and their notion of détournement. The humour that is likely to have this effect is the "intellectual" type based on techniques such as irony and wordplay. Examples of humour used by Ofog where Lena's "detour" would fit are Reality AB, Svensk Vapenfadder and the adbusting of Försvarsmakten's recruitment material. However, the idea of the detour also fits a much broader range of examples, such as the big donor show about organ donation and ACE bank mentioned in Chapter 3. The detour is also a central component of the concept of the discursive guerrilla war, where part of the "hit and run" effect is to blindside people before they realise that an attack is taking place.

The comments above are the activists' own perception of what happens with humour and their explanation for why they engage in this type of ironic communication. I'm not aware of any research that has proven this apparent ability to reach people through a detour, but until someone has proven otherwise, it appears to be a reasonable assumption that activists can work from.

The concept of the detour fits well with what Peter Berger has called humour's *intrusion into our paramount reality*. In his book *Redeeming Laughter*: *The Comic Dimension of Human Experience*, Berger writes that the ability to perceive something as comic is a unique human feature. To Berger, humour is an intrusion into the non-humorous paramount reality that dominates most people's everyday existence. Berger uses the term transcendence to describe this intrusion:

> …the comic transcends the reality of ordinary everyday existence; it posits, however temporarily, a different reality in which the assumptions and rules of ordinary life are suspended.[23]

Berger writes about humour in general and is not particularly concerned with political humour. Nevertheless, his concept of the intrusion makes it possible to understand theoretically the idea of the detour that Lena described. When it comes to political communication, it seems sensible to assume that one of the effects this intrusion might have is to reach people off guard. Thus, it becomes possible to introduce ideas that the rational self might have dismissed straight away if presented in a sober leaflet. As most people have probably experienced when discussing a political issue with someone of a different opinion, it can be very difficult to get a real conversation where everyone (oneself included) remains open-minded and ready to change points of view when presented with better arguments.

Through this idea of the detour, it becomes apparent how activists, consciously or not, sometimes assume humour to be a superior way of communicating—not because humorous political stunts in themselves can alter the existing relations of power, which would seem a rather naïve idea, but because it becomes a way to reach the hearts and minds of various audiences. When that happens with a sufficient number of people, or people in certain positions, then another battle in the discursive guerrilla war about how to understand a political issue has been won.

However, as the Ofog activists involved in Reality AB and Svensk Vapenfadder who engaged the general public in conversations can testify to, irony is a complicated form of communication. In her book

Irony's Edge, Linda Hutcheon is puzzled by the fact that people bother to use irony when it is so complex and the intentions can so easily be misunderstood:

> Why should anyone want to use this strange mode of discourse where you say something you don't actually mean and expect people to understand not only what you do mean but also your attitude toward it?[24]

Not all irony is humorous, and not all humorous political stunts are ironic. Nevertheless, Hutcheon's question is also relevant when it comes to humorous political stunts and in particular when the aim is to engage people in dialogue. Why use this complicated method of communication instead of saying what you mean directly?

The question is whether the humorous mode is applied in such a way that most audiences have an opportunity to grasp it or whether it is directed towards only a selected few. When audiences fail to understand something as humorous, it is not unusual to hear initiators of humour blame the audiences for being stupid. But this is just one way of understanding this breakdown in communication. Hutcheon suggests understanding irony in relational terms. She is critical both of those who focus on the ironic intent and the skills of the one who aims to be ironic and of those who understand irony to require a certain competence from the interpreter. Instead, she says that irony "happens" when the ironist and the interpreter share enough knowledge about the subject being ironised that they can be said to belong to the same "discursive communities". For irony to happen, competence is not the key element; more important is that everyone involved shares at least some assumptions about the world and about communication.[25] Irony is not "just" the opposite of what is said or done, but occurs in the tension between the people who initiate the irony, those who interpret it, the meaning which is stated as well as what is not stated.[26]

All humorous techniques can potentially be misunderstood just as rational communication can be, but the ambiguity of humour and especially irony means that the potential for misunderstandings is built into the fabric of this way of communicating.

Facilitating Mobilisation of New Activists

In much of the literature on humorous and creative political activism, it is assumed that humour makes it more attractive for new activists to be involved. The potential for mobilisation is one of the conclusions of Benjamin Heim Shepard's work on playfulness in queer activism. Shepard writes: "When social actors organize in engaging, thoughtful ways, their work usually attracts followers. Through play, others are seduced to join".[27]

The interviews with Ofog activists confirm that humour can be a way to mobilise more people and to demonstrate what type of world it is that Ofog was working towards, a world with more warmth, carnival, humour and joy. Lisa answered "absolutely" when asked whether humour can be a way of getting more people involved in Ofog. It is one reason why she remained active in Ofog for a number of years. She agreed that humour can make it more clear what kind of world Ofog strives towards—to be easy-going, humorous and carnivalesque conveys a positive image of what it is Ofog wants.[28] Johanna expressed a similar thought when she said "the world we want to see, we also have to try living".[29]

However, the use of humour as a way to mobilise people is not a straightforward causal relationship in which more humour leads to more activists. Many different factors are involved in determining whether people get involved in political struggles, what level of engagement they have, whether they maintain their commitment over long periods of time, leave activism altogether or return to it later in life.[30]

In the interviews with Ofog activists, the informants explained their various ways into Ofog, and humour was not an important factor for most people. For instance, one person mentioned that she was interested in the issues Ofog works with, and at first she was a bit put off by the humorous style which she had to get used to but then came to enjoy a lot. This suggests that humour might play a more important role in sustaining a culture of resistance than in facilitating mobilisation. On the other hand, someone else told me in an informal conversation that originally she was not especially concerned about militarism but liked Ofog's style and inclusiveness.

Although positive towards the use of humour, Lisa also thought humour has some disadvantages if activists focus too much on what they themselves think is funny and not on what is most effective. To her, humour becomes meaningless if it is just funny for Ofog activists. In addition, Ofog risks being perceived as silly and losing trust. People will ask themselves how a "frivolous" group like this would be able to govern a society or be responsible for an economic policy. According to her, Ofog needs to think strategically about who is won over with humour, and who is scared away.[31]

Ofog activist Vera thought that humour makes Ofog attractive to some people but discourages others. In her city, there are people who do not want to be part of Ofog (although they are critical of militarism) because they (in her opinion) prefer to be dressed in black, be angry and look dangerous. But other people are drawn by the openness and the positive style, and for Vera herself that optimistic and inclusive tone is an absolute necessity.[32]

The interviews from Serbia with Otpor activists express similar experiences. The informants confirmed that humour was a good way to attract new members and catch the attention of students and young people, the main target group for Otpor in the first period of organising:

> If you do something on a volunteer base, you need to motivate people. If you do something funny, people usually smile. If people smile they feel very well, and that was another way how to raise motivation of the people.[33]

When asked whether humour helped achieve things that could not have been done without humour, someone answered:

> yes definitely—especially in the beginning to break [the] pattern of thinking among young people, especially (…) to attract a critical mass, and a critical mass does not mean thousands (…) but a strong base. The humour was very important to attract young people, to attract those who made every campaign possible, to attract volunteers (…) opposing the regime, but not getting into classical political debate, I would say that was where humour [came] into the picture. Humour was the most important tool for Otpor to grow.[34]

However, getting new members was not the main reason Otpor engaged in humorous political stunts; it was more like a side effect:

> (…) and that is also how to use the humour, to actually attract more activists coming, and maybe not in the beginning [on] purpose, but actually that was the result. I would say that humour was like the glue and connected all the things that actually consisted of Otpor.

Humour worked especially to attract young people, but this was not its intent. One informant who was part of the leadership said that the biggest rise in members came at a point when Otpor relied less on humour. This does not contradict that humour helps in getting more members, but suggests that the combination of humour-seriousness matters or that other factors are important as well. Many other things than humour made it attractive to get involved in Otpor, such as the horizontal and non-hierarchical network structure where everybody was important.

The quotes above illustrate that humour can be one factor when it comes to mobilising new activists but also that it might have a bigger role to play as a way to sustain a culture of resistance.

Facilitating a Culture of Resistance

Facilitating a "culture of resistance" refers to creating, sustaining and strengthening cultures that facilitate resistance. In repressive contexts, an alternative expression can be to build *resilience* in order to face harassment and violent repression. Jason MacLeod emphasises how this has both individual and collective aspects; although it is the individual who has to find ways to face repression, much can be done at the group level to facilitate this process.[35] Also, in democracies, people have to overcome the barriers that prevent resistance to dominant discourses. It is not just a question of facing repression but about starting to question the dominant discourses that frame law and order as desirable and favours status quo. Thus, almost all challenges to discourses of obedience and encouragements to consider change as possible and desirable will be contributions to making cultures of resistance possible. Here, humorous political stunts might have much to offer.

Chapter 2 introduced Scott's and Bayat's work about hidden transcripts and quiet encroachment, forms of resistance that take place behind the scene or are rarely defined as open defiance of the status quo. Humorous political stunts take place in public and are not part of this quiet resistance. However, just like Scott's hidden transcripts are important for the serfs and slaves he writes about as ways to maintain self-respect and identify allies, so can humour serve as a way to create stronger group cohesion and make activism sustainable, also in cases where the humour does not directly challenge anyone in a position of power.

A number of authors who have written about tactical carnival and the carnivalesque found that the reasons for using creativity are seldom purely concerned with achieving immediate political goals but about making activism and political campaigning sustainable.[36]

Groups can facilitate a culture of resistance without any use of humour, but previous research has suggested that it might help. For instance, Shepard, in his work on playful activism, says:

> For many, play offers a life-affirming response to death and war. Here, play represents a counterbalance to disengagement; it is a way to stay engaged rather than fall into depression and personal alienation.[37]

In Angelique Haugerud's study of the satirical activist group *Billionaires for Bush*, one person expressed how the smiles he received from the passers-by were very energizing: "For me personally, I got a lot of energy from making people laugh". He explained how he was feeling burnt out by ordinary protest marches and how participating in the satirical group "was a way of lighting it up for me".[38]

That humour can help prevent burn-out and act as a counterbalance to the depressing issues of war and arms production was also confirmed by workshops and interviews with Ofog activists. Two answers to the question "What do you think can be achieved by using humour as a method in nonviolent actions?" illustrate this:

> Laughter or happiness bubble in your stomach—and that is worth *so much* when you work with heavy issues. Happiness quite simple.[39]
>
> Feel better ourselves.[40]

Maria also stressed that for a network, like Ofog, concerned with such grave issues, it is almost unavoidable to use humour because people need something that creates some distance from the topics. Otherwise, she fears that activists may become very aggressive themselves when they cannot find any energy.[41]

Peter thought that humour and a light-hearted tone are important and that Ofog has an image of being both serious and making spectacular actions. He considered humour important to the atmosphere in the group; otherwise, people cannot keep going for a long time. Many organisations are very "weighted down with earnestness" as he said, and it can also be very aggressive.[42] He found Ofog remarkably different and that is very important for Peter; otherwise, he would not have remained in Ofog.

Gustav emphasised some of the same things as Peter, that humour is important for the people taking part, to find the energy to keep going. He definitely thought that Ofog's easy-going tone makes it easier for people to be involved in Ofog. Otherwise, you are able to take part for only six months "and then you are totally hitting the wall", as he expressed it.[43] This "tone" also frames Ofog as innocent and harmless, showing that the activists are just human beings like anyone else.

In some contexts, engaging in political activism is associated with high risks and a culture of apathy persists, something which was the case in Serbia in the 1990s. Otpor was facing a situation that was very different from democratic Sweden, and the interviews with Otpor activists suggest that humour can be an important way to overcome or considerably reduce fear and apathy.[44] One person explained:

> [there was] an atmosphere of absolute fear, and everything was destroyed [in NATO bombing] (…) overall feeling that we could not do anything (…) and this is really where humour come into the picture: you couldn't persuade anyone, in this kind of atmosphere in the country, you couldn't persuade anybody that something **could** be changed, that something **should** be changed (…) with using different symbols, different narratives [Otpor succeeded]. And then there was the energy it was somewhere there, you could feel it, it was just to trigger it… people were really very, very eager to change things, (…) you just needed something to wake them up and make them active again.

This informant found that an atmosphere of fear and apathy persisted after the NATO bombing of Serbia in 1999 but that with the help of humour this was transformed into a new energy where change was perceived as something that was both possible and necessary. Another Otpor activist explained how the group's silly actions were a way to demonstrate that it was actually possible to do something, however ridiculous it might be:

> We wanted to show that however silly it can be, you can do something, although it may look silly, at least you do something, and that was the idea of Otpor. You don't support Otpor, you have to join Otpor, to live Otpor. And you have to take part in this kind of action, to do your own actions. Bite the system, live resistance [an early Otpor slogan].

Someone else emphasised that the situation in Serbia at the time was not funny at all but that humour was a tool Otpor used to reach to people in order to open their hearts and minds to the idea that they were part of choosing what the future should look like:

> Humour was just a tool. Actually it was not so funny at all (…) [we were] trying to make some kind of parallel reality and to convince other people that there is a parallel reality, and with that parallel reality there is another choice and that means you can choose. The fun was tool and humour was tool, because everything else was not so funny of all.

The Serbian informants also spoke about how the use of humour made them feel like a family and how it made them stick together:

> [because of the humour] we were functioning much better in the organisation, we had better relations inside Otpor, we felt like a family

Feeling that one belongs somewhere and that there are like-minded people striving for the same kind of change is important for sustaining one's commitment. This person explained how humour was a way to make people unite and together confront the fear and anxiety associated with engaging in nonviolent struggle against authoritarian rule:

> The humour was good to make us stick together and to confront the fear and anxiety, because it was possible to change a dramatic situation like beating up [by police] into something funny.

One critique of humour which is sometimes raised is that movement organisers are "wasting their time" when they preach to the converted through humorous political stunts.[45] However, things that appear meaningless to the outsider might contribute significantly to higher morale and energy within the movement and this in turn has the potential to lead to more energy to spend on other types of activism. This aspect of social movement organising I have referred to as building and sustaining *cultures of resistance*.

But how is it exactly that preaching to those who are already converted contributes to sustaining a culture of resistance? Amber Day discusses this in a chapter about irony in activism.[46] Quoting Jonathan Gray, she says that there is a reason why religious preachers do preach to the converted every week. Reminders and reinforcement are important, and religious leaders are aware of this. Day herself adds that "affirmation and reinforcement fulfil an integral community-building function, which is a crucial component of nurturing a political movement".[47] Humour can be one aspect in this community-building.

The energy which is available to activists is not a fixed amount, and participating in activities one considers fun and meaningful is likely to create *more* energy and motivation to continue. People who feel that others value their contributions, have close friends within the movement, think activism is enjoyable and believe their contribution will make a difference are much more likely to stay in activism and dedicate more time and effort to it. A good atmosphere contributes to creating a community, and having a good laugh together can be one way to make it more bearable to concern oneself with the apparently never-ending uphill battles against, for instance, war, dictatorships, poverty and climate change.

After this general discussion of how humour can contribute to cultures of resistance and hearing the Swedish and Serbian informants' reflections on the subject in very different political contexts, the next section will take a closer look at how one particular form of absurd humorous political stunt, *radical clowning*, can facilitate cultures of resistance.

Radical Clowning

A form of absurd humorous political stunt, known as the "clown army" or "radical clowning", is one way Ofog participants have found to be particularly useful when it comes to making activism sustainable. Ofog's clowning activities have been directly inspired by the British group *Clandestine Insurgent Rebel Clown Army* (CIRCA) that initiated radical clowning as part of civil disobedience actions in 2003[48]. The origin was specifically linked to the war in Iraq, but as time has passed several groups have experimented with clowning outside of an anti-war context.[49] The clowns in these very special armies dress in a mixture of military and clown clothing and use attributes from the clowning sphere. Although they are clowns in their hearts, their curiosity draws them to the exciting world of everything associated with police and military authority. Their absurd performances become a different way of challenging militarism and authorities, as in the example from Colombia introduced in Chapter 3.

Ofog has used radical clowning in three different contexts: In legal demonstrations, clowning has been a way to de-escalate tensions and reach out to police officers. In civil disobedience actions, clowning has served the additional purpose of physically challenging access to restricted space. In so-called *counter-recruitment* when Ofog has attempted to disrupt military recruitment of young people, clowning has been a way to demonstrate the absurdity of militarism. These three forms also correspond with how other clowning groups have used radical clowning.

CIRCA's radical clowning developed within a tradition of nonviolent direct action emphasising independent organizing, community and solidarity.[50] It is part of a larger trend of joyful protest that has been termed "carnivalesque"[51], the "ethical spectacle"[52], and "tactical carnival".[53] Tactical carnival is a way both to confront some of the dogmas within the traditional left and to "create a joyous counterculture that can sustain long-term participation in a movement"[54]. The goals are to occupy space, present a friendly face to outsiders, provide an alternative to the existing world order, help overcome fear and create a culture of active defiance.[55] As absurd humorous political stunts, radical clowning challenges all claims to rationality and logic put forward by the police and military

with an absolute refusal to accept this perception of the world. Through the use of absurdity, clowning has the potential to open up possibilities for interaction with authorities which is not available in the same form to "ordinary" protesters who carry out non-humorous stereotypical types of activism such as demonstrations, blockades and leafleting.

Radical clowning is a complex phenomenon, practiced in different ways by different groups who emphasise different aspects of the clown figure. The research on radical clowning has also focused on everything from citizenship[56] to its relation with the Bakhtian carnival and the masks' possibilities for concealing identities and countering society's focus on individualism.[57]

In Ofog, preparations for clown army action were done with short notice, ad hoc and with a mix of more and less experienced clowns. This way of preparing has its advantages and disadvantages. More people can participate if they are not required to spend long hours rehearsing and preparing. On the other hand, the performances might not have the quality they could otherwise have had. For Ofog activists, it has been important to let the clowning be a way of taking action that everyone can participate in. Peter, who was an experienced clown when he joined Ofog, thinks that it is important that the clowning be unpretentious. If some people in an affinity group have clowned before and others not, people learn from each other:

> You can walk in there and just stand there, and then you still fulfil a function. Everyone does not have to do the same, go in to influence or establish a relation or do something more advanced.[58]

The three central elements of radical clowning are play, otherness and ridicule, which can be combined in countless ways.[59] Play occurs when the clowns play with each other or when they invite activists or police to play games with them. For instance, rebel clowns can bring soap bubbles and jump rope with them and have a repertoire of games. Playfulness is the clown's basic attitude to life. In addition, the clown figure is always an "other", an outcast who is different and belongs nowhere, something which simultaneously makes it possible to be everywhere. The red nose is the traditional marker of otherness, but not all clowns use red noses, and

the otherness is also apparent through clothing and behaviour. An example of "otherness" in behaviour was when the Ofog clown Vera pretended to fall in love with one of the police officers monitoring the demonstration she was participating in. She looked at him and flirted by hugging herself and felt it was a breakthrough that made him relax: "For me the symbolism became: You are here, but you are not my enemy. I rather think you should be with us instead".[60] However, even if flirting is usually associated with sexuality, when done by a rebel clown confronting police it becomes disconnected from its ordinary use. It becomes an indication of otherness when social conventions about relations between protesters and police are broken.

Playfulness and otherness are two aspects the radical clowns share with the conventional circus clown, from whom the inspiration for clowning is drawn. However, the incompetence which is usually a stable ingredient in conventional clowning can rarely be observed in radical clowning. Instead, radical clowns rely much on ridicule, especially in interactions with law enforcement officers. Among radical clowns, imitations of how the police speak, stand and move are popular.[61] Clowns standing next to police and military personnel and imitating their every move are a "staple ingredient" in rebel clown activities. Rebel clowns address the issue of high and low status with their parodies of police and military signs of importance and prominence (for instance, when body posture and ways of walking are imitated). The parodies ridicule law enforcement officers' attempts at displaying authority and for most people they come across as funny without much explanation. However, the use of ridicule is not unproblematic. It is one of humour's darker sides, and its existence is often downplayed in writings focusing on the positive aspects of humour.[62] In Chapter 6, I return to the risk that ridicule will be experienced as abuse.

Together the clowns' play, otherness and ridicule create multiple opportunities for outreach to media and mobilisation of new activists and for confronting representatives of dominant discourses in absurd ways. Frequently, it is the police on the ground who are the target of clown play and ridicule, and these interactions have shown a tremendous ability to catch the attention of mass media and get a more favourable coverage than conventional protest.[63] All these opportunities make radical clowning a very interesting absurd humorous political stunt, but in

this chapter the focus is on the role clowning can play in sustaining cultures of resistance.

Sustaining a Culture of Resistance with Radical Clowning

One example of an Ofog clowning intervention was described to me in several interviews. It took place outside the headquarter of Bofors, one of Sweden's biggest arms manufacturers, when Ofog held a demonstration against the company in June 2008. The police had closed off a zone in front of the building with red and white tape. A small delegation from the activists had just tried to deliver a letter to the CEO but was driven out of the enclosed area. Everybody was a bit tired, it had started to rain, and the activists were discussing whether they should call it a day. Suddenly, three rebel clowns arrived. All three did their best to hide together behind a small tree branch on this huge open parking lot. Pretending that they were invisible to the police, the three clowns snuck into the enclosed area, hid behind a flower pot and started playing clown games. Then the clowns became bolder and tried to engage the police in their games and imitate the way the police officers stood and moved. Some of the police officers started to move differently in order to get the clowns to imitate them, and one policeman even blew soap bubbles that a clown offered.

Lena, who participated in the clown group, explains her perception of how the action affected the "ordinary" Ofog activists who were holding the demonstration outside of the enclosed area:

> We kind of snuck in, you know we were very visible because it was a totally open parking lot, but we pretended to sneak in and came all the way to the house and really played theatre. It was like a show for the others in the manifestation because it rained a little and was kind of "should we go home or what" atmosphere. [64]

Facilitating a culture of resistance is about the way groups build internal community and strengthen the individual's capacity for participating in resistance. On this occasion, Lena felt the performance of the three

clowns gave new energy to the rest of the Ofog activists. In literature on CIRCA, it is frequently noted how clowning affects the clowns themselves. Paul Routledge reflects:

> CIRCA was not an excuse for activists to dress up as clowns and bring color and laughter to protests. Rather, the purpose was to develop a form of political activism that brought together the practices of clowning and nonviolent direct action. The purpose was to develop a methodology that helped to transform and sustain the inner emotional life of the activists involved as well as being an effective technique for taking direct action.[65]

Whereas Routledge emphasises activists' emotional life, L. M. Bogad speaks about how CIRCA training sessions are a way for the participants to find their clown personas, to figure out how one should look and act as a clown, something which goes beyond taking on a role in the moment of the action. In addition, Bogad mentions the mutual relation between the individual and the group:

> It is also a much longer and deeper process that involves a great deal of thoughtful/playful exploration. Putting on the makeup before an action is a crucial part of the transformation, the re-entry into one's alternate clown persona. This celebration of individual creativity and identity through the development of one's own clown can hopefully enable CIRCA members to express themselves in the moment and mode of carnival while still feeling part of a larger group identity.[66]

These types of comments about the purpose of the training sessions have not been made by the Ofog activists I interviewed. The explanation for this is probably the much more ad-hoc approach to clowning that Ofog has had than CIRCA. However, all the clowns I interviewed said that clowning is fun and that they have enjoyed it themselves. Clowning and other types of humour have been important for many activists in finding the energy to keep working on such a depressing issue as war. For activists who are intimidated by figures of authority and usually prefer to keep in the background, clowning can be a way of reducing this fear.[67] Some clowns have also found that the chance of the police beating up clowns was smaller than violence against "ordinary" activists.

However, clowning is not necessarily personally liberating for everyone; some people have trouble finding a way to use the clown role under the circumstances they encounter. Emma and Maria felt a little superfluous as clowns during one Ofog action because there were so many protesters and so few police, and almost all protesters were very relaxed and participating in the carnival.[68]

To sum up rebel clowning's impact on facilitating a culture of resistance, it can be a way to contribute to more energy and sustainability to the group and a personal liberation for some clowns. However, what the clowns can actually do depends very much on the circumstances.

Internal-External Humour

At the outset of my investigations into humorous political stunts, I was primarily interested in their ability to challenge relations of power and how they reached out to various audiences—their outward directed effects. My interest in humorous political stunts' simultaneous ability to sustain cultures of resistance developed as it became obvious from the workshops and interviews that activists themselves do not necessarily make a clear distinction between humour which serves to strengthen group cohesion and humour which is directed towards various audiences. Occasionally, humour is purely internal, as illustrated by an anecdote told by an Ofog activist: When Ofog activists participated in a civil disobedience action in Scotland and were arrested, some people gave the police false names. The names have an anti-militarist meaning in Swedish but made no sense to the English-speaking police. One person was called Nei til Kärnvapen (No to Nuclear weapons), another Nedrusta Nå (Disarmament Now). These names followed them in the prison, during police interrogations and DNA tests—much to the amusement of the activists.[69]

However, humour which at first glance appears to be directed towards external audiences can be difficult to grasp for outsiders and therefore end up being more for the benefit of the activists themselves. An example of this is from Luleå 2010, where the participants in that year's summer camp and civil disobedience action were parodying the military recruitment ads "do you have what it takes to have an opinion?" It was the same

ads that were the target of the ad refinements in Gothenburg mentioned previously. During the various actions, the activists carried speech bubbles saying things like "My brother thinks it is sick to practice killing" and "My cousin does not think the military is good for democracy"[70], parodying the military ads.

Those who entered the military test area were dressed as people from various professions which Ofog considered more useful for society than the military. They had statements attached to their clothing that said things like "My nurse does not think the USA should be able to practice bombing here", "My Librarian does not think that war will ever create peace" and "My carpenter does not think the USA should practice war in Norrbotten."[71]

However, although the satire was public, it mainly played an internal role. In Ofog's press releases about seven people entering the military area in a civil disobedience action, the way the activists are dressed is mentioned:

> Dressed as "people beneficial to society"—teacher, carpenter, cook, artist, nurse, librarian and farmer—they wanted to point towards alternatives to militarisation and specifically disturb the war preparations.[72]

However, there is no reference to the parodies of the military ads, and the local news reports about the events did not mention it either.[73] This reflects that Ofog did not consider this humorous aspect of the action important in its relations to the media. Nevertheless, it is likely that the fun the activists who planned this action had while making the parodies contributed to sustaining cultures of resistance.

Conclusion

To sum up on humorous political stunts' potential for facilitating outreach, mobilisation and sustaining a culture of resistance, it seems reasonable to conclude that humorous political stunts have a substantial potential. The episode outside Bofors showed that the police line was artificial and negotiable. Of course, this clowning event did not stop Bofors

from producing weapons, but for the activists, this was a successful resistance to the dominant discourse of militarism. It was a transgression that exposed the absurdity of a huge arms producer's need for police protection against nonviolent protest.

Although humour is unlikely to bring about change on its own, it can be a way for dissent to be expressed. Ofog's actions did not bring down militarism, close an arms factory or stop a military exercise, and it would have been rather naïve to expect them to accomplish anything that far-reaching. What humorous political stunts can contribute is to raise critique, generate attention, and be a personal liberation that can make activism more sustainable, fun and enjoyable, thus facilitating a culture of resistance.

However, irony is a complicated form of communication, and one should be careful about jumping to conclusions when it comes to the long-term effects a single humorous political stunt can have on its audience. Although it might serve as an eye-opener, it probably requires a lot more to make people keep the eyes open. It is also important to keep in mind that the source of information here is the activists' perception, not the audiences' reports of how they have changed. Nevertheless, the big donor show mentioned in Chapter 3 did show how it was possible to make people not just open their eyes but also take a step that could actually make a difference, to fill in the donor form.

When activists talk about getting attention, they are not always clear which audience they want attention from. In future studies of the impact of humorous political stunts, researchers studying audience reactions should specify whether their main interest is the media, direct communication with the general public or mobilisation of potential new activists. Although these groups are linked, it is likely that there are differences regarding who responds to what type of humour.

Notes

1. Ofog, "English", http://ofog.org/english.
2. Alice McIntyre, *Participatory Action Research* (Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 2008); Bridget Somekh, *Action Research*: *A Methodology*

for Change and Development (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2006); Ernest T. Stringer, *Action Research*, 3rd ed. (Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 2007).

3. For details about the collection of data, please see Majken Jul. Sørensen, *Humorous Political Stunts*: *Nonviolent Public Challenges to Power* (Sparsnäs, Sweden: Irene Publishing, 2015), PhD thesis, School of Humanities and Social Inquiry, University of Wollongong, Australia.
4. The area is now called Vidsel Test Range but at the time of the action it was known as NEAT (North European Aerospace Test range).
5. A more literal translation would be "weapon Godfather" since a 'fadder' is a Godfather or Godmother, the person who during a baptism promises to take responsibility for the child in case a child's parents die or are unable to take care of it. The same term is used by development agencies that facilitate individual sponsorships to children in poor countries. The Swedish term indicates an even closer relationship with the weapon than what is apparent in the English translation.
6. For more details about the content of the web page of Svensk Vapenfadder and the different reactions the Ofog activists encountered, see Sørensen, *Humorous Political Stunts*: *Nonviolent Public Challenges to Power*. The page (in Swedish) is still available on https://vapenfadder.wordpress.com/ but has not been updated since 2012.
7. Christopher Holmbäck and Urban Hamid, "Framtidens Svenska Militärer Rekryteras Tidigt", *Re*:*public* 2012.
8. Ofog, "Vi Har Vad Som Krävs För Att Ha En Åsikt!", http://ofog.org/nyheter/vi-har-vad-som-kr%C3%A4vs-f%C3%B6r-att-ha-en-%C3%A5sikt.
9. Comment made by Lena during the War Starts Here seminar about counter recruitment, July 24, 2011, Luleå.
10. Christine Harold, *Ourspace*: *Resisting the Corporate Control of Culture* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2007). p. 34.
11. Harold, *Ourspace*: p. 35.
12. Harold, *Ourspace*: p. 12, 30–31.
13. Harold, *Ourspace*: p. 72.

14. See, for instance, L. M. Bogad, "Carnivals against Capital: Radical Clowning and the Global Justice Movement", *Social Identities* 16, no. 4 (2010). Amber Day, *Satire and Dissent*: *Interventions in Contemporary Political Debate* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2011). Chapter 5; Carole Roy, *The Raging Grannies*: *Wild Hats*, *Cheeky Songs*, *and Witty Actions for a Better World* (Montréal: Black Rose Books, 2004). pp. 1, 59–63; Janjira Sombutpoonsiri, "The Use of Humour as a Vehicle for Nonviolent Struggle: Serbia's 1996-7 Protests and the *Otpor* (Resistance) Movement" (PhD Thesis, La Trobe University, 2012), pp. 259–261. A rewritten version of the thesis is published as Sombatpoonsiri, Janjira. *Humor and Nonviolent Struggle in Serbia*. (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2015).
15. Written comment from workshop.
16. Written comment from workshop.
17. Written comment from workshop.
18. Written comment from workshop.
19. See, for instance, Sombutpoonsiri, "The Use of Humour as a Vehicle for Nonviolent Struggle"; Majken Jul. Sørensen, "Humor as a Serious Strategy of Nonviolent Resistance to Oppression", *Peace* & *Change* 33, no. 2 (2008).
20. Majken Jul. Sørensen, "Humour as Nonviolent Resistance to Oppression" (MA Thesis, Coventry University, 2006).
21. Roy, *The Raging Grannies*: *Wild Hats*, *Cheeky Songs*, *and Witty Actions for a Better World*: p. 60.
22. Barreca 1996 quoted in Roy, *The Raging Grannies*: *Wild Hats*, *Cheeky Songs*, *and Witty Actions for a Better World*: p. 61.
23. Peter L. Berger, *Redeeming Laughter*: *The Comic Dimension of Human Experience* (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1997). p. 205. Berger refers to this as "transcendence in a lower key" and uses "transcendence in a higher key" to describe a religious experience of the comic in the human condition that is not relevant here.
24. Linda Hutcheon, *Irony's Edge*: *The Theory and Politics of Irony* (London: Routledge, 1995). p. 2.
25. Hutcheon, *Irony's Edge*: pp. 94–98.
26. Hutcheon, *Irony's Edge*: pp. 12–13.

27. Benjamin Heim Shepard, *Queer Political Performance and Protest*: *Play*, *Pleasure and Social Movement* (New York: Routledge, 2010). p. 269.
28. Interview September 2011.
29. Interview June 2011.
30. See, for instance, Catherine Corrigall-Brown, *Patterns of Protest*: *Trajectories of Participation in Social Movements* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012); James V. Downton and Paul Ernest Wehr, *The Persistent Activist*: *How Peace Commitment Develops and Survives* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997); Bert Klandermans, "The Demand and Supply of Participation: Social-Psychological Correlates of Participation in Social Movements", in *The Blackwell Companion to Social Movements*, ed. David A. Snow, Sarah Anne Soule, and Hanspeter Kriesi (Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub., 2004); Mario Diani, "Networks and Participation", in *The Blackwell Companion to Social Movements*, ed. David A. Snow, Sarah Anne Soule, and Hanspeter Kriesi (Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub., 2004).
31. Interview September 2011.
32. Interview September 2011.
33. Sørensen, "Humour as Nonviolent Resistance to Oppression".
34. Sørensen, "Humour as Nonviolent Resistance to Oppression".
35. Jason MacLeod, "Building Resilience to Repression in Nonviolent Resistance Struggles "*Journal of Resistance Studies* 1, no. 1 (2015).
36. Bogad, "Carnivals against Capital"; L. M. Bogad, "Tactical Carnival: Social Movements, Demonstrations, and Dialogical Performance", in *A Boal Companion*: *Dialogues on Theatre and Cultural Politics*, ed. Jan. Cohen-Cruz and Mady Schutzman (New York: Routledge, 2006); Sombutpoonsiri, "The Use of Humour as a Vehicle for Nonviolent Struggle"; Benjamin Shepard, L.M. Bogad, and Stephen Duncombe, "Performing vs. the Insurmountable: Theatrics, Activism, and Social Movements", *Liminalities*: *A Journal of Performance Studies* 4, no. 3 (2008).
37. Shepard, *Queer Political Performance and Protest*: *Play*, *Pleasure and Social Movement*: p. 268.
38. Angelique Haugerud, *No Billionaire Left Behind*: *Satirical Activism in America* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2013). p. 17.

39. Written comment from workshop.
40. Written comment from workshop.
41. Interview September 2011.
42. Interview September 2011.
43. Interview September 2011.
44. Sombutpoonsiri has reached a similar conclusion regarding Otpor. See Sombutpoonsiri, "The Use of Humour as a Vehicle for Nonviolent Struggle", p. 259.
45. See, for instance, Marcyrose Chvasta, "Anger, Irony, and Protest: Confronting the Issue of Efficacy, Again", *Text and Performance Quarterly* 26, no. 1 (2006): p. 12.
46. Day, *Satire and Dissent*.
47. Day, *Satire and Dissent*: p. 146.
48. Bogad, "Carnivals against Capital".
49. Paul Routledge, "Sensuous Solidarities: Emotion, Politics and Performance in the Clandestine Insurgent Rebel Clown Army", *Antipode* 44, no. 2 (2012).
50. Kolonel Klepto, "Making War with Love: The Clandestine Insurgent Rebel Clown Army", *City* 8, no. 3 (2004); Routledge, "Sensuous Solidarities".
51. M. Lane Bruner, "Carnivalesque Protest and the Humorless State", *Text and Performance Quarterly* 25, no. 2 (2005).
52. Stephen Duncombe, *Dream*: *Re-Imagining Progressive Politics in an Age of Fantasy* (New York: New Press, 2007).
53. Bogad, "Tactical Carnival".
54. Bogad, "Tactical Carnival", p. 52.
55. Bogad, "Carnivals against Capital", pp. 542–543.
56. John Fletcher, "Of Minutemen and Rebel Clown Armies: Reconsidering Transformative Citizenship", *Text and Performance Quarterly* 29, no. 3 (2009).
57. Bogad, "Carnivals against Capital".
58. Interview September 2011.
59. Majken Jul. Sørensen, "Radical Clowning—Challenging Militarism through Play and Otherness", *Humor*: *International Journal of Humor Research* 28, no. 1 (2015).
60. Interview September 2011.

61. For a discussion of the similarities and differences between conventional circus clowning and rebel clowning when it comes to play, otherness, incompetence and ridicule, see Sørensen, "Radical Clowning—Challenging Militarism through Play and Otherness".
62. Michael Billig, *Laughter and Ridicule*: *Towards a Social Critique of Laughter* (London: Sage, 2005).
63. See, for instance, Bogad, "Carnivals against Capital", pp. 552–554.
64. Interview June 2011.
65. Paul Routledge, "Toward a Relational Ethics of Struggle: Embodiment, Affinity, and Affect", in *Contemporary Anarchist Studies*: *An Introductory Anthology of Anarchy in the Academy*, ed. Randall Amster, et al. (New York: Routledge, 2009), p. 87.
66. Bogad, "Carnivals against Capital", p. 550.
67. For a description of my personal experiences with radical clowning, see Sørensen, *Humorous Political Stunts*: *Nonviolent Public Challenges to Power*.
68. Interview September 2011.
69. Episode told during workshop May 2011.
70. These statements (and many other examples using the same format) are visible in the photos from the action, available here: http://ofog.org/aktionsl%C3%A4ger-mot-usas-bomb%C3%B6vning-i-norrbotten accessed March 6 2012.
71. These statements (and many other examples using the same format) are visible in the photos from the action, available here: http://ofog.org/aktionsl%C3%A4ger-mot-usas-bomb%C3%B6vning-i-norrbotten accessed March 6 2012.
72. Ofog, "7 Personer Inne På Flygflottilj—Krig Kan Inte Få Förberedas Ostört! Pressmeddelande Från Nätverket Ofog, 29 Juli 2010", http://ofog.org/press/7-personer-inne-p%C3%A5-flygflottilj-%E2%80%93-krig-kan-inte-f%C3%A5-f%C3%B6rberedas-ost%C3%B6rt.
73. I have not made a systematic search for local news reports, but Ofog has collected them on the web page. Those from radio and TV are not accessible anymore, but some of the local newspapers are. Four of the longer news reports from various local newspapers do not mention the professions beneficial to society or the parodies.

5

Confronting the State Through Humorous Political Activism

Introduction

Many humorous political stunts are targeting the state or state institutions. Ofog confronted military exercises sanctioned by the state, and in Chapter 3 the majority of the examples had the state as their targets. The Orange Alternative's surreal carnival was a challenge to the communist regime in Poland, and in Burma the support for the opposition on the front page of a sports magazine was a challenge to censorship. Also, the two provocative humorous political stunts, the teddy bears and Voina's bridge painting were confronting the Belarusian and Russian states. Humorous political stunts are part of a discursive guerrilla war, and they can have a role to play for shaking up people and catching attention of passers-by and be a way to reinforce cultures of resistance. But how do the humorous political stunts function in direct relation to the state? Do they have any chance of influencing policy makers and changing laws? This chapter investigates these questions through the case study of Kampanjen Mot Verneplikt (KMV), which means *The Campaign Against Conscription*. KMV was fighting against conscription and for the rights of conscientious objectors who were imprisoned in all of Scandinavia. In

M.J. Sørensen, *Humour in Political Activism*,
DOI 10.1057/978-1-137-57346-9_5

Norway, they faced the tricky situation that some conscientious objectors were sent to prison for 16 months, but without the state calling it a punishment. During the 1980s, KMV based its outward-directed activities on two major strategies: (1) to *create a spectacle* which was sometimes humorous and (2) *using the court system* when it seemed beneficial to KMV by filing charges against the state for violating the human rights of the conscientious objectors.[1] This case study documents how these two strategies worked hand in hand to pressure the Norwegian government into changing the law on conscientious objection. Moreover, it shows how humour can facilitate outreach to media and challenge the power of the state. Humorous political stunts can be one method within a campaign, and together several methods can bring about law changes desired by social movements.

KMV and Total Resistance

KMV was launched in 1981 as a joint campaign involving Swedish and Norwegian activists and also with some links to Denmark and Finland. The campaign was primarily concerned with the issue of total resistance and supported total resisters who refused the obligatory military service on the basis of an anarchist-pacifist conviction.[2] The total resisters were usually accepted as conscientious objectors by the Norwegian authorities but got into trouble because they also refused to perform the civilian substitute service which they considered an integrated part of the military system that can "never be in any fundamental opposition to the military service".[3]

The total resisters were sent to prison for 16 month, but with the 1965 law of conscientious objection, the Norwegian state had established a unique way of dealing with this group of men: §§19 and 20, which regulated the treatment of total resisters, stipulated that the 16 months were not considered a punishment. Officially, the total resisters simply carried out their substitute service by force in an "…institution under the administration of the prison administration".[4] This contradiction—that what appeared as a punishment was called something else—became the core of the total resisters' spectacular protests and legal strategy, revolving

around their court hearings and prison time and generating newspaper headlines like "Prison is not punishment".[5]

The conditions for the incarcerated total resisters were the same as those of ordinary criminal convicts. The only differences were that their time in prison was not entered in the criminal record and they could not be released after serving two thirds of the time, which was standard practice for most other prisoners. No other country in Europe which had substitute service had a similar system. Everywhere else, total resistance was considered a crime and the total resisters were convicted in an ordinary trial.

KMV was a non-hierarchical group, deliberately organised as a campaign focusing on one particular issue: conscientious objectors in prison. It was more of a loose network than a formal organisation. Even if total resistance was KMV's main issue, the group also supported other conscientious objectors risking imprisonment. These were primarily selective objectors, who were not approved as conscientious objectors because they were not pacifists, but refused military service as a critique of Norway's NATO membership or the risk of nuclear war. Contrary to the total resisters, the selective objectors were considered to evade military orders and convicted in an ordinary trial. This difference had the bizarre effect that whereas the total resisters who were not "punished" spent 16 months in prison, the selective objectors was imprisoned much shorter. They were convicted to 3 to 4 months for refusing to obey orders. Depending on which government was ruling, this process might be repeated after the selective objector was called up once more and again refused.

KMV as an organisation was committed to principled total resistance, and not everyone who was spending time in jail for refusing military service felt they belonged in the group. This was one reason why an even more informal group was established, called *Samvittighetsfanger I Norge* (S.I.N.), which means *Prisoners of Conscience in Norway*.[6] Another reason was that the concept of *prisoners of conscience* had other connotations which were more appropriate under some circumstances, such as when it came to cooperating with Amnesty International. Many of the most committed activists in KMV were also deeply involved in S.I.N. and changed their "hats" depending on the circumstances.

During the early 1980s, the idea of total resistance became known in much wider circles thanks to the young men's own efforts. Their visibility also made the number of total resisters grow. Between 1965 and 1984, eight people spent time in prison after being sentenced according to §20. By the end of 1984, 25 people had been convicted according to §20 and were waiting to go to prison.[7] In December 1985, this number had increased to more than 40, and KMV was in contact with 96 total resisters, estimating the actual number to be more than 100.[8]

Spectacles for Mainstream Media

Before the total resisters could be sent to prison, a court had to establish that the conditions in §20 that made this sanction possible were fulfilled. Over the years, Norwegian participants in KMV tried in various ways to draw attention to their §20 court hearings (for example, by bringing many supporters or by making the court hearing itself into a spectacle).[9] Some of the spectacles that received most attention were humorous political stunts.

One humorous political stunt took place on midsummer night in June 1983, when 12 people used ladders to climb the walls of a prison in the capital is Oslo. Ten of them proceeded to jump into the prison yard. Their demand was that either Johan Råum should be let out of prison or they should all be locked up together with him. Since he was in prison because of his opinions and they all shared these views, the "visitors" argued that they ought to be imprisoned as well. Råum was a selective objector who had already served his first three-month prison sentence and was now serving the second.

The prison authorities were not used to getting extra inmates through such a *jail-in*[10], and one can assume that the action must have been totally unexpected. Some of the KMV participants who stayed outside the wall hid the ladders, so when the police arrived they could not figure out how the KMV activists had managed to get up there. The police's own ladders were too short for them to reach the top of the prison wall and bring down those who were sitting there, something which added to the amusement. KMV had several activists who were experienced in

working with the media, and they had informed journalists whom they trusted that if they turned up at the prison at a certain time, something interesting was going to happen.[11] Officially, the action was carried out by S.I.N., but as it would seem from the KMV newsletter's references to the event, KMV felt very much responsible for it.

The activists refused to leave the prison and managed to have a meeting with the person in charge of the prison and Råum himself. They negotiated that a press conference should be held inside the prison before the 10 activists were literally carried out by the police.

After spending three to four hours at the police station, they were all released. The story got considerable attention, including coverage by the tabloid VG.[12] The newspapers reported that the prison authorities were not going to press charges and that the action would have no legal consequences for the activists. One of the articles also mentioned that there was a nice and friendly atmosphere between the activists and the prison authorities, something which both sides pointed out.[13] However, one of the activists says in his own writing that they were reported to the police for trespassing but that the charges were later dropped because of "lack of evidence", as the official terminology goes.[14]

Another type of humorous political stunt took place on September 12, 1983[15], a few months after the first jail-in in order to sabotage Øyvind Solberg's court hearing. Solberg was a lawyer by profession, an attorney for many of the total resisters and also one of the driving forces in KMV. When Solberg's §20 hearing came up, he called his friend Jørgen Johansen and said "I would like you to be in court with me, I need your help". Johansen replied "Sure, I will come with you, but you are a lawyer, so you can defend yourself?" To Johansen's surprise, Solberg replied "No, no, I already have a defence lawyer, I would like to have you as the prosecutor!" At first Johansen thought that would not be possible to organise, but the real prosecutors seldom bothered to show up for the §20 hearings, because the result was not negotiable: always 16 months in prison. This was a fact that annoyed the activists in KMV a lot and one of the reasons Solberg had the idea for this stunt. Johansen says "we were annoyed that the prosecutor did not show up in these cases, it all went so automatic that they did not *bother* to come". Solberg explains that "at the time, I had the idea that if you are going to do something, what if

everything was turned upside down?" He had not heard about anyone who ever tried to do anything similar, but liked Monty Python's humour and tried to apply a similar approach to political activism. Many people have a privately recruited lawyer, but Solberg is the only Norwegian who has ever had a privately engaged prosecutor.

Johansen borrowed a prosecutor robe and turned up in court, where he was sitting at the prosecutor's place when the judges turned up. There the main judge asked "are you new here?", which Johansen could say yes to without lying. Johansen, who had long hair and a big beard, had done his best to tame it with hair pins and look respectable. In court, nobody noticed that anything was wrong, and the proceedings went on for two hours. The whole event was filmed by KMV, and Johansen did indeed look very serious and convincing during the proceedings. Nevertheless, some of the arguments he made were rather outrageous and the audience (mainly Solberg's and Johansen's friends) was openly amused. In his parody of the prosecutor, Johansen demanded that since Solberg was a lawyer, he ought to serve almost four times as long in prison as the police had initially demanded. Because Solberg had served part of his military service, he was facing "only" 96 days under the administration of the prison authorities. Johansen demanded that he ought to be imprisoned 376 days.[16] Nevertheless, the judge did not notice anything wrong and it was KMV itself that told the press about the fake prosecutor. Because of this parody of a prosecutor, the case had to be heard again later, this time with a real prosecutor present.

At first, KMV was not sure what to do with the film, and it took almost a week before the story hit the media. But the story exploded when part of KMV's film was shown as the major story of the 7 p.m. news, *Dagsrevyen*. In 1983, Norway had only one TV channel and "everyone" was watching that particular news broadcast. For KMV, it was all about the possibility to show what a farce the court hearings were, and Solberg got the opportunity to express this live on national TV. Afterwards, the story was also picked up by several national newspapers.[17] The judge was quoted saying that he was "shocked" about what had happened and that he and his colleagues had "reacted strongly".[18]

The court filed a report to the police against Johansen, Solberg and Solberg's lawyer, named Wulfberg.[19] The judge described the proceedings

differently from what Johansen and Solberg remember. For instance, he claimed that Johansen had not said much and that there was nothing unusual in what he said.[20] The three men were reported to the police for violation of several paragraphs in the criminal code and courts act[21], for an "unauthorised exercise of official authority" or assisting in this, and for showing contempt for the court.[22]

Solberg came close to losing his right to practice as a lawyer but instead received a "serious warning" from the department of justice because he had assisted Johansen in impersonating the prosecutor.[23] However, even the highest placed civil servant in the department of justice, Departementsråd Leif Eldring, could see the comic side of the case according to the well-respected newspaper *Aftenposten*.[24] The legal proceedings against all three were dismissed for lack of evidence, although both Johansen and Solberg requested that they be tried in court.

KMV activists also did a number of other spectacular actions which were attention-grabbing but not humorous. This included hunger strikes, a conscription book-burning in court, and a funeral procession for §20.[25]

It is not only KMV which has experienced that humorous political stunts can be a way to create a spectacle that appeals to mass media. CIRCA, Otpor and the Raging Grannies, mentioned in the previous chapter, have also caught wide attention.[26] A group which was specifically designed to interact with the press was the US *Billionaires for Bush* (*or Gore*), first taking action at the presidential election in 2000. The group had several forerunners and the *Billionaires* have later changed names with circumstances and been, for instance, *Billionaires for Wealthcare*.[27] The Billionaires, a clear example of a supportive humorous political stunt, have dressed as stereotypical super-rich characters and made numerous ironic performances in support of economic policies benefitting the rich. Naming their characters things like Phil T. Rich, Meg A. Bucks and Noah Countability and armed with professionally designed posters stating slogans like "Corporations Are People Too" and "Taxes Are Not For Everyone", they both organised their own events and crashed those initiated by others.

The Billionaires were friendly and smiling and appealed to the press's need for entertainment and a good photo. They quickly became media darlings who were contrasted with the "anarchists" and "scruffy" conventional

protesters. According to Angelique Haugerud, the Billionaires got a substantial and usually favourable coverage compared with other protest groups. Nevertheless, there was a limitation because it was the glamour, surprise and ambiguity which were covered rather than the actual issues the Billionaires wanted to highlight: increasing economic inequality and how "Big Money" paid for political campaigns. In spite of this, the organisers of the Billionaires were satisfied with what they achieved because the names and slogans themselves included a subversive message. As long as the names and slogans got mentioned, the Billionaires trusted that the public would itself be capable of decoding the irony.[28]

Many of the humorous political stunts presented in Chapter 3, such as the ACE bank stunt and the Santas in Copenhagen, were also covered extensively by national mainstream mass media. However, the assumption about mass media appeal is so much taken for granted that no one has done a systematic comparison between the attention given to humorous and non-humorous actions, so we do not know how big the effect is. Although anecdotal evidence makes it reasonable to assume that humorous political stunts are frequently a spectacle the media cannot ignore, there are also examples of failed cases. With Svensk Vapenfadder, Ofog tried to reach mass media with humour but was unsuccessful.

The Role of KMV's Humorous Political Stunts

The humorous political stunts that KMV activists performed were a vital part of their strategy. The stunts were an unpredictable obstruction of the state's intention of carrying out the court procedures in an orderly fashion, and they were a way to get attention. The stunts were part of the discursive guerrilla war about what is true and just concerning total resistance. The Norwegian authorities responded to the strategy in numerous ways, but the design of the actions meant that it seldom was possible to ignore the total resisters completely. Frequently, the police were brought in to arrest the total resisters or their supporters or both and remove them from the courtroom or the prison as in the jail-ins. At other times, the police became involved only after the event when charges were pressed against the total resisters (for instance, with regard to the fake prosecutor).

KMV used two types of humorous political stunts—the supportive prosecutor and the provocative jail-in—which in two distinct ways positioned KMV as a critic of Norwegian authorities' discourse about total resisters. In both of these stunts, it was the dominant discourse of military service as the norm which was under attack as well as the option of accepting the substitute service as a valid alternative. To KMV, the substitute service was something the authorities had adopted as a way to appear more tolerant and inclusive while still upholding the military service as the norm.

The prosecutor impersonation was a supportive humorous political stunt and included all the characteristics of this type of stunt described in Chapter 3. Instead of a conventional and rational protest, it was framed as a support and encouragement to the Norwegian authorities' position on total resistance. Johansen made the court into a parody when he appeared overenthusiastic in his role and suggested that Solberg be sentenced three times as long as the law demanded. In this political play, it was an "invasion" of the authorities' own "stage", right in front of their eyes. Although it is not an important stage for national politics like the parliament, it was an absolutely crucial stage for legitimising the treatment of the principled total resisters and dressing their imprisonment in a legal frame. It is difficult to imagine a more appropriate scene to "invade" when the intention was to disrupt the Norwegian state's routines regarding the total resisters.

In this particular case, Johansen's performance and improvisation skills turned out to be so convincing that the usual actors on the stage did not even realise that their performance had been turned into a play of politics. The presence of the fake prosecutor thoroughly sabotaged the court hearing, though only temporarily. The stunt was a concrete prevention of the smooth functioning of the legal system and intended to convince others that the law should be changed.

To the larger audience, the Norwegian public, the stunt served to expose the reality of the total resisters' cases. Each person who heard or read about this stunt made his or her individual interpretation of its meaning, but in the newspaper coverage the stunt was presented according to the taste of KMV. The reporters framed it as astonishing that a fake prosecutor could demand an imprisonment so much longer than what the law prescribed without anybody noticing. To the authorities, it must

have been rather discomforting to have an issue they preferred to keep out of the public eye exposed this way. The case is unique in the history of Norwegian judicial practice and according to Johansen's and Solberg's friends and colleagues, it is still something that lawyers and judges talk about.[29]

The jail-in (which was repeated on two occasions in 1984 and 1987) was a provocative humorous political stunt. In this type of stunt, there is no attempt to disguise behind irony and double meanings that this is a protest as in the other types of humorous political stunts. The humour derived from playful twists to the provocation, in this case by someone unexpectedly making their way into the prison instead of the conventional goal of escaping. Just as in the prosecutor case, KMV invaded a stage which was central for their struggle, the prison walls. Again, this was not a major national scene, but just like the courtroom it was loaded with symbolism. If the usual actors in the courtroom—the judges, prosecutor and their assistants—were unprepared for a fake prosecutor, the prison authorities were probably even more unaccustomed to citizens clamouring to get in. Afterwards, a dilemma arose for the prison authorities and prosecutor: charge the intruders with trespassing or pretend that nothing had happened. According to Johansen, the case was "dismissed for lack of evidence" in spite of a written confession, similar to what happened in the prosecutor case. KMV interpreted this to mean that the authorities did not want any further publicity about the incident. When it came to the audience of the Norwegian population, again KMV managed to reach them through mass media. Once they had access to the media, the stunt spoke for itself. However, it was a type of stunt which depended on surprise and could work this way only a limited number of times—after a while, it would not be newsworthy any more.

The central aspect in both the jail-ins and the prosecutor case was how KMV positioned itself in relation to the dominant discourses of crime and punishment. The fake prosecutor did not argue against sending Solberg to prison but instead was very supportive of the legal practice and demanded that the total resister receive a longer sentence. In the jail-ins, there was no disguise, but an open provocation when they demanded that either the prisoner of conscience be set free or they all be imprisoned with him. In the case of the prosecutor, it was an attempt to expose the

absurdity in sending someone to prison without calling it punishment. The jail-in served to expose and ridicule the practice of sending conscientious objectors to prison.

If one should point towards a limitation with these two stunts, it would be that they did not speak for themselves when it came to the issue of total resistance. Although the activists brought banners for the jail-ins, someone who just heard about people jumping into the prison would not understand the connection to conscientious objection without an explanation. Likewise, the story about a fake prosecutor is an illustration of how the court system can be fooled, but the listener needs much more information in order to understand the context of total resistance.[30] Nevertheless, the scenes that KMV chose to invade were central in their struggle and what they wanted to change about their situation. In the prosecutor case, they snuck in behind the backs of the authorities; in the jail-in, they openly captured the prison walls. In both cases, the boldness and devil-may-care attitude cause admiring smiles, and the absurdity of these events invited people to ask themselves "Why would anyone voluntarily climb into the prison? How is it possible that no one noticed a fake prosecutor?" In the jail-in case, the amusement increased for passers-by who could wonder "What should be the punishment for this provocation—prison, as the activists had demanded?"

These humorous political stunts were an integrated part of KMV's strategy, but they were only part of it. The stunts' role in changing the law on conscientious objection as KMV demanded cannot be understood in isolation from the way KMV raised cases against the Norwegian state for violation of the constitution and the total resisters' human rights.

Combining Humour with Suing the Norwegian State

KMV had an ambivalent attitude towards the judicial system. On one hand, the legal system convicted the selective objectors to prison and sent the total resisters to serve their substitute service in prison. As anarchists, most of the participants in KMV had a very negative attitude towards the state and therefore also its legal system. On the other hand, KMV itself

used the court system to sue the Norwegian state, and through spectacular actions KMV exposed the court hearings as a farce. However, contrary to many other organisations that pursue a legal strategy, KMV did not see this as the only possible course of action, and the legal strategy was combined with a successful media strategy as the following example will show.

One of the most decisive cases was when the same Johansen who had impersonated the prosecutor took his own case to the European Commission of Human Rights at the Council of Europe.[31] On May 4, 1983, he applied to the European Commission of Human Rights to consider his case a violation of the European Convention on Human Rights.[32] In May 1984, the commission decided to ask the Norwegian state for a written explanation regarding potential violation of article 5.[33] This article of the Convention about "Right to liberty and security" states that no one can be imprisoned unless the "procedure [has been] prescribed by law"[34]. Johansen and his lawyer Øyvind Solberg argued that there must be a limitation to this, and it was absurd that Johansen would be considered to perform substitute service even if he was sleeping in his cell all day.[35]

Johansen's complaint became a rather big case in the Norwegian media in March 1985, when the Norwegian state was asked to appear before the commission in order to explain the state's practice.[36] The Norwegian state immediately stopped imprisonment of the principled total resisters while the case was pending.[37] Norway was generally considered a defender of human rights, and only one other case against the Norwegian state had ever been considered for admission by the commission; so this was an important case that officials took very seriously.[38]

The actual meeting took place on October 14, 1985. For the local newspaper in the town where Johansen lived, *Sarpsborg Arbeiderblad*, it was such a major event that it decided to send a journalist to Strasbourg to cover the case.

The Commission of Human Rights spent five hours deliberating the case, but in the end it was considered inadmissible because the commission had accepted the arguments of the Norwegian state. The time Johansen would spend in prison could not be considered a punishment since he would be released if he changed his mind and decided to perform the substitute service. "This fact may be of little interest to the applicant,

but it distinguishes his detention from normal incarceration following a criminal conviction".[39]

Solberg was terribly disappointed. Although he had not expected to win, he had been fairly certain that at least the case would be considered by the commission. Around 8 to 10 principled total resisters who had had their court hearings were now facing 16 months in prison.

In spite of the defeat in Strasbourg, KMV decided to continue pursuing the path of the courts in parallel with the ongoing spectacular actions. In May 1986, Solberg filed charges against the Norwegian state at the court in Oslo on behalf of Bjørn Bremnes and Tom Nilsen for violation of article 96 of the Constitution. This article prohibits punishments without a judgement, and KMV argued that since the 16 months in prison were always the end result, the court hearings that the total resisters participated in could not be considered a trial.[40] While the case was under consideration, the department of justice again decided that no principled total resisters should be imprisoned.[41]

Because of the ruling in Strasbourg, Solberg knew what line of argument the representatives of the Norwegian state were most likely to pursue. He decided to sharpen his argumentation around the issue of the "choice" that the state claimed the total resisters had to change their mind and perform the substitute service. Solberg remembers that he made a comparison with the way the Nazis in Germany had told members of Jehovah's Witnesses that they could just change their faith and then they would not be required to go to the concentration camps.[42] KMV also called Nils Christie, a famous Norwegian professor of criminology, as one of their witnesses. He testified that although the total resisters were not technically punished according to the Norwegian state, in reality their time in prison resembled that of other prisoners in all respects. And in the Norwegian criminal law, you had to have committed quite serious crimes in order to be sentenced to 16 months of imprisonment.

The Oslo court decided on the case on January 12–13, 1987, and did not find any violation of the constitution. The conclusion was similar to that in Strasbourg; the total resisters would be released as soon as they changed their minds.[43] KMV appealed the decision, and it took another two years before the case was heard in January 1989 in Eidsivating Lagmannsrett, which again ruled in favour of the state.[44]

Thus, KMV activists lost in all the cases where they tried to challenge the Norwegian states with legal means. That the courts uphold the status quo in cases like this is no surprise. Many social movements that have tried to battle states and big business with legal means discover that the court system is geared towards protecting those with money and power rather than being an institution where "justice prevails".[45] However, in spite of losing the legal battle, KMV in Norway was still successful in using the cases to generate attention. In what follows, it will become apparent how these cases contributed to changing the law. Not only did they stall the imprisonment while they were pending, they also drew the civil servants' attention to the problems with the law.

The Legal Procedures That Changed the Law

In June 1990, the parliament changed the legislation that had made it possible to serve the substitute service in an institution under the administration of the prison authorities, and the new law took effect on January 1, 1991.[46] From then on, the total resisters have been convicted in an ordinary trial, usually to 3 to 4 months in prison.

The activities of KMV and S.I.N. described above were decisive in bringing about the law change. However, the process of discussing and deciding on official reports and white papers in order to change laws can be long and winding.[47] In this case, some of the processes were exceptionally long and exceeded the decade that KMV existed as an active campaign. Already in 1974, the Norwegian government had decided to appoint a committee whose task was to write a Norwegian Official Report on conscription.[48] However, it took 15 years before the proposal to change §§19 and 20, which concerned the treatment of the total resisters, was to be presented to the parliament. The initiative to change these paragraphs came from the department of justice and was first mentioned in a proposition to the parliament that suggested a new bill, *ot. prp. nr 39*, in February 1989. Because of various delays, the proposal was not discussed by the parliament's justice committee until June 1990[49] and was finally passed later the same month.[50]

The change regarding §§19 and 20 was one suggestion among several others regarding the law on conscientious objection.[51] In the proposition to the parliament, it appeared as if the debate that KMV had initiated about their treatment being unconstitutional and a violation of their human rights was the main reason why the department suggested these changes. The department referred to this criticism and Johansen's case in Strasbourg but concluded that since KMV activists lost both in Strasbourg and the case against the Norwegian state, the parliament was not obliged to change the law.[52] Nevertheless, the civil servants did suggest changing §§19 and 20, although the logic behind it seems vague:

> Even if it must be assumed that the arrangement [with serving substitute service in prison] is not contrary to International law or the Constitution, it is a question whether the present arrangement is appropriate.[53]

The word "appropriate"[54] is peculiar because it does not really say anything. Did it mean that the lawyers at the department of justice were aware that they had the law on their side but themselves found it odd to keep people in prison for 16 months without calling it a punishment? Or did it mean that they were aware that KMV was likely to keep making trouble? Or could it be a reference to solidarity actions that had been carried out at Norwegian embassies in Denmark and Spain?[55]

A person who represented the Norwegian state and the department of justice in questions regarding conscientious objection at the time has recently confirmed that the case in Strasbourg played an important role in bringing the question on the agenda and eventually changing §§19 and 20. Although a couple of years passed, he saw this as the only possible explanation for the change, and law changes always take time.[56]

The argument used in the report for abolishing the possibility to serve the substitute service in prison reflected what KMV had said for years. It did not seem fair that the selective objectors were convicted to a prison sentence of two times 3 to 4 months in a regular trial but that those who served the substitute service spent at least twice as long in prison. The department of justice acknowledged that:

> While it can be adduced that compulsory service [in prison] is not completely comparable with serving a prison sentence, the reality for those concerned is comparatively modest when disregarding the economic circumstances. [57]

From a judicial perspective, it is notable that this suggestion from the department of justice was passed without much comment or discussion. The lack of debate is a clear indication that most people probably had considered the 16 months in prison a punishment in spite of the official terminology. There did not seem to be any reason to discuss the principles when the result of the change was a considerably shorter time in prison.

There was only a very short debate in parliament preceding the decision to change the law. However, although no parliamentarians were involved in suggesting the changes, two of them referred to the end of the practice with substitute service in prison as the most important part of the revision.[58]

Gaining Attention Through a Broad Campaign Confronting the State

Traditionally, conscientious objection to military service is considered an individual moral choice that each conscript has to make on his or her own. Until the beginning of the 1980s, total resistance was almost non-existent in Norway, and to the Norwegian state this was desirable. The state's representatives preferred to deal with the young men on an individual basis and when necessary send them to prison without any publicity. However, just as laws do not operate in a vacuum but reflect changes in society, so do individuals' conscience develop influenced by inspiration and debate from their surroundings. KMV's campaign with its two main strategies of creating a spectacle and suing the state brought the issue of total resistance from a relatively silent individual struggle into a noisy confrontation with the state that caught the attention of the media and increased the number of total resisters. For a country like Norway that claimed to be a defender of human rights, it was uncomfortable

to be publicly accused of violating the rights of both the selective objectors and the total resisters.

KMV was a very small political group but managed to move the issue of total resistance from the arena of personal, individual choices to a collective challenge. In less than a decade, total resistance was on the agenda as never before. The total resisters' situation was discussed in parliament and debated in major newspapers, and parliamentarians were questioned by journalists about their opinion on the issue. Court hearings were turned into a theatre stage and the Norwegian state had to defend its practice in front of the European Commission of Human Rights, an issue it took so seriously that no total resisters were imprisoned while the case was pending.

Total resistance went from being a possibility that most young men had probably never even considered to a viable option chosen by more than 100. Although this is a very small number compared with all those who went into military service and the substitute service during the same period, it is still a dramatic increase compared with previous decades when the choice involved such far-reaching consequences.

Each individual total resister was probably aware that the more their numbers increased, the greater the chance that they together would provide enough pressure to change the legislation. Most of the Norwegian total resisters involved in KMV never went to prison for total resistance, but there were no guarantees, particularly for the first ones. All they knew was that 16 months in prison was a real possibility and that only life-threatening hunger strikes had made it possible for other conscientious objectors in prison to be released.[59]

Most participants in KMV had an ambivalent attitude towards the legal system. On one hand, many tried to cooperate as little as possible with the courts, seeing them as the extended arm of the military system. On the other hand, the §20 court hearings were among the best opportunities to generate publicity about the fate of the total resisters. KMV activists frequently used their court hearings for all they were worth, as was the case when Johansen impersonated the prosecutor during Solberg's hearing. In spite of their ambivalence, KMV participants also tried to give the state some of its own medicine when they raised cases against the

Norwegian state for violating their human rights. To sum up the relationship between KMV and the courts, the group was successful in bringing about a law change, but it was not the court cases against the state that directly led to this. Rather, the legal strategy worked indirectly through the attention the issue of total resistance generated.

The attention of media, civil servants, the general public and potential new total resisters was caught with two different strategies:

1. Spectacular actions took place primarily in the courts and prisons. They aimed to expose the court hearings as a farce and draw attention to both total resisters and selective objectors serving time in prison, whether labelled as punishment or substitute service. KMV used two types of humorous political stunts: the provocative jail-ins and the supportive fake prosecutor. The scenes of prison walls and courtrooms stand out as highly relevant for the changes KMV demanded.

2. The challenges the state seemed to take most seriously were the use of the courts against the Norwegian state. Johansen complained to the European Commission of Human Rights at the Council of Europe that the Norwegian state was violating the European Convention on Human Rights when he was forced to serve the substitute service in prison while the state refused to call it a punishment. The state naturally enough found it necessary to defend itself and spent many resources on this. Although the informant from the Norwegian state insisted that being dragged to the court was not an embarrassment as long as the state won, it still turned out to be a decisive factor for the law change that eventually took place.

The case in Norway where Bremnes and Nilsen filed charges against the state for violating the constitution was also important. Although KMV activists lost both these cases in court, they demonstrated that there was a grey zone which the state subsequently decided to withdraw from. The existence of such a grey zone regarding the imprisonment of total resisters was confirmed without doubt by the interviewed representative for the Norwegian state. The legal strategy was combined with a media strategy, thus showing even the legal battle's potential for contributing to the spectacle.

Thus, humour was an effective way to draw attention to an issue that concerned only very few people. The stunts' media appeal indicates that KMV was able to reach out to many more people than those who felt the imprisonment on their own body. The humour was, with all likelihood, a contributing factor to the dramatic increase in the number of total resisters. However, there is no doubt that humorous political stunts did not do this alone—they were an integrated part of a strategy in which the legal cases probably influenced the Norwegian authorities more directly.

The total resisters did have a very good case in Norway, which contributed to success of their cause. No matter what one thinks about conscription, it violates logic to send someone to prison and not call it a punishment. In all other European countries with conscription and the right to conscientious objection, total resistance was considered a crime and the total resisters convicted in an ordinary trial. It was also obvious that the period of imprisonment—16 months—was out of proportion with sentences for both ordinary crimes and selective objection in Norway.

In the end, the department of justice had no problem convincing a united parliament that the contradiction "prison is not punishment" was not "appropriate". A reason for the success on the issue of total resistance was probably also that the resisters now actually would be punished, something that could be framed as a more "conservative" line by all those critical of total resistance.

KMV's success in Norway is quite impressive when taking into account the limited resources that were available to the network. Compared with groups like the Billionaires and Otpor, KMV was tiny. This makes it remarkable that as late as March 1985, when the Norwegian Official Report about conscription was discussed in parliament, only a few politicians mentioned the total resisters during the parliamentary debate.[60] When KMV met with them in advance, no one was prepared to propose a law change.[61] Just four years later, the department of justice proposed a change which was accepted unanimously by parliament. It is difficult to see any factors for the success other than the total resisters' own effort, creativity and persistence.

Given the timing of the change, it seems likely that two factors were more important than others. Early in 1985, the Strasbourg case had

not yet received much attention in Norway; this happened only later that year. It therefore seems reasonable to give that case much credit for the sudden change in attitude. Secondly, there are the numbers of total resisters: at the end of 1984, 25 men had had their §20 hearing and were waiting to go to prison.[62] In December 1985, this number had increased to more than 40 men, and KMV wrote in its newsletter that the campaign was in contact with 96 total resisters.[63] The department of justice did not know about all these because they had not yet had their §20 hearings, but the 40 existed in the system. It is not clear whether the department of justice was aware of this increase.[64] The authorities did not keep a record of the number of total resisters, since they were considered to be serving their substitute service just like the other conscientious objectors. Neither was the increase mentioned in ot. prp. 35. On the other hand, it seems unlikely that such a dramatic increase in numbers should go unnoticed and not be part of the reason the department of justice suggested abolishing the arrangement with serving substitute service in prison.

If the court cases against the Norwegian state and the numbers of total resisters played such an important role for the law change, did it mean that the spectacular actions had been superfluous and that Johansen's case in Strasbourg alone could have changed the law? That we will never know, but that seems unlikely too. The two strategies of creating a spectacle and using the courts went hand in hand, and it is reasonable to assume that the numbers grew because of all the attention that the total resisters received for all of their actions, spectacular as well as "sober". As discussed in Chapter 4, a creative and spectacular style of protest, including humour, is likely to attract more people and facilitate outreach, mobilisation and a culture of resistance.[65]

KMV failed in its attempt to abolish conscription altogether. Nevertheless, the changes to §§19 and 20, which meant that the arrangement with substitute service in prison was abolished, was a major victory for the group. Its decade-long struggle had also had practical consequences for the men who had declared total resistance. While the legal cases in Strasbourg and against the Norwegian state were pending, no total resisters were taken to prison. Solberg is proud that up to a hundred people who had had their §20 hearings in reality got an amnesty, including

Johansen and Solberg himself. Although such an amnesty was never officially declared, they simply fell through the cracks in the system.

The case study of KMV has shown how humour can be used to generate attention for a cause that concerns a very limited number of people and how it can be integrated into a larger campaign that also includes many non-humorous elements. Through this combination, KMV challenged the Norwegian state so successfully that the group achieved its goal of changing the law that regulated the conditions for the total resisters.

Conclusion

KMV was a very small group concerned with the radical issue of total resistance which affected only very few people directly. In comparison, a group like the Billionaires had hundreds of active participants and chapters in 50 US states at its height and was bringing attention to a comparatively uncontroversial issue of economic inequality which has a direct impact on the lives of millions of Americans. Yet both groups experienced how their stunts were a way to create a spectacle that appealed to the mass media.

KMV worked within the context of a liberal democracy where the possibilities for public dissent were quite open. Thus, the actions KMV carried out are not advisable to copy to other political situations. However, the findings about how humour can be used as one aspect within a campaign have global relevance to almost any type of political situation.

One reason which makes it possible to show the impact of KMV's humorous political stunts is that the group in Norway had a very clear objective: to change the law regarding the treatment of the total resisters. Many other humorous political stunts are carried out without so clear a goal. KMV also used the stunts in combination with other strategies to reach the goal—the stunts were not one-time events disconnected from other activities. Only one other group known to the research community of humour scholars has consciously used humorous political stunts in pursuit of such a clear goal and combined it with an equally conscious non-humorous strategy: Otpor. Although the goal of ousting Slobodan Milošević from power can hardly be compared to the struggle for a quite

minor law change, these two cases illustrate the potential of combining humorous and non-humorous strategies over a longer period of time in order to bring about very specific changes.

Notes

1. The group also lobbied and participated in the public debate as well as carried out solidarity work with other conscientious objectors around the world. However, these two other strategies played only a minor role. See Chapter 6 in Majken Jul Sørensen, *Humorous Political Stunts*: *Nonviolent Public Challenges to Power* (Sparsnäs, Sweden: Irene Publishing, 2015), PhD thesis, School of Humanities and Social Inquiry, University of Wollongong, Australia.
2. The majority of total resisters were Jehovas Witnesses who based their refusal on religious beliefs. They were not included in the campaign, because they agreed to serve their substitute service in special camps.
3. ICR Skandinavia, *Verneplikt*: *Statlig Tvangsarbeid*: *Et Hefte Fra ICR—Skandinavia* (Bergen: FMK, 1981). For more information about KMV's anarchist-pacifist platform, see Chapter 6 in Sørensen, *Humorous Political Stunts*: *Nonviolent Public Challenges to Power*.
4. NOU, "Nou 1979: 51 Verneplikt", (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1979), p. 46.
5. Sarpsborg Arbeiderblad, "16 Måneders Fengsel Er Ikke "Straff", Sier Myndighetene", [16 months in prison is not "punishment", says authorities] *Sarpsborg Arbeiderblad*, April 20, 1982.
6. The unusual way of abbreviating with full stops in between each capital letter was the group's own way of abbreviating its name. In Norwegian there is no association with the English word *sin*.
7. Notis Øyvind Solberg, KMV, "Rundbrev 9", (Kampanjen Mot Verneplikt, November 1984), p. 4. The Norwegian authorities did not keep track of the number of total resisters, because the department of justice which was responsible for all cases regarding conscientious objectors simply considered them to be like any other conscientious objectors. Thus, KMV's numbers are the most reliable

information available. However, it is possible that there were total resisters whom KMV did not have contact with and there is a potential risk that KMV exaggerated the numbers of people they were in contact with.

8. KMV, "Rundbrev 16", (Kampanjen Mot Verneplikt, February 1986), p. 14.
9. See Chapter 6 in Sørensen, *Humorous Political Stunts*: *Nonviolent Public Challenges to Power*.
10. Gene Sharp uses the term jail-in about various ways of seeking imprisonment: to fill the jails, to refuse to leave on bail or (as in this case) to seek imprisonment in solidarity with someone already imprisoned. Gene Sharp, *The Politics of Nonviolent Action* (Boston: Porter Sargent, 1973). pp. 418–419. KMV called this a *røm-inn*, a literal translation of which would be an *escape-in*. The English term *jail-in* does not really cover the meaning of trying to escape but doing it the wrong way.
11. Interview with Jørgen Johansen and Øyvind Solberg, January 31, 2013.
12. Erik H. Sønstelie and Bjørn Aslaksen, "Sett Oss I Fengsel", [Put us in prison] *VG*, June 24, 1983.
13. Gunnar Fortun, "Rømning—Feil Vei", [Escaping—wrong way] *Arbeiderbladet*, June 24, 1983.
14. Åsne Berre Persen and Jørgen Johansen, *Den Nødvendige Ulydigheten* (Oslo: FMK, 1998). p.147. Several of the cases in connection with the actions done by the total resisters were "henlagt på grunn av bevisets stilling", as it is called in Norwegian. In Norwegian, a literal translation is not "lack of evidence"; instead, it indicates that something is not right about the evidence. When the prosecutor dismisses a case for "lack of evidence", the accused cannot appeal this decision. The alternative decision for the prosecution, which would have been the correct thing to do in this case since there was plenty of evidence in the form of witnesses and written confessions, would have been to decide on a "waiver of prosecution" (påtaleunnlatelse). This is the term when the prosecutor still thinks the accused is guilty, but does not expect to be able to win the case. In cases of "waiver of prosecution", the accused can demand to have a trial in order to clear

his or her name. KMV would have enjoyed the possibility of appealing such a waiver of prosecution and the attention it would bring.
15. KMV, "Rettsal 8 Sprenges", (1983).
16. Gunnar Fortun, "Spilte Aktor", [Played prosecutor] *Arbeiderbladet*, September 19, 1983.
17. For details about the media coverage, see Chapter 6 in Sørensen, *Humorous Political Stunts*: *Nonviolent Public Challenges to Power*.
18. Tormod Haugstad, "Her Blir Dommeren Lurt Av Falsk Aktor", [Here the judge is fooled by fake prosecutor] *Dagbladet*, September 20, 1983.
19. Aftenposten, "Falsk Aktor Og Impliserte Politianmeldt", [False prosecutor and implicated reported to the police] *Aftenposten*, September 21, 1983.
20. Terje Alfsen, "Report", (1983).
21. In Norwegian, the names for these laws are "straffeloven" and "domstolloven".
22. Conrad Clementsen, "Anmeldelse", (1983).
23. KMV, "Rundbrev 6", (Kampanjen Mot Verneplikt, May 1984), p. 6. Interview with Jørgen Johansen and Øyvind Solberg, January 31, 2013.
24. Aftenposten, "Falsk Aktor Og Impliserte Politianmeldt".
25. See Chapter 6 in Sørensen, *Humorous Political Stunts*: *Nonviolent Public Challenges to Power*.
26. Carole Roy, *The Raging Grannies*: *Wild Hats*, *Cheeky Songs*, *and Witty Actions for a Better World* (Montréal: Black Rose Books, 2004). pp. 1, 59–63; L. M. Bogad, "Carnivals against Capital: Radical Clowning and the Global Justice Movement", *Social Identities* 16, no. 4 (2010). Amber Day, *Satire and Dissent*: *Interventions in Contemporary Political Debate* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2011). Chapter 5. Janjira Sombutpoonsiri, "The Use of Humour as a Vehicle for Nonviolent Struggle: Serbia's 1996-7 Protests and the *Otpor* (Resistance) Movement" (PhD Thesis, La Trobe University, 2012), p. 260.
27. For a detailed study of the Billionaires and their history, see Angelique Haugerud, *No Billionaire Left Behind*: *Satirical Activism in America* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2013).

28. Haugerud, *No Billionaire Left Behind*: *Satirical Activism in America*: p. 183.
29. Interview with Jørgen Johansen and Øyvind Solberg, January 31, 2013.
30. This limitation was pointed out by Johansen himself. Interview with Jørgen Johansen and Øyvind Solberg, January 31, 2013.
31. The Swedish total resister Ulf Norenius was the first KMV participant to apply to the European Commission of Human Rights at the Council of Europe. His argument was that his total resistance was treated differently than that of the Jehovah's Witnesses because they were automatically exempted from both compulsory military service and substitute service in Sweden (this was not the case in Norway). Norenius's case was dismissed by the commission which found that membership in Jehovah's Witnesses was convincing evidence that someone held strong religious beliefs preventing him from performing any compulsory service. According to the commission, no similar evidence could be found in other cases, and the Swedish state's need for conscripts was reason enough to send non-religious total resisters to prison.
32. European Commission of Human Rights, "Decision of the Commission as to the Admissibility Application No. 10600/83 by Jørgen Johansen against Norway", in *10600/83* (Strasbourg1985). The "European Convention on Human Rights" is the short version of the name. The full name is "Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms". Johansen's original court hearing had occurred in April 1982. After that, he appealed to the Supreme Court in Norway, but the case was dismissed in November of the same year.
33. European Commission of Human Rights, "Decision of the Commission as to the Admissibility Application No. 10600/83 by Jørgen Johansen against Norway".
34. Council of Europe, "European Convention on Human Rights", 1950.
35. European Commission of Human Rights, "Decision of the Commission as to the Admissibility Application No. 10600/83 by Jørgen Johansen against Norway".

36. Articles from Aftenposten and VG reprinted in KMV, "Rundbrev 11", (Kampanjen Mot Verneplikt, April 1985), pp. 13–14.
37. The decision is mentioned on the front page of KMV, "Rundbrev 11", and refers to a letter from the prime minister's secretary of information.
38. Alf Bjarne Johnsen, "Fengsel for Totalnekter?", [Prison for total resister?] *VG*, March 16, 1985. Interview with Jens Jensen April 2013.
39. European Commission of Human Rights, "Decision of the Commission as to the Admissibility Application No. 10600/83 by Jørgen Johansen against Norway", p. 23.
40. Already in 1982, KMV had raised a case against the state, but the case was dismissed by the court because no individual total resister was named. Aftenposten, "Vernepliktsnektere Til Sak Mot Staten", [Draft refusers file charges against the State] *Aftenposten*, January 9, 1982.
41. KMV, "Rundbrev 17", (Kampanjen Mot Verneplikt, October 1986), p.3.
42. Interview with Jørgen Johansen and Øyvind Solberg, January 31, 2013.
43. KMV, "Rundbrev 18", (Kampanjen Mot Verneplikt, 1987), p.2.
44. KMV, "Rundbrev 30", (Kampanjen Mot Verneplikt, February 1990), p.14.
45. See, for instance, Brian Martin's work on the problems with using official channels, including the courts in Brian Martin, *Justice Ignited*: *The Dynamics of Backfire* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007). Another source is Thane Rosenbaum, *The Myth of Moral Justice*: *Why Our Legal System Fails to Do What's Right*, 1st ed. (New York: HarperCollins, 2004).
46. Lovdata, "Lov 1965-03-19 Nr 03: Lov Om Fritaking for Militærtjeneste Av Overbevisningsgrunner [Militærnekterloven]", http://lovdata.no/all/hl-19650319-003.html.
47. For details about this process, see Chapter 6 in Sørensen, *Humorous Political Stunts*: *Nonviolent Public Challenges to Power*.
48. This is called a *Norsk Offentlig Utredning* (*NOU*) in Norwegian.

49. Justiskomiteen, "Innst O. Nr. 75. Innstilling Fra Justiskomiteen Om Lov Om Endringer I Lov 19 Mars 1965 Nr 3 Om Fritaking for Militærtjeneste Av Overbevisningsgrunner Og Militær Straffelov 22 Mai 1902 Nr 13", (June 8, 1990).
50. Forhandlinger, "Forhandlinger I Odelstinget Nr. 28. Sak Nr. 7.Innstilling Fra Justiskomiteen Om Lov Om Endringer I Lov Av 19. Mars 1965 Nr 3 Om Fritaking for Militærtjeneste Av Overbevisningsgrunner Og Militær Straffelov Av 22. Mai 1902 Nr 13. (Innst O. Nr. 75, Jf Ot.Prp. Nr 35)", (June 11, 1990). There were several reasons for the delay; see Chapter 6 in Sørensen, *Humorous Political Stunts*: *Nonviolent Public Challenges to Power*.
51. Justis- og politidepartementet [Department of Justice and Police], "Ot Prp Nr 35 (1989-1990) Om Lov Om Endringer I Lov 19 Mars 1965 Nr 3 Om Fritaking for Militærtjeneste Av Overbevisningsgrunner Og Militær Straffelov 22 Mai 1902 Nr 13", ed. Justis- og politidepartementet [Department of Justice and Police] (March 2, 1990).
52. Ot. prp. 35 did not mention that there was a dissenting vote in Eidsivating Lagmansrett when the appeal case was heard, in spite of the fact that dissenting votes are usually considered important when laws are changed.
53. Justis- og politidepartementet [Department of Justice and Police], "Ot Prp Nr 35 (1989-1990) Om Lov Om Endringer I Lov 19 Mars 1965 Nr 3 Om Fritaking for Militærtjeneste Av Overbevisningsgrunner Og Militær Straffelov 22 Mai 1902 Nr 13", p. 5.
54. The original Norwegian text uses the word *hensiktsmessig*.
55. For more information about these solidarity actions, see Chapter 6 in Sørensen, *Humorous Political Stunts*: *Nonviolent Public Challenges to Power*.
56. Interview with Jens Jensen April 2013. For more details about the interview, see Chapter 2 and 6 in Sørensen, *Humorous Political Stunts*: *Nonviolent Public Challenges to Power*.
57. Justis- og politidepartementet [Department of Justice and Police], "Ot Prp Nr 35 (1989-1990) Om Lov Om Endringer I Lov 19 Mars 1965 Nr 3 Om Fritaking for Militærtjeneste Av Overbevisningsgrunner Og Militær Straffelov 22 Mai 1902 Nr 13", p. 6.

58. Forhandlinger, "Forhandlinger I Odelstinget Nr. 28. Sak Nr. 7.Innstilling Fra Justiskomiteen Om Lov Om Endringer I Lov Av 19. Mars 1965 Nr 3 Om Fritaking for Militærtjeneste Av Overbevisningsgrunner Og Militær Straffelov Av 22. Mai 1902 Nr 13. (Innst O. Nr. 75, Jf Ot.Prp. Nr 35)". p. 405–406. A united justice committee had also supported the suggestion from the department of justice regarding the changes to §§19 and 20 with the remark that the practice of serving substitute service in prison was "unfortunate on principle" and continued "Even if forced service in prison is not imprisonment, the difference in reality is small for the person concerned". See Justiskomiteen, "Innst O. Nr. 75. Innstilling Fra Justiskomiteen Om Lov Om Endringer I Lov 19 Mars 1965 Nr 3 Om Fritaking for Militærtjeneste Av Overbevisningsgrunner Og Militær Straffelov 22 Mai 1902 Nr 13", p. 3.
59. See Annebrit Bertelsen, "Fred Ove Reksten Fri Igjen", [Fred Ove Reksten free again] *Klassekampen*, July 14, 1983. Terje Helsingeng, "Advokat Må I Fengsel", [Lawyer must go to prison] *VG*, September 12, 1985.
60. Forhandlinger, "Forhandlinger I Stortinget Nr. 192. Sak Nr. 3. Innstilling Fra Justiskomiteen Om Verneplikt. (Innst. S. Nr. 111, Jf. St. Meld. Nr. 70 for 1983-84)", (March 12, 1985).
61. KMV, "Rundbrev 13", (Kampanjen Mot Verneplikt, September 1985), p.2.
62. Notis Øyvind Solberg, KMV, "Rundbrev 9", p. 4.
63. KMV, "Rundbrev 16", p. 14.
64. Since Jensen's memories of the whole issue of total resistance were so vague, he did not remember anything about the numbers.
65. See also Majken Jul. Sørensen, "Humor as a Serious Strategy of Nonviolent Resistance to Oppression", *Peace & Change* 33, no. 2 (2008).

6

Dilemmas and Risks in Humorous Political Activism

Introduction

The previous chapters have mainly investigated the potential of humorous political stunts making nonviolent resistance to oppression and injustice more effective. However, although humour has a huge and largely unexplored potential, it is important to remember that this mode of communication also has its limitations. This chapter explores five possible risks for nonviolent activists experimenting with humour: First of all, there is an ever-present possibility that people who engage in humorous political stunts will not be perceived as serious about the issue. Second, there is a risk that humour can be misunderstood, and third, some activists consider it unwise to mix the humorous with the non-humorous. Fourth, there are some ethical considerations concerning the risk that ridicule might be experienced as abuse. Finally, it has been claimed that satire might make people disillusioned rather than encourage them to take action.

M.J. Sørensen, *Humour in Political Activism*,
DOI 10.1057/978-1-137-57346-9_6

Unserious About the Issue

The first potential risk with using humour in political activism is that audiences might consider that the activists are not serious about the political issue. Almost everyone I have asked about potential problems with using humour in activism responded that they see this a risk. One Ofog activist expressed concern about being seen as unserious and self-centred:

> We can be seen as unserious. Childish, silly, without anything important, sensible, or important to say. Exhibitionistic: People have thought that we want to "be seen", without any more aims or thoughts than that.[1]

The risk of not being taken seriously expressed in this quote appears real enough: one must expect part of the audience to respond as if they believe that the pranksters are just out to have fun themselves.

Ofog activists are, of course, not alone in experiencing this potential risk. In Day's analysis of the Billionaires, she includes a quote from a woman who prefers "honest" and straightforward protest. The quote that Day refers to was broadcast in an interview on national radio when the Billionaires were present at a Bush fundraiser:

> I think they're making a mockery out of it and it's a joke, and it's pretty embarrassing. It's confusing to children and it's confusing to a couple of adults here as well. And I have more respect for the people over there who are saying what they happen to feel. They dress normally. They don't have to come in costume and have a gimmick.[2]

There is no way of knowing how representative this woman's views were, but they reflect the need to be careful. However, much more research is needed about how audiences perceive humorous political stunts before one can conclude that audiences prefer rational ways of communicating. Some audience members may prefer rationality because it is more familiar or easier to ignore.

Gustav is an Ofog activist who cautioned against too much humour. He emphasised that it is important to show that one understands the issue one works with:

> And then I don't always think it is good to use humour. Sometimes it is good to show that you are a serious person who has read a lot and do this because you really believe in it, and can argue your case as well.[3]

Humour about any sensitive issue like torture, hunger and people's loss of life and livelihood should, of course, be approached carefully. There will probably always be people who consider black humour tasteless, but research about the use of humour in professions exposed to life and death indicates that black humour might be a way of coping with difficult issues.[4] Nevertheless, the most obscure and macabre might be best kept as internal jokes in order not to offend those whom activists want to protect. However, it also depends on how the black humour is performed. Before I started to investigate humorous political stunts, I was doubtful about the possibility for creating humour about civilian casualties in war. Nevertheless, I think Ofog's Reality AB is an inspiring example of black humour that brings attention to who gets killed in war, and I have met only one person who openly disapproved of it.

The risk of being considered tasteless is slightly different from being considered too silly, although the two are, of course, related. The risk of being considered someone just out to have fun probably increases if the audiences see costumes and other signs of "carnival" but do not understand the intended message and critique. Thus, part of the risk might be overcome by balancing the absurdities and carnivalesque outfits with a very clear political message. Then it will be more difficult to dismiss activists as childish and frivolous people who think only about their own joy.

The idea that those engaging in humorous and creative activism cannot be trusted to be serious about the issue is a consequence of the widespread and taken-for-granted dichotomy between the "humorous" and the "serious" discussed in Chapter 2, in which the logical outcome is that something humorous cannot be serious at the same time. However, humorous political stunts also derive their special qualities from this tension. Thus, activists who consider applying humorous political stunts in their campaigns will have to weigh the risk that part of the audience might not take them seriously against the potential benefits of using humour. Fear of being considered unserious is probably the reason why humour is not used more. Organisations and movements that have already established

ways of communicating with their potential audiences on the basis of rational arguments might simply find it too risky to experiment with humour. The *persistence of logical argument* is quite strong, even within a network like Ofog, which is more willing to experiment with humour than most other organisations.

Humour Can be Misunderstood

Another possible risk with using humour is that it might not be understood. In connection with Ofog's Vapenfadder campaign that recruited people to become the sponsor of a weapon produced in Sweden, the participant observation made it very clear how problematic it can be to communicate with irony. No matter how exaggerated a group thinks the irony is, there is always a risk that people misunderstand it because the clues are not clear enough.

Again, research on the Billionaires also provides an illustrative example. Angelique Haugerud writes that most passers-by who lingered for a little while realised that the performance was ironic. However, she also quotes two people who were not so sure:

> 'Is it a joke? I can't figure out if it's a joke' said a woman encountering the Billionaires for the first time at their 2004 tax day event outside New York City's central post office. A male passer-by at the same event at first wondered: 'But are they for or against Bush?'[5]

Likewise, the Raging Grannies have also found that irony can be extremely tricky. One granny told about a particular satirical song criticising the treatment of protesters. To her surprise, some people in the audiences thought the group actually meant that the government should spray demonstrators with pepper spray. To avoid this, she has come to the point where she steps out of character to announce that "this is from the point of view of the government, this is not what we believe".[6]

That humour is not understood the way the initiators intended it to be seems especially to be a potential problem with the technique of irony where the literal meaning is different from the intended mean-

ing. Previously, I mentioned how understanding irony requires what Linda calls "discursive communities", where people share an understanding with others about what things mean. All humorous techniques can potentially be misunderstood just as rational communication can be, but the ambiguity of humour and especially irony means that the potential for misunderstandings is a risk which is inevitably linked to this way of communicating. Irony is not "just" the opposite of what is said or done but something that "happens" in the tension between the people who initiate the irony, those who interpret it, the meaning which is stated as well as what is not stated.[7] Irony is based on the audience's moment of doubt about whether this is the actual meaning or not. For the prankster, the more cues one gives, the "rougher" the irony is and more likely that many people will get it. On the other hand, if there are just a few cues, the irony gets better because of the ambiguity, but at the cost of the irony going over the head of more people.[8] One possibility is, of course, to take the approach of the granny mentioned above and simply explain that "we don't really mean this", but it ruins the joke when it has to be explained. As with other potential risks with using humour, activists considering using humour will have to weigh the potential benefits against the risk of being misunderstood. The dynamic which is here discussed as a potential risk is directly related to the moment of doubt which many activists consider a great benefit of humour: that the uncertainty creates ambiguity, resulting in a "crack" where it is possible to reach people one could not reach otherwise or to reach them at a deeper level.

There are two potential sources for the misunderstandings. Sometimes the activists constructing humorous political stunts are simply not skilled enough in designing irony. This can be because they are not able to exaggerate thoroughly or present the absurdity convincingly; this was probably the case for the Vapenfadder campaign. This problem can be considerably reduced with practice and training without the political groups needing to develop the skills of professional entertainers in order to be funny.[9] The Billionaires had professional actors among their members who offered other Billionaires help with developing their characters and practicing poses and speech.[10]

The problem might also be that the irony is so sophisticated that it goes over the head of the intended audience. If it is based on references

that the general public are not aware of, they have no way of discovering the hidden meaning. Then the humorous political stunt risks becoming elitist, serving to show that "we are more clever than you" rather than engaging people in a debate about a political issue.[11] And if an ironic message is taken literally, the result might be that stereotypes are reinforced.[12] Ironists have to keep in mind that although they themselves are deeply concerned about an issue and know many facts and details, not everyone has the same concern. Additionally, when pranksters perform irony, they are already thinking in the humorous mode. In contrast, people who just happen to pass by when they are out shopping or on their way to work usually have their mind somewhere else, most likely in a non-humorous mode, and they might not have all details about an issue on the tip of their fingers.

If the goal is outwardly directed action and campaigning and if humour is one of the elements, it is important to consider beforehand how it will be understood and perceived by the intended audience. Generally, it is more difficult to create actions that others will understand than what most activists assume, no matter if they are humorous or not. Activists would probably benefit from researching these issues by asking members of the potential audience what they think and evaluate their campaigns instead of relying on their personal assumptions and speculations. However, there are also benefits to be gained from using humour internally when it comes to creating a culture of resistance, and as long as the internal humour does not obstruct the communication outwards it is hard to see any problems with internal humour.

Mixing the Humorous and Non-Humorous

A third dilemma when it comes to humour in political activism is to what degree and under what circumstances it can be combined with non-humorous campaign aspects. As we saw in the previous chapter, both Otpor and KMV successfully used a mix of humorous and non-humorous actions in their efforts to undermine the rule of Slobodan Milošević and change the Norwegian law on conscientious objection.

However, although this indicates that mixing the humorous with the non-humorous can be an effective strategy, for activists it is worth considering at what level this mix can take place. In KMV's activities, there was a clear distinction between the humorous political stunts and the cases where they took the Norwegian state to court. These events were separate in both time and space.

Ofog has experimented with combining the humorous and non-humorous much more closely. For instance, Reality AB took place side by side and partly mixed with non-humorous street theatre. However, during the interviews, one Ofog activist questioned whether this was a good strategy. Lisa stressed that humour is important for her own commitment to Ofog but that she would like Ofog to be more cautious about mixing different approaches, in particular for activities that take place simultaneously. We were talking about an idea for an ironic campaign that had come up during a workshop but was never carried out. Lisa first emphasised that there have to be enough resources in the form of time and energy to do it properly but then continued to talk about how mixing different strategies might be less efficient.

> … there should be energy to do it properly (…) I did not think that we should do it this year [2011], because we already had a campaign with one concept, and it could become very confusing to have an ironic campaign and a serious campaign… and that was how it was when we did Reality AB, that it became a little double in a way, that at the same time we also had a non-ironic campaign, and maybe that is not very strategic, we ought to become better at choosing a focus. But in itself, [ironic campaigns] are a very good idea.[13]

Here, Lisa reflected on what she considered the problems with mixing rational and humorous campaigns, comparing it to her memory of how Reality AB worked. She continued:

> I think absolutely that [Reality AB] worked very well as it was, I think it would have worked even better if we had just gone for that, (…) maybe it became a little half done, that someone got the idea and that we did not do it 100%. But it is always like that.[14]

The problem that not everyone commits 100% to a certain idea is not something that is peculiar to humorous political stunts. Since it is only a minority of groups that primarily rely on humour in their communication, the majority of groups are likely to change between the humorous and the non-humorous. And as long as "seriousness" (= the non-humorous) continues to be the norm, ideas for humorous campaigns will end up being a supplement to the norm. Thus, the problem that Lisa is pointing out is unlikely to disappear unless groups dare to say that this time we will try to let the humorous be the norm.

Lisa saw the potential that a humorous and non-humorous campaign about the same subject has in appealing to and reaching out to different audiences and suggested that campaigns can run parallel in time if it is not obvious that they originate from the same place.

> I think it can be difficult, but maybe it is possible to combine. It does not have to be very obvious that it is Ofog who does it, maybe Ofog runs a serious campaign, and then the ironic or upside down can just be there. It does not need to have any sender at all. Maybe we can reach different people that way. (…) It is difficult, because I really believe in the idea [of an ironic campaign], but I also believe in the idea of being serious (both laugh), (…) and I think that you have to choose, I really think you have to choose.[15]

In spite of Lisa's belief that ironic campaigns can be a useful tool, she still ended up stressing that she thinks it is important to choose and prefers that Ofog is cautious about mixing humorous and non-humorous approaches about the same issue.

Related to the issues that Lisa brought up is the problem with doing a humorous political stunt half-heartedly and mixing it with traditional protest. For activists who are used to "ordinary protest", it can be a challenge to leave all the usual symbols of protest behind (for instance, when participating in a supportive stunt). However, the result of a mix might be that neither the supportive stunt nor the ordinary protest symbols come across. Instead, the message one communicates is just confusing.

The Billionaires is an example of a group which worked actively on this issue (for instance, by insisting that it would be "awfully out of

character" for Billionaires to get arrested).[16] What was acceptable to wear as a Billionaire also changed with time: whereas Billionaires in 2000 could get away with using a rock-and-roll T-shirt if it was combined with a boa, this was "definitely forbidden for 2004 Billionaires".[17] However, as Haugerud describes, this created tensions within the organisation between those who aimed for the perfect, polished brand of the Billionaires and those who thought it important to build decentralised grassroots organisations.[18]

Ridicule Can be Experienced as Abuse

Another risk with humour is the potential ethical problem that ridicule might be experienced as abuse. If humorous intent can be reframed as abuse, a totally different discourse is in use than when something is considered to belong to the just-joking sphere.

In 2005, two scholars independent of each other published books about ethical considerations regarding laughter and ridicule. Michael Billig's *Laughter and Ridicule*: *Towards a Social Critique of Laughter* is written from the perspective of critical sociology and sets out to question common-sense beliefs that humour is necessarily positive and good.[19] *The Pleasure of Fools*: *Essays in the Ethics of Laughter* by Jure Gantar[20] takes a very different approach. His point of departure is philosophy about ethics. For Gantar, there is no question that some laughter is unethical, but he wants to investigate whether this is a characteristic of *all* laughter or whether it is possible to have constructive and inclusive laughter.[21] The sources for Gantar's investigations are various forms of classic literature—from Greek comedies to Oscar Wilde.

Gantar finds no shortage of people who throughout history have considered laughter unethical, and he writes that "Of all these different kinds of laughter the one that is most frequently associated with the unethical is satirical laughter".[22] Since much political humour involves satire, Gantar's findings are of interest. The reason satire is considered unethical is because its target is very often a real person, and satire is based on contempt for this person. No matter how much they deserve it, there is always someone who gets hurt by satire. As an example, Gantar

notes how Adolf Hitler was upset by Charlie Chaplin's movie *The Great Dictator*. However, Gantar emphasises that it is also possible to argue that satirical laughter is most ethical. Satire is social correction, and it corrects what is morally wrong.[23]

Gantar also recognises humour's subversive potential and thinks that it can be ethical to laugh at the oppressor.[24] He proceeds to see whether there will be any laughter at all in Utopia, when all social inequality has been abolished. He finds that the prospect for laughter is bleak in the perfect world that various authors have dreamed about.

Gantar's conclusion is both interesting and surprising. After he has carefully demonstrated how all types of laughter can potentially be unethical, he declares that he has found himself at "an epistemological dead end".[25] The problem is that ethical criticism of laughter either ends up censoring laughter or keeps looking for an innocent laughter that does not exist. He concludes that the subject of ethics "is incapable of dealing with laughter".[26] The reason is that ethical criticism does not have the capacity to distinguish between a joke and an insult; it will all look the same. So Gantar ends up concluding that "When we laugh, we should not care about offending. And when we investigate laughter critically, we should forget about ethics".[27]

Billig's approach to laughter and ridicule differs greatly from Gantar's since his starting point is not ethics but critical sociology. His aim is to question the taken-for-granted assumption that humour is something good and positive which is dominant in today's Western societies. He reminds his readers that much humour also serves to enforce social order through ridicule and mockery and that this aspect is a neglected area in studies of humour.[28] Billig is aware that humour can both disrupt and impose social order. However, in the tradition of critical sociology, his focus is the social control he thinks others have neglected and what appear to be contrary to dominant common-sense beliefs. Nevertheless, this one-sidedness becomes problematic because Billig almost ends up with the opposite one-sidedness. He makes generalisations from everyday ridicule which cannot be justified to apply to humorous political stunts as well.

Billig shows that the concept of *a good sense of humou*r as a positive character trait historically is a rather new phenomenon, which was first

used in the 1840s but did not become common until the 1870s. In his critical investigation, Billig also points out that contrary to common-sense impressions, the medical evidence on the benefits of humour is "weak and inconclusive."[29] He claims that the idea that humour helps us heal and prevents diseases, as stressed by many self-help books, is not based on solid evidence. Psychology's focus on the individual's capacity to handle stress and negative events by laughing and looking at what is positive is also problematic. Such a perspective of learning to live with whatever the problem is and get the best out of the circumstance is an implicit discouragement of struggles for social change.[30] The origin of many people's problems is not a lack of capacity to cope but their social position in an unfair and unequal world where wealth is the privilege of the few.

Previously, I mentioned Jerry point that humorous intent does not automatically mean that the audience agrees that something is humorous. Differing perceptions of the same situation are also a theme for Billig, who points out that. "one person's harmless bit of teasing will be another's cruelty".[31] This is most obvious when it comes to ridicule and mockery. In everyday interactions, few people are willing to admit that they ridicule and mock others. What the target considers inappropriate, the person who is responsible for it instead refers to as "friendly teasing". When someone is accused of mocking or ridicule during the interactions of daily life, many respond that no harm was meant or that they were "just joking".[32] Billig has named this response the *tease spray*, which the offending person can spray around her to cover up the bad smell of ridicule. Billig's arguments about how children learn this behaviour by being mocked and ridiculed by their own parents are convincing[33], and there is little doubt that the same "tease spray" is used by political activists. On the other hand, people exposed to ridicule do not have to laugh but can turn to what Billig calls *unlaughter*. Unlaughter is not the same at not laughing because one does not understand; it is a way of showing disapproval when others laugh.[34] Unlaughter easily becomes the target of ridicule.

Billig's focus on how ridicule maintains social order in daily life has led him to sound as if ridicule is always something morally problematic. He acknowledges that ridiculing a child as a form of discipline might be

considered a milder form of punishment than violence, but this is not discussed in relation to humour's rebellious potential.[35] If the example of the ridiculed child is transferred to the societal level, the equivalent would be that mocking would be better than a violent crackdown on protesters. Although he provides an example of a child ridiculing its parent, this is not related to an ethical discussion about the implications when a subordinate political group ridicules those in power.

If one insists on judging humour along ethical lines in spite of Gantar's conclusion that it is not possible, one point of departure that Gantar and Billig do not discuss is the position of those who initiate the humour. There is a huge difference between ridicule initiated by people in power aimed at a minority and ridicule that comes from people in a subordinate position directed towards those more powerful. An example of the first was the so-called Muhammad cartoons published by Danish *Jyllands-Posten* in 2005, when an established mainstream newspaper directed its satire towards a religious minority in Denmark. That is very different from humorous political stunts initiated by small activist groups and directed at powerful discourses and their representatives. When people in power try to use what Billig calls the "tease-spray" or the "just-joking spray", one can point out that they speak from a position of power and meet their mockery with unlaughter, at the same time as one can approve of ridicule which kicks upwards. Although the much-debated cartoons portraying the prophet Muhammad in *Jyllands-Posten* and French *Charlie Hebdo* might be defendable if one is concerned only about freedom of speech, they become problematic as soon as a power perspective is included. Since Muslims are marginalised in most of Europe, cartoons targeting Muslims as a group contribute to upholding established relations of power, not criticising those on top of the power pyramid.

However, although it is possible to make this distinction in principle, it might not be as easy in reality. It is rarely black and white who are subordinate vulnerable minorities and whom to consider representing positions of power. An employee at a multinational corporation might not share the views of the leadership, and an individual police officer might feel extremely vulnerable when surrounded by protesters, even when they are clowning.

The ridicule that clowns can initiate is one way to discuss the potential problem of ridicule being experienced as abuse. Although the police and soldiers on the ground are rarely what concerns the clown activists the most, relations with the police frequently become the major topic for rebel clowns. Through play and otherness, clowns present their friendliness and nonviolent intentions, but as soon as ridicule is added the whole affair becomes more ambivalent. Law enforcement officers respond to clowns in many different ways. The experience of Vera from Ofog is that her clown figure can be disarming, and this was her impression already when she was performing as a clown for the first time. She described how when she was in her role as a clown, the police that she interacted with became more relaxed. Her impression was that at first they were quite stiff but that once they understood that the clowns did not intend to do anyone any harm, they responded by moving in ways which they expected the clowns to imitate.[36]

In Chapter 4, I described the action in 2008 at Bofors's headquarters where three clowns "snuck" inside the enclosure. Vera, who was one of the clowns, experienced a change in the dynamic of the interaction with the police:

> And we had very much fun, and in the end the police started to interact with us and blow soap bubbles. When we imitated them they started to do funny things because they knew we would imitate them, and it became an interaction instead of an angry demonstration.[37]

To Vera, situations like this show something about what it is that clowns can do that other protesters cannot do and how disarming the clown figure can be:

> I experienced how big the difference can be between being a clown and an ordinary activist, and I thought it was really intense and cool. Not because it is very cool in itself to cross the enclosed area, but there is something very disarming with this figure, the symbol that the clown is.[38]

Lisa, an activist who observed this episode, viewed it as a little victory regarding space because the clowns managed to get a little further

than what was allowed. That victory felt important since the year before someone had been arrested and convicted just for being a few metres inside the enclosed area.[39] However, there is a limit to the clowns' ability to influence relations of power. Vera used the term *disarm* metaphorically to describe how the clowns charmed the police into a mutual recognition of each other as human beings. However, in spite of this "disarmament", the police literally remained armed and it is hard to imagine anything the clowns could have done to change that.

The challenge of space was mainly symbolic since the clowns themselves did not have any clear plans about what they wanted to do once they were inside. It was the crossing itself that was seen as a victory because it challenged the authority that the police were trying to uphold. Some people might consider this childish mischief, but in this context where the police were there to protect a big arms producer against nonviolent protest, and there was no obvious reason for having the restricted area exactly where it was placed, the challenging of space became an undermining of the rationality that the police were trying to uphold. By physically crossing the line of authority, the clowns showed that the location of the line was artificial and negotiable since some people could be there and others could not. By using an absurd humorous political stunt, they pointed towards the absurdity of the situation. It is this potential of radical clowning which has to be weighed against the risk that some police officers might feel abused by the ridicule of, for instance, their "authoritarian" body posture or their way of talking.

In several of the interviews, people from Ofog also commented on many different types of police reactions to clowns. During a civil disobedience action in the North of Sweden in 2011, a group of clowns were among the approximately 50 people who entered a restricted military area by walking on the main road which leads through the zone. Cars can go through but are not allowed to stop. The place had been declared off-limits to Ofog, but the handful of police had no chance of stopping the group. On the walk to the fence which separates the road from the military runway, these 50 people were escorted by only two police officers: a man walking and a woman driving the police car. During this five-kilometre walk, some of the clowns walked in the heels of this lonely policeman, sometimes one, sometimes three in a line, imitating his every

move. If he walked fast, the clowns walked fast; if he talked in his radio, the clowns talked in their make-believe radios. If he turned around to see what was going on, the clowns turned around as well. From the clown perspective, this was a game of "follow John", but it is not unlikely that these two police officers felt vulnerable under the circumstances even if this was a nonviolent direct action and the activists would not think about threatening them. My impression of the policeman's strategy for dealing with the clowns was that he seemed to ignore them to the extent possible and engage in conversations with the "civilian" protesters. Emma, who observed the episode, had the impression that "he thought it was quite comical".[40] To her, it looked like he tried to interact a bit with the clowns and smiled a little.

Johanna, from Ofog, has not been close to the police herself as a clown but has observed the various responses to clowns: "The police laugh, and I think it is very difficult not to do that. However, I have also seen police who did not dare to laugh".[41]

As Johanna interpreted the police, most of them could not help but laugh, and in her opinion those who did not laugh did not dare. An alternative interpretation is, of course, that they were just not amused.

Peter, an experienced clown, has the impression that police and military do not really know how to react to clowns. According to him, clowning creates uncertainty because they cannot react as they do with conventional protesters.

> I think there is such a liberty in the role of a clown. First of all, the limitlessness, what you can do as a person, it becomes more like play. I have noticed that police and soldiers do not really know how to meet clowns, they can't really behave as they usually do when they meet demonstrators. Instead they become a bit more cautious. They don't know exactly how to react, and therefore you can get away with more things than you usually would. It becomes a little less hostile.[42]

Peter has also had the experience that the police attempted to make the clowns become serious, asking them to stop clowning and being foolish. When I asked what he and the other activists did as a response, Peter painted a picture of the dilemma that absurd clowns pose to police who

know how to deal with rational protest but have little experience with absurdity:

> Peter (laughs): Then you just continue, that is the point. To be a clown is about giving those you meet a perspective on their own role, on how they react. So when I walk and pretend to be a soldier, and place myself next to a soldier then maybe they get a perspective. That is a part of the action as well, that you can reach to the human being in a different way. You go in as a clown and play either police or military or demonstrator, so everyone can see themselves in what they do.
>
> Majken: Have you seen any episodes where you have felt that break through the police role and reach the person who is behind it?
>
> Peter: That is difficult, because you never really know, actually. You feel that the police are uncomfortable, you can feel that. And then you have reached through in some way, because then they are not so certain in their role. Then you have kind of broken through, but it is difficult to see if there is any personal connection. But you feel that they must in some way reflect on how to react to this. And then you have reached across in some way.[43]

Peter thought it was difficult to know to what degree he and other clowns had connected with the persons behind the police role, but had the feeling they became uncomfortable and Peter interpreted the uncertainty as a kind of breakthrough. This is Peter's understanding of the situation, but to make someone uncertain who is usually sure of themselves and how to handle various situations is a big achievement from the clowning perspective. It is worth noting that Peter's experience is that when it comes to meeting clowns, confusion leads to less hostility. It is easy to imagine other situations where uncertainty would lead to more aggression.

When it comes to the relations with the police, both Larry and Paul in their writings about CIRCA mention many of the same things that Ofog activists have told me and that I observed. Clowning changes the dynamic of the interaction when the police are not sure how to react, and it is an attempt to reach the human being behind the uniform. Bogad explains how the clowns refuse to behave as "ordinary" protesters when they do not show fear or turn to anger:

> As the clowns greet the police as 'friends' and fail to either melt away in fear or raise the tension in anger, a shift in the paradigm and pattern of confrontation ensues. The true challenge is to stay 'in clown' even when conventional power relationships assert themselves.[44]

Other protesters told Routledge how clowning can diffuse tensions and reach out to the human being behind the uniform:

> Various protestors at the G8 protests told us that such tactics had helped diffuse tense situations between them and the security forces during the protests. Moreover, CIRCA clowning attempted to access the person behind the police uniform. During CIRCA operations, I witnessed police officers smiling and laughing in interaction with rebel clowns, and even mimicking the clown salute.[45]

Again, it is this potential benefit of creating moments of uncertainty and friendly relations which has to be considered in relation to the risk that some might experience the ridicule as abuse.

It is a challenge to sum up the authorities' reactions to clowns because so many factors are involved. There is the "big picture" about what type of action the clowns are involved in since it makes a major difference if the clowns participate in a big legal demonstration, an attempted counter-recruitment or a civil disobedience action. It also matters a great deal how much time is available during the encounter, what the activists are planning to do, and what instructions the police have received from their superiors. Adding to the complexity are the interactions at the individual level. Behind every clown and police officer is an individual who responds to micro signals from another individual—signals that might be intended or unintended and whose interpretation depends on how they are perceived. Clowns do not have to offend or ridicule; the episode from Colombia described in Chapter 3 used clowning to question militarism, but the film of the event does not show any indication of ridicule.

Several clowns have emphasised to me that it is not the people on the ground they want to confront but systems and people at the top of the hierarchies. Nevertheless, it is mainly those at the bottom of the hierarchy who are exposed to the clowns' mocking and ridicule of authoritative

body language and commands since the clowns usually do not have access to those at the top of the hierarchies. This creates a dilemma because there is a contradiction between what the clowns intend to achieve and what they are actually able to do. Although the clowning is directed at the role that police and military perform, it is the individual police officer or soldier who knows how the experience feels for them.[46] Some police officers might laugh or smile at the ridicule if they have enough critical self-distance, but they can also be genuinely offended.

From the ethical perspective, clowning raises many questions: Is it not better to have communicative clowns than angry and abusive shouting, even if the clowning includes ridicule and ambiguity? Is it ethically defensible that a few police officers might be offended by ridicule if the majority appear to take it all with a smile or even interact with the clowns? Could radical clowns establish rules of acceptable behaviour (although this sounds like an ideal topic for clown ridicule), which spell out what is acceptable and what is not? For instance, such rules could emphasise that ridicule should be directed at the role of the police officers, such as authoritative body language or their way of handing down orders, but not at more individual aspects (for instance, that someone has a big nose). Or one can take Vera's approach: give it a try with everyone but focus on the officers responding in a positive way and ignore the others.

The issue of radical clowning is one approach to discussing the role of ridicule. Another Ofog example which can illustrate the dilemmas happened in August 2011. Ofog participated in Stockholm's week-long pride festival, organised by the gay community as a way to celebrate and show pride in their sexuality. Also present was the Swedish military, Försvarsmakten, represented by men and women who are openly homosexual in the military. Under a banner saying "Openness—part of our reality",[47] Försvarsmakten had a stand used to promote the institution. This was a combination of the armed forces campaign slogan "Welcome to our reality" and the pride festival slogan of "openness".

Many Ofog activists are concerned with LBGTQ (lesbian, bisexual, gay, transgender, queer) rights and themselves identify as homosexual or queer persons. They wanted to protest against the presence of Försvarsmakten in the parade, referring to the parade's code of conduct that the parade is nonviolent. In their feminist analysis, these activists

in Ofog also think that being a feminist, one cannot at the same time endorse violent solutions to conflict.

During the parade through Stockholm which is part of the festival, Ofog activists carried posters formed as speech bubbles in cartoons with different expressions referring to the "real reality" of working in the military. One bubble said "Here I walk to protect my human rights while my job is about abusing other's human rights" while others said "I'm just as good at killing as straight soldiers", "My job kills", "I think that some people's lives are worth more than others'", "Abusing other people's rights is part of my reality", "Försvarsmakten's reality = violence and repression" and "I think that Swedish children are worth more than Afghan children". These speech bubbles were carried next to the uniformed soldiers to make it look like their statements.

Less than a month after the action, I did a phone interview with one of the participants, Sofia. She told me that they were about 10 people who all consider themselves part of the radical queer movement and that it was all planned while they were at the festival when they saw Försvarsmakten's stall and realised they were there. The activists were not aiming at a lot of publicity and did not send a press release before the action.

When they wrote the text for the different speech bubbles, they wanted to focus on two things: that the military uses its participation in Pride for *pinkwashing* its image and that its reality is not openness but to kill and to uphold injustice. Sofia used the term pinkwashing as a way of describing the armed forces' double standards. Apparent tolerance for LBGTQ persons creates positive associations at the same time as the discourse of militarism stands in stark contrast to radical LBGTQ values.[48] The participants in the action thought that being queer has to do with a lot more than policies about sexual identity. The group wanted to show that there is no consensus within the LBGTQ movement about the presence of Försvarsmakten in the parade. Therefore, Sofia was also pleased to see that the action has led to internal debate within the LBGTQ movement.

While they prepared the speech bubbles, the activists did reflect that some of the statements were kind of harsh but, they concluded, all true. Looking back, Sofia comments that there was probably a difference between those that said "I" and those that said "my job". Although she

did not say it explicitly, this is a reference to the nonviolence principle of distinguishing between a person and the role she performs.

Sofia explained that the action was not intended to be funny in the sense of making anyone laugh, and she is not certain what words are the best to describe what they aimed at doing, but she thought humour, and not laughter, was part of it. She also saw it as a mockery of the military's intention to use this as an opportunity to present a positive image of themselves, and she thought it can be funny when that opportunity is thwarted. In this case, there is a difference between being there, where it was not humorous, and being part of an audience that hears about it later. Although I have met people who do not consider this humorous at all, others have smiled when they saw the photos from the parade. Thus, this is a clear illustration of how important perspective is.

Returning to the model of humorous political stunts, this action is an example of a *corrective* stunt. Ofog presented an alternative version of how the soldiers speak about their job than what Försvarsmakten and the soldiers themselves would do. Ofog confronted their dominant discourse with a different perspective that aimed to dispute perceptions of what the reality of the armed forces is and should be. In contrast to many other performers of corrective stunts, Ofog did not sneak onto a stage to display the correction but did it openly in a way which could hardly be mistaken for being the soldiers' own statements. Through this direct confrontation, it also has some similarities with a provocative stunt.

Ofog's speech bubble action generated many different types of reactions. During the parade itself, the individual soldiers did what they could to ignore it. Afterwards, a spokesperson for the soldiers, Michael "Totte" Ekdahl, chair of the association for homosexual, bisexual and trans persons in Försvarsmakten (HoF), said they were going to report the activists to the police.[49] In an interview with a newspaper and in a subsequent opinion piece he wrote, he presented a very different perception of what was at stake than Sofia did. Without mentioning the critique of militarism, he said the individual soldiers felt hurt when opinions they did not have were attributed to them. This way, he moved the debate away from Ofog's intention of criticising an institution. Instead, he contextualised the action as an attack on individual homosexual soldiers who had already encountered much prejudice. He wrote:

> It is very cynical to pick on the most vulnerable in all groups. The activists have made a conscious decision to achieve maximal pain for HoF's participants. This way, they have "kicked" our work for openness for LBGT-persons in FM [Försvarsmakten, the Swedish military] back as well as turned the Pride concept "openness" to suspiciousness.[50]

Similar comments were made in blogs and comments to the articles. For example:

> And it is no problem to criticise the military in Sweden, but why have the bad taste to do it by picking on homosexuals and [transpersons] in this profession?[51]

Ekdahl was also suspicious of the motives of the Ofog activists. Instead of acknowledging this as a contribution to a debate about queer identity and militarism, he referred to their "conscious decision to achieve maximal pain". Such statements were also part of the comments: "Can one expect anything else? Left-wing activists have never put democracy especially high on the agenda".[52]

Different bloggers and comments to blogs as well as the news report expressed much criticism of the action. The main line of argument was that it is offensive towards the individual soldiers. Only the soldiers themselves can tell whether they felt personally hurt or not, but there was nothing in the speech bubbles that criticised the sexual identity of the soldiers. Instead, the bubbles offered a critique of the military and war and referred to the potential consequences of Swedish soldiers' participation in the war in Afghanistan. The soldiers were targets because they were soldiers, not because of their sexual identity. They were wearing their uniforms and carried a banner that promoted the training to become an officer in the armed forces. In a response to the debate article mentioned above, Cattis Laska from Ofog wrote how she considered anti-militarist work an integrated part of the queer struggle. She finished by saying:

> Finally: War kills, LBGTQ-military personnel as well as civilians, and then it does not matter what sexual identity or gender identity the soldier who carries the deadly weapon or the officer that gives the order has.[53]

A year later, just before the next Stockholm Pride, Ofog's action from 2011 drew attention again. The action became part of a debate about who has the right to define "queer" and whether the LBGTQ struggle should be limited to the rights of sexual minorities or implies a much broader political focus that also can question capitalism and militarism.[54]

Under the heading "The whole parade became one long torment", one of the officers tells about how he experienced the episode. He filed a report to the police, but the prosecutor dismissed the case because he did not think the soldier had been the victim of any crime. However, in contrast to Ekdahl, who wrote about the events the year before, this officer acknowledged Ofog's intentions to criticise militarism. When asked whether he intended to participate in the parade again this year, he said:

> It will not destroy my intention and my commitment to show who I am. It is a little like an "antiprotest", throw dirt on me, but I walk anyway. Maybe because I know they have an agenda that is not about the LBGTQ-question but about the existence of the armed forces.[55]

In an interview with the same newspaper, Kristina Johansson from Ofog again emphasised why Ofog did this:

> For us it is obvious that Pride is political. If the armed forces are there it is political in a certain way. That is what we think you have to start talking about. That it is not just a family party, that the questions are political in many different regards.[56]

Internally in Ofog, the action has also generated debate, both about tactics and about respect for individuals. To some people, this was simply too much of an exposure of individuals. Others who participated in the debate used a different type of argumentation: They did not object to exposing soldiers in uniforms this way; militarism is militarism no matter what sexual orientation the soldiers have. But from a strategic point of view, they thought the action unwise since it was too easy for opponents to reframe Ofog's intentions. They worried about the debate focusing on discrimination of LBGTQ persons instead of on militarism.

Sofia was not surprised to see that Ekdahl tried to frame this as an attack on individuals and their sexuality. When asked whether she thought anything should have been done differently, her spontaneous reaction was "no". It was good that it generated debate within Ofog and the LBGTQ movement, and she is satisfied with the action.

The speech bubble action at the pride parade is the most obvious example where the target explicitly said that they experienced this as abuse and where also people within Ofog reacted. Although the activists who participated in the action wanted to expose the consequences of militarism and the presence of the soldiers in the pride parade, the soldiers who were targeted experienced it as an attack on them as individuals, raising the question of ethics.

Although Ofog's speech bobble action at the pride parade is an extreme example, other humorous political stunts have also included elements of ridicule. The judge in the case where KMV turned up with a fake prosecutor was quoted in a newspaper as saying "I was shocked when I heard what had happened", and he made his superior file a report to the police.[57] He did not explicitly say that he felt abused, but it is not unreasonable to assume that at least some people would have felt that way under similar circumstances. KMV was targeting the court system, not an individual, in order to expose the system as a farce. Nevertheless, this judge, like the soldiers in the pride parade, became the direct victim, raising the question of whether Ofog and KMV behaved unethically. In both cases, it was people in subordinate positions who ridiculed those they saw as representatives of powerful institutions: the court system and the military. Nevertheless, those who initiate a stunt cannot dictate the emotional responses of others.

Cynicism Might Make People Disillusioned

Perhaps the most fundamental critique that has been directed against satire and irony is that they are cynical and make people disillusioned. They are good at criticising everything and everyone but do not present any alternatives.[58] If this were correct, it would be counterproductive for political activists to use these techniques. However, this is a misreading of much satire and irony. Rebecca Higgie has shown how one can make a distinction

between cynicism and kynicism when discussing satire. Kynicism is a notion that comes from ancient Greek philosophy, and Higgie says that "Kynicism is cynicism without the latter's nihilistic nature".[59] Whereas cynicism criticises without seeing any hope for change, "Kynicism also questions and doubts, but maintains that there is a better way of doing things".[60] Although the satire does not provide any alternatives to the prevailing political order, under the surface of the irony, a kynical approach finds that not all truth is said to be non-existent, just the particular truth of the prevailing order.[61] When it comes to the satire and irony in humorous political stunts, it is usually quite clear that the initiators are committed to improving and not just criticising. It is difficult to accuse the grassroots groups behind most of the stunts presented here of being cynical. The risk is much greater for professional comedians, although many of them have a direction in their social critique.

Most of the humorous political stunts do not criticise everything and everyone. Some might be rather diffuse in their critique and not provide any suggestions for alternatives, such as absurd stunts by the Polish Orange Alternative and the radical clowns. But many stunts are carried out by groups that also work in the non-humorous mode on specific issues they care deeply about. Netwerk Vlaanderen, which organised the ACE bank hoax, had worked with the issue of ethical investment for several years before the stunt. KMV was aiming its critique at one particular paragraph in the law on conscientious objection. In addition, several of the humorous political stunts directly or indirectly imply an alternative cause of action which includes a "solution". With ACE bank, it was quite clear that the solution for the banks being criticised would be to stop their investment in companies that profit from landmines and cluster monition. Ofog's adbusting of the military's recruitment efforts also suggested that people who have what it takes to have an opinion should join Ofog instead of the military. To claim that these groups are cynical would simply be wrong.

Conclusion

The risks discussed here are connected to the "nature" of humour—its ambiguity and double meanings. This makes the dilemmas and risks relevant to consider under all political circumstances. In addition, there are,

of course, particular risks associated with different political situations. While, for instance, KMV's jail-in and John Howard Ladies' Auxiliary Fan Club did not result in any severe reactions in the Norwegian and Australian democracies, it is not hard to imagine other political circumstances where authorities would have imprisoned the activists.

The potential risks with using humour vary a lot but also have something in common. Fears that humour might offend, be misunderstood or lead to a loss in the group's legitimacy are different from one another but all result in a *persistence of logical argument*. However, an investigation into the potential problems also revealed that some might be due to general organisational and planning aspects. When evaluating a humorous political action and deciding whether something similar should be repeated in the future, this might be worth taking into consideration.

The persistence of logical argument might also stem from the fact that subversive irony requires an intimate knowledge of dominant discourses—an intimacy that can also be considered complicity.[62] That is probably one reason why some political activists become uncomfortable when it comes to humour. To create irony is possible only if you know very well the language of what you want to ironise about. Hutcheon explains that there is an emotional element when it comes to producing and interpreting irony. Irony does not just say something about a certain topic; it also adds an emotion or an attitude towards it.[63] This emotional dimension might be problematic for activists concerned about being perceived as "serious".

With all the potential risks, activists considering using humour will have to weigh them against the potential benefits. Some of the risks might be reduced with careful planning and "ground rules" (for instance, about what can be legitimate targets of ridicule).

Ridicule might be experienced as abuse, but there is a perspective from which it is possible to make moral judgements: relative positions within systems of power. With such power lenses on, one might find it legitimate for political activists to ridicule dictators, make fun of leaders of multinational companies or humiliate police officers policing political protest. At the same time, it remains perfectly possible to condemn the same type of humour when it is directed towards religious minorities such as Jews and Muslims in Europe or vulnerable groups like beggars or homosexuals. However, even if one does not have any moral objections to

a particular humorous political stunt, it does not necessarily mean that it is a good strategic choice, since there are many other factors to take into consideration. Nevertheless, this power perspective is something to take into account when making a moral evaluation.

Notes

1. Written comment from workshop.
2. National Public Radio broadcast March 12, 2004, quoted in Amber Day, *Satire and Dissent*: *Interventions in Contemporary Political Debate* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2011). p. 181.
3. Interview September 2011.
4. Ruth M. Strudwick, Stuart J. Mackay, and Stephen Hicks, "Cracking Up?", *Synergy* (2012); Katherine van Wormer and Mary Boes, "Humor in the Emergency Room: A Social Work Perspective", *Health* & *Social Work* 22, no. 2 (1997).
5. Angelique Haugerud, "Satire and Dissent in the Age of Billionaires", *Social Research* 79, no. 1 (2012): p. 154.
6. Carole Roy, *The Raging Grannies*: *Wild Hats*, *Cheeky Songs*, *and Witty Actions for a Better World* (Montréal: Black Rose Books, 2004). p. 62.
7. Linda Hutcheon, *Irony's Edge*: *The Theory and Politics of Irony* (London: Routledge, 1995). pp. 12–13.
8. Hutcheon, *Irony's Edge*: p. 152.
9. Day points towards this risk in Day, *Satire and Dissent*.
10. Angelique Haugerud, *No Billionaire Left Behind*: *Satirical Activism in America* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2013). pp. 137–142.
11. Ronald N. Jacobs and Philip Smith, "Romance, Irony, and Solidarity", *Sociological Theory* 15, no. 1 (1997). p. 74.
12. Jacobs and Smith, "Romance, Irony, and Solidarity", p. 74; Day, *Satire and Dissent*.
13. Interview September 2011.
14. Interview September 2011.
15. Interview September 2011.

16. Haugerud, *No Billionaire Left Behind*: *Satirical Activism in America*: p. 17.
17. Haugerud, *No Billionaire Left Behind*: *Satirical Activism in America*: p. 133.
18. Haugerud, *No Billionaire Left Behind*: *Satirical Activism in America*: p. 122.
19. Michael Billig, *Laughter and Ridicule*: *Towards a Social Critique of Laughter* (London: Sage, 2005).
20. Jure Gantar, *The Pleasure of Fools*: *Essays in the Ethics of Laughter* (London: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005).
21. Gantar, *The Pleasure of Fools*: pp. 10, 14–16.
22. Gantar, *The Pleasure of Fools*: p. 32.
23. Gantar, *The Pleasure of Fools*: p. 48.
24. Gantar, *The Pleasure of Fools*: pp. 92–93.
25. Gantar, *The Pleasure of Fools*: p. 158.
26. Gantar, *The Pleasure of Fools*: p. 158.
27. Gantar, *The Pleasure of Fools*: p. 158.
28. Billig, *Laughter and Ridicule*: *Towards a Social Critique of Laughter*: pp. 2–3.
29. Billig, *Laughter and Ridicule*: *Towards a Social Critique of Laughter*: p. 21.
30. Billig, *Laughter and Ridicule*: *Towards a Social Critique of Laughter*: p. 32.
31. Billig, *Laughter and Ridicule*: *Towards a Social Critique of Laughter*: p. 8.
32. Billig, *Laughter and Ridicule*: *Towards a Social Critique of Laughter*: p. 25.
33. Billig, *Laughter and Ridicule*: *Towards a Social Critique of Laughter*: pp. 196–198.
34. Billig, *Laughter and Ridicule*: *Towards a Social Critique of Laughter*: p. 192.
35. Billig, *Laughter and Ridicule*: *Towards a Social Critique of Laughter*: p. 205.
36. Interview September 2011.
37. Interview September 2011.
38. Interview September 2011.

39. Interview September 2011.
40. Interview September 2011.
41. Interview June 2011.
42. Interview September 2011.
43. Interview September 2011.
44. L. M. Bogad, "Carnivals against Capital: Radical Clowning and the Global Justice Movement", *Social Identities* 16, no. 4 (2010): p. 550.
45. Paul Routledge, "Toward a Relational Ethics of Struggle: Embodiment, Affinity, and Affect", in *Contemporary Anarchist Studies*: *An Introductory Anthology of Anarchy in the Academy*, ed. Randall Amster, et al. (New York: Routledge, 2009), p. 88.
46. As part of the research project, I contacted the police in the north of Sweden and asked for an interview with the police officers who had been present during the *War Starts Here* action in 2011. However, they never responded to the request, so the only information about their reactions which is available is how participants in Ofog perceived the situation.
47. Ofog, "Ofog Visar Försvarsmaktens Verklighet I Prideparaden", http://www.ofog.org/nyheter/ofog-visar-f%C3%B6rsvarsmaktens-verklighet-i-prideparaden.
48. The term pinkwashing is also used when the Israeli government uses its tolerance for LBGTQ persons to promote itself abroad to audiences that might be critical of the occupation of Palestine; see Sarah Schulman, "Israel and 'Pinkwashing'", *New York Times*, November 22, 2011. The Breast Cancer fund, which uses pink ribbons to create awareness about breast cancer, writes: "Pinkwasher: (pink'-wah-sher) noun. A company or organization that claims to care about breast cancer by promoting a pink ribbon product, but at the same time produces, manufactures and/or sells products that are linked to the disease". Breast Cancer Action, "Before You Buy Pink", http://think-beforeyoupink.org/?page_id=13.
49. John Henzlert, "Soldater Kränkta under Prideparaden", [Soldiers offended during pride parade] *http://www.svd.se*, August 7, 2011.
50. Micael "Totte" Ekdahl, "Cyniskt Angrepp I Prideparaden", [cynical attack in the pride parade] *etc.se*, August 11, 2011.
51. Reader's comment to Ekdahl, "Cyniskt Angrepp I Prideparaden".

52. Reader's comment to Ekdahl, "Cyniskt Angrepp I Prideparaden".
53. Cattis Laska, "Krigsmotstånd Central Del Av Queer Kamp", [War resistance central part of queer struggle] *etc.se*, August 18, 2011.
54. Peter Letmark, "Begreppet Queer Skapar Allt Större Oenighet", [The notion queer creates greater disagreements] *dn.se*, July 26, 2012.
55. Peter Letmark, "'Hela Paraden Blev En Enda Lång Pina'", ["The whole parade became one long torment"] *dn.se*, July 25, 2012. The newspaper has added to the article that the person who was interviewed died a few days after the article was published. There have been many rumours about the cause of his death. Accusations have been made that Ofog's speech bubble action drove him to commit suicide. For instance, this insinuation was made on January 28, 2013, in a comment on Ofog's Facebook page.
56. Dagens Nyheter, "Ofog Svarar: 'Självklart Är Pride Politiskt'", [Ofog responds "Of course Pride is political"] *dn.se*, July 25, 2012.
57. Tormod Haugstad, "Her Blir Dommeren Lurt Av Falsk Aktor", [Here the judge is fooled by fake prosecutor] *Dagbladet*, September 20, 1983.
58. For instance, this is discussed in Jacobs and Smith, "Romance, Irony, and Solidarity".
59. Rebecca Higgie, "Kynical Dogs and Cynical Masters: Contemporary Satire, Politics and Truth-Telling", *Humor*: *International Journal of Humor Research* 27, no. 2 (2014): p. 185.
60. Higgie, "Kynical Dogs and Cynical Masters: Contemporary Satire, Politics and Truth-Telling", p. 185.
61. Higgie, "Kynical Dogs and Cynical Masters: Contemporary Satire, Politics and Truth-Telling".
62. Hutcheon, *Irony's Edge*: p. 30.
63. Hutcheon, *Irony's Edge*: p. 39.

7

Humorous Political Stunts and Theory of Nonviolent Action

Introduction

Humorous political stunts are part of the long tradition of nonviolent action. To understand the dynamics of the humorous political stunts better, Stellan Vinthagen's conceptual exploration of nonviolent action, *A Theory of Nonviolent Action*: *How Civil Resistance Works*, is a good place to start. Vinthagen combines Gandhi's and Gene Sharp's insights on nonviolence with modern social theories developed by Jürgen Habermas, Erving Goffman, Pierre Bourdieu and Michel Foucault.[1] With this combination, he takes nonviolent theory a major step further in understanding it to be a "multi-dimensional rationality". Nonviolence is a combination of resistance and construction, expressed through four aspects which he calls *dialogue facilitation*, *power breaking*, *utopian enactment*, and *normative regulation*. Together they explain the unique rationality of nonviolent action as a tool for change in a way which takes critique of Gandhi and Sharp seriously. Here, I will use Vinthagen's theory to analyse how humour can contribute to a nonviolent action, and investigate its limitations.

M.J. Sørensen, *Humour in Political Activism*,
DOI 10.1057/978-1-137-57346-9_7

Nonviolent Action

Nonviolent action has been practiced for centuries in struggles for justice, political rights and freedoms; for the protection of the environment and animals; and against foreign invasion and occupation. It has been used to bring down dictators, challenge liberal democratic government and much, much more. Academically the study of nonviolent action became part of peace studies, but it has also been studied in many other disciplines, such as political science and sociology.[2]

Nonviolent action is an attempt to overcome violence and repression without using any violence yourself.[3] This definition, developed by Vinthagen, has two aspects, which he calls *against-violence* and *without-violence*. To take action without using violence (without-violence) does not by itself make it nonviolence. Most everyday activities are without-violence, only occasionally do people take action to prevent, stop or confront violence committed by someone else (against-violence). Nonviolent actions can take many different forms; some well-known examples are strikes, boycotts and acts of civil disobedience. Frequently, nonviolent action is considered to be extra-parliamentary and non-routine, but that is not a requirement in this definition.

Many misunderstandings of what nonviolent action is exist.[4] For one thing, it is a common mistake to associate nonviolence with passivity and avoidance of conflict. But with Vinthagen's definition, nonviolent action is about confronting various forms of violence. Nonviolent methods are also used to escalate and intensify conflicts in order to make violence and repression visible to others and force them to take a stand.[5]

Studies of nonviolent action can be divided into two main categories: those who treat it as a technique in a struggle for change, sometimes referred to as *pragmatic nonviolence*, and those who consider it a way of life, called *principled nonviolence*.[6] However, this should be understood as a spectrum with two opposite poles rather than as distinct categories. There are a growing number of books and articles about both these approaches. Here, I will just briefly touch on a few themes from both perspectives which are relevant when discussing humorous political stunts as a form of nonviolent action.

More than anyone else, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi made the idea of nonviolent struggle available to the world when he led the struggle for an independent India against the British colonial power in what he called his "experiments with truth".[7] The central concept in Gandhi's writing is *satyagraha*, which is often taken to mean *nonviolent struggle*. However, his ideas reach much further than what many other writers mean when they use this term. Satyagraha comes from Sanskrit and loosely translates as *soul force* or *truth force*. For Gandhi, satyagraha consists of three parts: truth (*satya*), nonviolence (*ahimsa*) and self-suffering (*tapasaya*). All three are closely related and combined they are the basis of satyagraha. Truth is closely connected to God, and only God knows the whole and full Truth (with a capital T). All people should strive to know Truth but will only ever find what they believe to be truth (with a lowercase t). However, it is their obligation to fight for this truth but remain humble towards the possibility that they are wrong. Acknowledging the possibility that people can be mistaken leads Gandhi to nonviolence, ahimsa. If one person in her fight for her truth kills someone else, she has denied that person the possibility to be right and the possibility that she herself is wrong. If it later turns out that she is mistaken and the dead person was right, it is not possible to apologise and revive the person. This possibility remains open if she struggles for her truth with nonviolent means. If she turns out to be wrong, she and the people she struggles against have together gotten one step closer to Truth.[8] Although Gandhi's concept of satyagraha was based on his faith, it is not necessary to be religious in order to acknowledge that no one knows the whole and full Truth.

The means to reach towards Truth is to strive for ahimsa, which means *nonviolence* or *love*. According to Vinthagen, ahimsa is a collective non-egoistic self-realisation (not to be confused with Western ideas about individual self-realisation). The collective aspect is that one person's suffering is connected to other people, and the collective self-realisation is concerned with diminishing the amount of suffering and violence in the world. For Gandhi, it is not possible to reach the truth as long as other people suffer. Therefore, ahimsa is about much more than avoiding the use of violence oneself: it also includes opposing the violence of others. This part of Gandhian thought is central in Vinthagen's definition of nonviolence. The total absence of violence is an unachievable goal, but

what is realistic is an eternal striving towards reducing violence. In the struggle against violence, suffering is inevitable, which leads to the third aspect of satyagraha, self-suffering, *tapasya*. The idea of self-suffering is foreign to many but has nothing to do with masochism. I will return to this when I show how Vinthagen uses the concept.

Gandhi did not distinguish between the means and the ends of a goal; each depends on the other. He is supposed to have said that "If you take care of the means, the ends will take care of themselves", but there is no source for this quote. Nevertheless, it summarises his ideas about nonviolence nicely. If people use nonviolence (ahimsa) to reach their goals, the result will be marked by that approach.

Another aspect of Gandhi's thought is the idea of "constructive work". Parallel with the struggle against violence and injustice, those struggling for nonviolent social change should also work to build the world they want to see. Gandhi's campaigns during the Indian independence struggle were almost always *for* something and not just against it. This is an aspect of nonviolence which is almost absent in the technical approach to nonviolent action.

When discussing power and resistance in Chapter 2, I mentioned Gene Sharp and his consent theory of power. In the 1950s, he set out to prove that nonviolence was not just an option for committed pacifists who based their choice on strong moral principles, as Gandhi had done, but an effective strategy which everyone could use in their struggles for freedom and justice. Sharp based his work on what others had done previously, but he was the first to develop systematic, academic thinking about nonviolence. His book *The Politics of Nonviolent Action*[9] is a ground-breaking analysis of nonviolence. Although forceful critiques of his ideas have been published,[10] it is unquestionable that his contribution to the study of nonviolence has been unique and far-reaching.

According to Sharp, people striving for nonviolent social change can achieve their goals in four different ways:

1. Conversion: The opponent ends up viewing the issue completely differently and is convinced that the nonviolent activists are right.
2. Accommodation: The opponent accommodates the demands of the nonviolent activists (for example, because she sees that she cannot win) but without changing her point of view fundamentally.

3. Nonviolent coercion: Things change without the consent of the opponent. He loses control of the situation when he no longer has access to the resources he once had (for example, when police and army refuse to shoot nonviolent activists).
4. Disintegration: In rare cases, the opponent simply disintegrates and falls apart after prolonged nonviolent coercion, and there is no longer anyone to negotiate with.[11]

For some nonviolent activists, it is a goal to convert the opponent and make her agree that the nonviolent activists are right. This is a quite high demand and it is seldom that a complete conversion happens. Sharp thinks that it is mainly religious nonviolent activists who work with this goal in mind. Many of Gandhi's actions had the goal to change the hearts of the British, and he thought that the self-suffering played an important part in this. However, social distance between the nonviolent activists and those they want to convert can make it difficult to touch someone's heart and convert her. No matter how much they are willing to suffer it does not matter if those who witness the suffering do not consider them human. In the case of India, Thomas Weber has shown how the self-suffering of the Indian independence activists did not work directly on the police ordered out to beat them up, but indirectly on so-called third parties. His case study of the 1930 salt raids at Dharasana where many Indian activists were severely beaten shows that the refusal to fight back did not touch the police or the British authorities at all. Those who were converted by the suffering were the general public who read the journalist Webb Miller's moving report of the events. When it came to the police responsible for the beating, Miller observed how the refusal to offer any resistance when attacked made the aggressors even more furious.[12]

I consider it important to think of the *opponent* not as a single individual but as an organisation or other unit whose members share a common goal. Apart from this particular goal, their interests usually differ a lot. A state, a company or an organisation is seldom an integrated whole, and although leaders may try to speak with one voice when communicating with others, individuals within the unit can vary a lot in their approaches to a nonviolent movement (and vice versa, of course). Even when leaders are not converted, other supporters of the opponent, such as police or military personnel, may be. Anyone aiming to convert someone must

avoid humiliating their opponent, and the activists will have to signal that a conversion will not harm the converted. In order to touch the heart of the opponent in this way, it does not matter how many activists participate. It is their dedication which counts.

When an opponent accommodates to the demands of the nonviolent activists but without actually changing his mind, Sharp thinks the opponent considers the nonviolent activists an irritation rather than a threat. He might also consider the costs of continued struggle more damaging than giving in to some of the activists' demands. If there is a chance of withdrawing with honour intact, he will do that.

The third way the activists can achieve their goals is through nonviolent coercion. The opponent has not changed her mind in any way, and she is prepared to keep on fighting as previously. She will not negotiate or withdraw. But still she cannot win, because the nonviolent activists have cut off her access to central resources for the struggle. Maybe some of her former allies have been converted, or they see which way the wind blows and prefer to change sides while there is still time. Nonviolent coercion is well known from workers' strikes or threats to strike. When it comes to nonviolent coercion, numbers count. If a large number of people are disobedient, it is harder for the opponent to continue as before. However, even more important than the number is the position of the disobedient. Key disobedient people make a bigger difference than the general public. Those who are armed on behalf of the state, such as police and military, are important, but the system also depends on, for instance, courts, key industry and infrastructure.

How are these different ways of winning relevant when it comes to humour? Where can humour play a role? In order to approach these questions, Vinthagen's four aspects of nonviolent action can be useful. Vinthagen took his point of departure in Habermas's theory of social action in order to show the multidimensionality of nonviolent action. Habermas wrote about four different types of rationality: goal rationality, normative rationality, expressive rationality and communicative rationality. The *goal rationality* concerns people's relation with the material world and is the way scholars approached the concept of rationality before Habermas. Nonviolent action is goal-oriented in the sense that it tries to break dominant power, which has been the focus of Sharp and

others who have been concerned mainly with the technical aspects of nonviolence. However, nonviolent action is also much more; first and foremost it has a strong communicative aspect. Habermas developed the concept of *communicative rationality* as a way of describing how human beings have a fundamental orientation towards understanding each other, even during the most heated arguments. In the context of nonviolence, Vinthagen develops this aspect of social action into what he calls dialogue facilitation—how nonviolent action has an element of facilitating dialogue between opposing parties. Additionally, Habermas's theory of social action includes the notion of *expressive rationality*, in which people communicate their feelings and experiences. In Vinthagen's framework of nonviolent action, this becomes a question of utopian enactment. This is the part of the nonviolent action that aims to break down enemy images and tackle assumptions about "the other" as unworthy or less human. Finally, there is Habermas's concept of *normative rationality*, in which through their actions people hold on to the values and rule of behaviour within their communities. In the context of nonviolent action, this translates into nonviolent action as normative regulation, the ways support systems and community make it possible to take nonviolent action.

Dialogue Facilitation

The first of Vinthagen's four dimensions of nonviolent action is called *dialogue facilitation*. Dialogue is an essential aspect of nonviolent struggles since the choice of nonviolent action, as opposed to a violent alternative, means that nonviolent activists can be seen to engage in a kind of dialogue.

In Gandhian terms, dialogue in nonviolent action means that people are prepared to work towards a common Truth with their opponent. Vinthagen uses Habermas's thoughts on the *ideal speech situation* to develop this further. He shows how Habermas's concept of the ideal speech situation has many things in common with Gandhi's concept of satyagraha. In the ideal speech situation, the participants in the communication mean what they say and they treat each other's statements with mutual trust. The communication is undisturbed by power relations,

and there is time enough to hear all people's opinions and explore what they mean. All people with a stake in the issue under consideration participate on equal terms and all have access to relevant information. Finally, everyone is ready to change their point of view on the basis of convincing arguments by someone else. In practice, such an ideal speech situation will never occur but is the utopia one should strive towards. In this situation, rational arguments are allowed to rule and the best argument wins, not the person who is most resourceful or best at manipulating. The ability to change one's opinion when confronted with good arguments is also a central aspect of Gandhi's philosophy, something he did himself on several occasions. In Gandhi's opinion, it is a "blessing" to have an opponent because the conversation with her helps everyone involved to reach a little closer towards Truth. In nonviolent actions, one acknowledges the possibility that one's opponent might be right at the same time as one holds on to one's own truth until better arguments have been put forward.

However, there are some problematic aspects with the ideal speech situation that can be highlighted from the perspective of humour. Sammy Basu has shown how the distrust in the ambiguity of humour is a shortcoming in Habermas's ideal speech situation since humour is a way for both the strong and the weak to find more "room to manoeuvre".[13] My findings about humorous political stunts support Basu's perspective because even when they are ambivalent, humorous political stunts usually remain dialogue-oriented, both towards those who represent a dominant discourse and other audiences. Although Basu does not elaborate on how exactly humour can overcome the differences, he considers it social *glue* that serves to incline one towards empathy with others.[14] This inclusive humour "cultivates the pleasurable recognition of our mutual absurdities with the Other".[15] Janjira Sombutpoonsiri found that the multiple voices that can exist side by side in carnival foster an atmosphere of dialogue despite the existence of prejudices and antagonism. A joyful atmosphere has the possibility of transforming hostility between demonstrators and authorities and contributing to maintaining nonviolent discipline.[16]

Humorous political stunts are almost always communicating with multiple audiences. Compared with violent resistance, humorous nonviolent actions appear to signal more openness because of their playful

attitude. This is especially obvious in carnivalesque protests of naïve Santas and absurd clowns, but also other types of stunts can frequently be understood as dialogue-oriented if the alternative had been more disruptive forms of protest. In Thailand, the silly Red Sunday actions were tolerated because they were not disruptive compared with the previous Red Shirt demonstrations and occupations. However, there is a major gap between being tolerated as the lesser of two evils and honest dialogue as Habermas's ideal speech situation. Usually the humorous political stunts do not contribute to a better dialogue with the opponents the way Vinthagen describes dialogue facilitation. It is part of the nature of humorous political stunts that they do not present rational arguments, and some of the stunts might even be considered counterproductive if that was the goal. Being ridiculed is not likely to make anyone inclined to convert to the other side of a conflict.

However, if dialogue facilitation is not only evaluated in terms of dialogue with the opponent but expanded to include other audiences, humorous political stunts have much to offer by getting more people involved in the dialogue. Because only a tiny proportion of nonviolent struggles end in a conversion, this element of dialogue is important. As discussed previously in connection with the Indian struggle for independence, the suffering of the Indian activists did not melt the heart of the police ordered to beat them. On the contrary, they were annoyed that the activists did not fight back. However, the journalist who observed the episode was shocked, and his widely read report of the event was a turning point when it came to international support for Indian independence. Thus, nonviolent action is much more than convincing or forcing the "enemy" to take a new point of view. In order for the pressure to build, it usually requires that a much larger number of people become part of the dialogue as well. KMV's humorous political stunts with the jail-ins and fake prosecutor are good examples of how many more people became involved in the dialogue about total resistance than those who were personally affected. And it particularly affected their treatment that it was the parliament that had a dialogue about them. Although it matters who gets engaged in the dialogue about an issue, numbers also matter. Dialogue works in a similar fashion for groups such as the Orange Alternative, Red Sunday and Otpor. Their actions were not facilitating

dialogue with the regimes, but their naïve, absurd and provocative humorous political stunts considerably expanded the number of people involved in the dialogue. By lowering levels of fear through humour, the groups encouraged more people to dare to express an opinion.

In Chapter 5, I discussed how some humorous political stunts are ideal for opening the door to mainstream mass media for small activist groups, in many cases an important audience. Although it is not unheard of that media remain silent about major spectacles, some of the people who perform humorous political stunts are tremendously successful in generating media attention for their stunts for instance, (KMV, CIRCA, the Billionaires, the Santas and the Big Donor Show). Netwerk Vlaanderen's ACE bank that invested in oil, weapons and child labour; the dropping of the teddy bears over Belarus; and Voina's giant penis on the bridge in St. Petersburg are other examples of humorous political stunts covered internationally by mainstream media. However, a humorous political stunt is not in itself enough to gain media attention, and it remains a challenge to obtain coverage that communicates the message and not just the method. Experiences from Ofog exemplified how humorous political stunts can facilitate mobilisation of potential new activists and direct communication with the general public. What is special about humour as compared with non-humorous communication is the cognitive "detour" created by the ambiguity and double meanings which the audience has to decode.

In spite of its possibilities to contribute to facilitating dialogue, humour can also be problematic in relation to this aspect of the nonviolent action. For those watching the clowns and the Santas, the message might be unclear, something which risks distorting the communication. Likewise, audiences might be suspicious of the communicative intentions when it is not obvious to them what the message is or it is loaded with possibilities for multiple interpretations. Audiences used to rational communication might prefer straightforward, unambiguous communication that does not require them to figure out what the intentions are. Just as some people feel constrained or uneasy by Habermas's demand for rationality, others are lost without it. The risk of being misinterpreted when using humour is probably higher than with rational communication. The people organising the actions are usually aware of this but consider the attention they get for an issue important enough to run the risk. No matter

how the audiences interpret humorous political stunts, the pranks almost always provide "material" for conversation. It is both a way to strengthen the dialogue among the grassroots and provoke those in power positions to at least pay some attention.

When evaluating the limitations and possibilities of the dialogue element in nonviolent actions, one should not compare it only with rational communication in the ideal speech situation. On the other side of the spectrum stands the choice of violent resistance or sabotage, such as taking up a gun, burning cars or smashing windows. Compared with that, even the most ambiguous and confrontational humorous political stunts are considerably more dialogue-oriented, also in the sense of Habermas's ideal speech situation.

In cases where the nonviolent activists are especially concerned with appearing willing to engage in dialogue (for instance, if they aim to convert the opponent to their cause), it is probably wise to shy away from humour and especially ridicule. Activists who have no problem "loving their enemy" and who always appear friendly and non-threatening probably benefit from rational communication since ambiguous humorous messages are likely to create more confusion than clarity. However, for activists who are angry and frustrated, the ambiguity of humour might facilitate dialogue compared with violent actions and aggressive shouting. From the perspective of the tradition of nonviolence, Voina's painting of the big penis on the bridge in St. Petersburg as a "fuck you" to the secret police was more dialogue-oriented than smashing their windows, especially towards audiences who see or hear about it. On the other hand, painting the penis is less dialogue-oriented than sitting down and having a rational conversation about what one thinks is wrong with the secret police. This is not to say that smashing windows and setting cars on fire are not communicative in the sense of sending a clear message of frustration and contempt, but they are even further from Habermas's ideal speech situation of respectful dialogue than the painting on the bridge.

Another example is the Santa action in Copenhagen which was an attempt to confront capitalism by highlighting and questioning a core characteristic, private property. An alternative cause of action would have been for the activists to vandalise the shopping centre or organise campaigns of theft, something which could also have been interpreted as an

attempt to undermine capitalism. However, the choice of a humorous political stunt was considerably more communicative towards everyone involved. Although the management of the shopping centres and the police on duty were not thrilled, there was a huge difference between this action and vandalism or theft. Arresting thieves might be an everyday occurrence for police officers, but arresting happy, smiling and dancing Santas is a completely different story. In both these cases, we do not know what the police thought, and it is even possible that Voina's painting angered them more than a broken window would have. However, to the general public, the painting and Santas send signals of clever provocateurs rather than an angry mob out of control. In the study and practice of nonviolent action, audiences' perception and interpretation of an action matter as much as the intentions and facts about what happened.[17] Thus, both the principled and pragmatic traditions of nonviolence discourage anything that can be considered vandalism—the principled tradition because vandalism and sabotage are perceived as morally wrong and the pragmatic tradition because of the way such actions are perceived by others.

Another dialogue-oriented element of humorous political stunts is that they have an ability to remind everyone that we are all human beings in a confusing and bewildering world. In Chapter 4 I introduced Berger's idea that humour intrude into the non-humorous paramount reality that dominates most people's everyday existence. *The Comic Dimension of Human Experience*, Peter Berger writes that the ability to perceive something as comic is a unique human feature. To him, humour is an intrusion into the non-humorous paramount reality that dominates most people's everyday existence. The idea of "intrusion" becomes a striking expression for describing the humorous political stunts. It is both an intrusion into authorities' and conventional non-humorous protesters' paramount reality. Berger uses the term transcendence to describe this intrusion:

> …the comic transcends the reality of ordinary everyday existence; it posits, however temporarily, a different reality in which the assumptions and rules of ordinary life are suspended.[18]

Berger does not discuss whether this transcendence can also take place when someone does something they intend to be humorous but the butt of the joke or part of the audience does not perceive it as funny

at all. What happens then? Does the transcendence still work with the police officers who do not want to play along with the clowns? Can the transcendence take place only for those who agree that this was humorous? Another sociologist of humour, Jerry Palmer, has emphasised how humour is fragile and easily can fail. Accepting something as humorous is not straightforward and self-evident; it is a struggle over what meaning to attribute to what is said or done and depends on the context. Humorous intent is not enough for humour to succeed. The butt of the joke or prank does not have to agree that something is funny, but either the audience agrees that an event was humorous or there is something special about the occasion which a given culture considers humorous.[19] The butts of the pranks may not consider them funny at all; nevertheless, at some level, it is possible to interpret the pranks as an appeal to our common humanity, whether this is done consciously by the pranksters or not.

Rebel clowns are a good example of this. They can show what another world can look like at the same time as they aim to speak to a shared humanity that transcends roles of activists and police officers. Even when they are annoying, nonviolent rebel clowns to some degree appeal to the shared experience of what it means to be human. However, the relations are fragile, and if the clowning is not experienced as sincere, the possibility will collapse. Thus, humorous political stunts have a potential for transforming relations of power because they highlight the contradictions and weaknesses of the dominant discourse by using a format that is recognisable as humorous also for those who are the butt of the joke. The comic is an intrusion into our paramount reality and temporarily suspends the world as we know it. Even when the "victims" are not amused, the presence of the comic still communicates to everyone involved that we are all humans in spite of our different roles in society. Future research on this issue might give us more information about the possibilities and limitations of this transcendence.

Power Breaking

The second aspect of Vinthagen's theory is the way nonviolence is used to break existing relations of power. Although dialogue should be free from power according to the utopia of the ideal speech situation, this is not

the reality on the ground. Everyone working to change the status quo is met with power in many different forms and thwarted by vested interests. When the other side is not listening, you need power breaking to get their attention. Vinthagen's understanding of power breaking is also a critique of Sharp's consent theory of power. Although they agree that power happens in the interaction between people and is not something that exists in itself outside of the relationship, Vinthagen thinks that Sharp's view of power is too simplistic. Although individuals have a possibility to change their behaviour, this is not something they just do. Deciding to resist is not just an individual choice open to anyone who is oppressed. Using the theories of Michel Foucault and Pierre Bourdieu, Vinthagen shows that power and resistance are complex processes and not just a question of making the right choice. The research of both Foucault and Bourdieu shows that no one is outside of power and free to decide to resist. Through their upbringing, people become subordinated to power, and the power is so much part of them that they do not think about it—people just continue to act as they have always done. Obedience and submission are so infiltrated in everyone's life that they become part of their bodies, what Bourdieu calls *habitus*. For Vinthagen, power is something which people give away, often unconsciously and out of habit and conventional thinking. They are obedient because they have always been that, and "one has to follow the rules". With a Foucauldian understanding of power, people can never be outside the relations of power that they want to challenge, but have to act from within. People, including nonviolent organisers, have to acknowledge and understand the systems of submission in order to be able to empower and liberate themselves. They need to fight actively and systematically against their internalised submission. Sombutpoonsiri's thesis about the Serbian group Otpor emphasised humour's excorporation potential, where parody and satire can be used to resist power from within the existing culture.

Even if nonviolent actions are a way of facilitating a dialogue with the opponent and other audiences, the dialogue is influenced by the existing power relations. The ideal speech situation requires that everyone involved in the conversation be striving towards the utopia; it is not something that can be done by just one party. Although nonviolent actions should encourage dialogue and be open towards the good argu-

ments of the opponent (in the cases where this is a person or an organisation), at the same time they should actively resist existing relations of power. Those who benefit from the status quo seldom have reason to engage in dialogue until they are forced to do so. They frequently resist this dialogue on equal terms with all possible means, including devaluing the activists as persons and their motives, reframing what the action is about and using all official and unofficial sanctions at their disposal.[20]

Many of the humorous political stunts aim to challenge and transform the power relations. Usually this remains a temporary symbolic power breaking when those in power are challenged, ridiculed, humiliated and shown not to be so powerful and almighty as they first appeared. Sometimes it is sovereign forms of power which are challenged; this is most obvious in the provocative stunts, as when Studio Total violated Belarusian airspace to drop teddy bears as a show of support for human rights or Voina painted the penis on the bridge in St. Petersburg. Actions like these shout "see, they are not that almighty anyway". However, a naïve stunt like the aerobic dance by the Red Sunday group was also aiming at the sovereign power exercised by the Thai state. In contrast to the previous Red Shirt occupations of public space which lasted for days and disrupted economic activities, Red Sunday was targeting the framing of protesters as terrorists. It was largely ignored by the authorities (although they monitored it closely and occasionally interfered), but the space that was thus created allowed the group to grow bigger and become more visible. As Sombat, the founder of Red Sunday, expresses it: "when we can laugh at the authorities, fear is gone".[21]

Although challenges to sovereign power occur with humour, most of the humorous political stunts have more diffuse forms of power as their target. Most organisers of stunts are well aware that their challenges are not "real" resistance as the concept is understood in the old-fashioned *realpolitik* approach to power. Instead, humorous political stunts are contributions to the debate about what is true, right and just in the domains that the activists are concerned about. If Foucault is right that the main source of disciplining a society is through discourse, then a key role of resistance is to combat dominant discourses. Viewed from this perspective, humorous political stunts are part of the *discursive guerrilla war* that

the activists are waging and have much to contribute in this "battle" about what meaning to attribute to events and actions.

Controlling language and symbols is an important aspect of upholding a dominant discourse. The possibility to name and label the world can be just as important for hegemony as physical control through the threat of violence. A consequence of this understanding is that one should not underestimate the threat to the dominance that arises from undermining symbols and language. Well-executed supportive and corrective humorous political stunts skilfully twist and play with words and images and bring in new associations. Ofog's weapon sponsors, ad corrections and Reality AB are examples of this parody and ridicule of the language of power. When the Swedish armed forces through their recruitment ads tried to define military solutions as the only solutions for anyone who "had what it takes to have an opinion", Ofog used their own symbols and language to suggest alternatives from peace activists who were not afraid to have a different opinion.

At other times, humorous political stunts break power when they force a theme on the public agenda. The Big Donor Show broke the silence about the shortage of organs for transplantations. Likewise, when Netwerk Vlaanderen created the fictive ACE bank, which presumably relied on investments in controversial industries such as oil, weapons and child labour, it drew attention to a subject which all the major banks would have preferred to keep silent about. Total objectors from KMV had little possibility to draw attention to their fate via traditional channels of communication, but when they staged stunts like the jail-in and the false prosecutor, media coverage enabled others to know about their situation which the Norwegian state was silent about. When the representatives of the Norwegian state responded, a sort of dialogue had been started. Although it was still far from the utopia in the ideal speech situation, it was a move away from total silence.

One of the ways that power is challenged in humorous political stunts is when different dominant discourses are played out against each other. These different discourses usually exist side by side governing different domains but can be brought together and contrasted with each other. For example, in Western societies, discourses of protection of human rights, profit and gift giving as desirable and theft as a deviance are all

dominant discourses. When a humorous political stunt manages to rub some of these discourses against each other, an interesting dynamic arises when one dominant discourse is used to criticise another. This was the case when the Santas in Copenhagen positioned the naïve and generous gift-giving Santa against discourses about theft and private property. In Belarus, the discourse of human rights was used to challenge the discourse of respect for national sovereignty and air space. This way of playing dominant discourses against each other is not unique to humour, but one reason that humour arises for some audiences is that they spot the incompatibility and incongruity among discourses. However, this is probably also a reason why other people are not amused at all—they see one of the discourses as being much more important under the circumstances (profit, sovereignty) and thus no appropriate incongruity arises for them.

Another way to investigate how humour has engaged with relations of power is to look at responses to it. The different examples have documented some of the many types of reactions and how important it is for a social movement to be able to read what is going on. Sometimes, those who are being challenged can ignore the attempt to undermine them. For instance, NATO did not get into trouble for ignoring Reality AB. But, frequently, humorous political stunts are met with sanctions from authorities: elves, Santas and clowns are handcuffed and taken to prison.

Several authors writing generally about humour have made the observation that it can be difficult to find an adequate response to a humorous attack. Both Palmer and Hans Speier have indicated that the best response is probably to come up with an even better witticism.[22] However, everyone who has found themselves the victim of someone's joke knows how difficult it can be to find a witty retort on the spot. None of the defenders of the dominant discourses under attack in the examples presented here has tried to respond this way in public.

Most humorous political stunts differ from conventional protest because of the pretence that the instigators are not protesting. The disruption through pretence opens up possibilities for transformation rather than opposition. For many humorous political stunts, it is natural to use a vocabulary of confrontation, opponent and so on. The activists who

initiate the stunts frequently see a clear division line between themselves and those they consider powerful. On the other hand, the use of humour means that it is much more difficult for representatives of the dominant discourse to frame these actions as ordinary protest, although they frequently try. Since non-protesting protesters cannot easily be categorised with other protesters, the show is interrupted in a different way. On the surface, the fan club was not protesting Howard's politics; they were celebrating him. Ofog's company Reality AB did not demonstrate when the NATO exercise took place; they just helped improve it. Red Sunday in Thailand did not protest; the participants just carried out ordinary activities of citizens in Bangkok, like shopping, eating and exercising. None of them fit into the ordinary play called "dominant discourse tolerates protest".

Humorous political stunts call for a lexicon of disruption, challenge, transformation and transcendence, rather than "opposition", because the choice of humour as a method is in itself much more inclusive and transformative than oppositional. Nevertheless, almost all humorous political stunts are strong on the power-breaking dimension of the nonviolent action when they temporarily break the power of those they want to challenge, either by taking control of space usually controlled by others or by undermining the language of power of the dominant discourses.

Utopian Enactment

The third aspect of Vinthagen's theory of nonviolent action originates in Habermas's notion of *expressive rationality*, in which people communicate their feelings and experiences. In Vinthagen's framework, this becomes a question of utopian enactment, and it is the part that aims to break down enemy images and tackle assumptions about "the other" as unworthy or less human. The activists show the human sides of themselves, giving others the opportunity to see them as more than disruptive and angry and frustrated "others". However, it also means acting as if the societies the activists work towards already exist, where those who might be considered belonging to opposing sides respect each other's differences. When emphasising the utopian enactment aspect of a nonviolent action,

the activist should both believe and behave as if even the most brutal opponent at some point will be willing to change. The action should make visible that the utopian situation is possible in principle, at least for a short moment while the action is being carried out.

The problem with Habermas's ideal speech situation is not just existing power relations but also emotions which will affect communication. Negative emotions of hatred, grief and sadness can lead to perceptions that some people are worth less than others or deserve to die or be harmed in revenge for real or perceived past injustice. Facts like these influence communication from both the nonviolent activist and her opponent. Gandhi said that activists should "touch the opponent's heart" to reach him or her and that rational argumentation is not enough. He saw the self-suffering, tapasya, as one way of doing this. The ability to suffer can show the opponent the humanity of the nonviolent activist. The idea of suffering is closely connected to Indian philosophy of religion, but in Vinthagen's interpretation of the concept, self-suffering is different. He sees it as a risk of death or harm which the nonviolent activists accept as part of the struggle. Willingness to run risks is common among soldiers fighting in wars and is nothing unique for nonviolent activists. It is not a *wish* to suffer or die but means that one is prepared for it, or even counts on it, in the struggle for one's cause.

Vinthagen uses a drama model developed by Erving Goffman to show how nonviolent actions for a short while dramatise what the society that the activists strive for could look like. An example from the civil rights movement in the US which Vinthagen himself uses can illustrate what he means: In May 1959, when segregation was still enforced in the southern states, a group of 10 African-Americans went to Biloxi Beach in Mississippi to swim and have fun with family and friends. But this was a "whites only" beach, and while the African-Americans sang and walked with their picnic baskets and swimming towels they were arrested. This way, they dramatised the injustice being done to them, and what justice would look like. The civil rights movement was good at enacting injustices like this, where African-Americans peacefully and with great dignity asked to be served in lunch restaurants for white people or, like Rosa Parks, refused to move from a bus seat where whites had priority. These activists were, of course, aware that they ran a risk of being beaten up by

white people in favour of segregation or arrested by the police. But at the same time, they made a live drama which showed what a more just society would look like, where going to the beach, buying lunch or taking the bus is nothing other than ordinary everyday life and not a confrontation.

According to Vinthagen, it is not just the existing power relations that stand in the way of an ideal speech situation. Communication about sensitive issues, such as political struggles, is also highly influenced by emotions. Emotions were long a neglected research area when it came to social movements, but now many texts have documented how feelings of anger and grief are central for the moral shocks and outrage that are strong driving forces for many activists.[23] Sharon Erickson Nepstad and Christian Smith argue that it is inaccurate to see emotions and rationality as opposites:

> We need to cease viewing emotions and rationality as dichotomous. Moral outrage is a logical reaction to the torture, disappearances, and assassinations of innocent civilians and to the lies disseminated by a government to cover its role as an accomplice to these atrocities.[24]

Nepstad and Smith consider moral outrage a rational response to accounts of torture and killing of civilians; thus, it does not make sense to claim that emotions and logic can and should be separated from each other.

However, in the context of nonviolent action, negative emotions like anger and longing for revenge towards those responsible for wrongdoing and injustice may block activists' thinking about constructive solutions and a future peaceful co-existence. The aspect of the nonviolent action which carries a utopian enactment can present a more constructive element. This does not contradict anger as an emotional kick-starter for activism but is a supplement when it comes to thinking about the future. Utopian enactments demonstrate that alternatives to the prevailing order are possible here and now, however fleeting and temporary. With this enactment, nonviolent action suggests alternative ways of structuring society.

As discussed in Chapter 2, the definition of humour includes an emotional aspect. This indicates that the humorous mode speaks to an

emotional side of people that might not be reached the same way when we operate in the non-humorous mode. This makes humorous political stunts a good starting point for investigating emotional aspects of nonviolent activism. Sombutpoonsiri's thesis with its concept of the carnivalesque and the idea from L.M. Bogad about tactical carnival also point towards this side of humour.[25]

Humorous political stunts speak to the imagination, thinking out of the box, encouraging audiences to look at reality from a new perspective. This is an aspect where they differ from many conventional expressions of protest. Thinking about the future is not limited to the usual way of "doing politics" but instead is an encouragement to "play politics". The Orange Alternative showed with their happenings that the grey everyday life of communist Poland could easily be turned into a carnival, thus hinting at other possible ways of living in the future. Also, the army of Santas which used the naïve Santa figure to communicate values of generosity and solidarity concretely enacted how the world could be different. Similarly, all the other figures speaking to fantasy and imagination emphasise that the organisers value diversity and creativity. In addition, absurd stunts are a way of illuminating the absurdity of various situations.

However, there is a limitation with using humour to present these alternatives. Especially when it comes to the carnivalesque, some observers might associate the playful frame with irresponsibility and not consider it "serious" enough. This is less of a risk in the corrective stunts, but here the "dishonesty" might in some people's eyes disqualify the expression of dissent from seriousness. It might also become more difficult to reach out to potential allies and new activists who find it a challenge to let go of their anger and don't feel at home in an environment that they see as too silly.

Normative Regulation

The fourth and last aspect of Vinthagen's theory is that in nonviolent actions the activists work towards making nonviolence the norm, something he calls normative regulation. This is the aspect of a nonviolent

action he derived from Habermas's notion of *normative rationality*, which means that people through their actions hold on to the values and rule of behaviour within their societies. In most societies, people learn that violence is normal, at least in some situations. This "knowledge" about violence is internalised the same way as power, resulting in the widespread perception that violence is normal even if one disapproves of it. Some nonviolent activists are dedicated not just to confronting ongoing violence but also to "regulating" the norm about violence as normal. One way to approach this is when nonviolent activists in different ways try to "unlearn" the immediate response of meeting violence and verbal abuse with counter-violence and counter-abuse. Such nonviolent training methods were developed or refined during the civil rights struggle in the US. They aim to prepare the participants for what will happen during the action and make new and more desirable reactions a natural first choice. When the African-Americans went into a restaurant for whites, it was important that all participants stay calm and dignified if they were physically or verbally attacked. It should not be possible in any way to frame them as aggressive. Because many people learn while growing up that it is acceptable to shout or hit back at an attacker, the civil rights activists (as well as many other activists) had to unlearn this behaviour. Role plays are one method in this preparation, where the aim is to make dignified responses to attack and abuse a part of the body's natural reaction. The question is, of course, to what degree previous lessons can be unlearned and new behaviour internalised. Can this be done during a weekend course before a major nonviolent action? The nonviolent discipline in many actions with thousands of participants shows that this can be done when it comes to the action itself, but is the change so thorough that the new behaviour becomes part of a new way of life? Gandhi would probably have been sceptical of the idea that a weekend course can change well-established ways of reacting much. He saw life in the communities, *ashrams*, as a daily training where nonviolent activists should live their life as a service to society and what he called "the constructive programme". The challenge was not just to fight injustice but also to build alternatives in parallel. For an individual to experience profound change, it is often necessary to create

new social relations and to be in an environment where the majority really do experience nonviolence as the norm. Nevertheless, it is only a small minority of people considered nonviolent activists who have taken up the idea of living in communities that emphasise nonviolence as a way of life.

Almost all the humorous political stunts contribute to the normative regulation aspect of a nonviolent action because of the inherent playful attitude that speaks to our common humanity. This is especially obvious with the same stunts that contribute to utopian enactments. Many accounts describe how clowns and a carnivalesque atmosphere de-escalate tensions and make the atmosphere less hostile, especially in cases where protesters are directly confronting a massive police presence and there is a considerable risk of violent clashes. It does not even have to be all protesters who are playing these roles: the presence of merely some in the front line appears to make the situation less tense. However, as pointed out by some informants, individual police might be provoked and the ambiguity of the clown role that teases and ridicules does allow many possible interpretations of intentions. Humour which is perceived as aggressive might make an opponent insecure about how true the nonviolent intentions are. Judging whether humour is appropriate in the situation is similar to the dilemma when it comes to dialogue facilitation: In cases where protesters have no problem maintaining their nonviolent discipline and remaining calm and dignified without abusing their opponent, the ambiguity of humour makes the nonviolent intention and norm less obvious. However, when this is not the case and there is a risk of the nonviolent protest turning aggressive, using humour and the carnivalesque to maintain nonviolent discipline is much preferable, although it remains ambiguous.

Although humour at some level contributes to this normative regulation, the stunts presented here are temporary interventions and usually their main purpose is a short breaking of established relations of power. They are miles away from the Gandhian constructive programmes, and the contribution to the normative regulation is very superficial compared with the ideal. However, as Vinthagen points out when presenting his theory, the normative regulation aspect is generally neglected in the

Western world, where most of my examples of humorous political stunts come from.

Humour and Theory of Nonviolent action

Investigating humour's relation to Vinthagen's theory of nonviolence and its four dimensions reveals that humour can contribute to the goals of a nonviolent action but also that some aspects of some stunts might be problematic. While humour can help emphasise one of the aspects, it might at the same time become problematic when it comes to others. Table 7.1 schematically sums up some of these relationships, and some examples can illustrate the complexity.

As discussed above, dialogue facilitation can concern both the opponent and other audiences. None of the humorous political stunts investigated here is an ideal example when it comes to dialogue with those representing what the activists opposed or were concerned about, but several showed a strong possibility for humour to facilitate dialogue with the general public either directly or via mass media. One such example was the Big Donor Show, which clearly reached out to the general public. However, this stunt did not show much power-breaking potential, since only the "power" of silence was broken and it was not clear whether anyone had an interest in maintaining the status quo of few organ donations. The show itself was not a utopian enactment, since it was definitely not suggested that TV shows were the solution to the problem, but implicitly the desired course of action—more people to sign up as organ donors—was quite obvious.

Power-breaking can have three different dimensions. First, there is the breaking of "sovereign" forms of power, as when the teddy bears over Belarus challenged control of airspace or when Voina painted the giant penis right in front of the FSB in St. Petersburg. These stunts obviously broke the physical control of space for a short period of time, but they did not contribute much in terms of dialogue facilitation or utopian enactment.

The strengths of KMV's jail-ins and fake prosecutor actions were that they broke the power of Norwegian authorities. Again, it was a question

Table 7.1 The relationships between Stellan Vinthagen's four dimensions of nonviolent action and humorous political stunts

Dimension	How do humorous political stunts potentially weaken nonviolent action?	How do humorous political stunts potentially strengthen nonviolent action?
Dialogue facilitation	• Ambiguity about who is behind a stunt and what the organisers actually mean might make the dialogue more difficult. • The deceptions in some stunts can be interpreted as dishonesty that weakens the dialogue.	• All types of humorous political stunts can be interpreted as dialogue-oriented. • Play is communicative, especially compared with violence and hostility. • Corrective stunts communicate a suggestion for an alternative cause of action. • Many activists experience a personal liberation when taking on a role. • Stunts frequently provide material for conversation. Also those who disagree talk about them.
Power breaking	• Silliness can be interpreted as if the activists are not serious about the issue. Especially the naïve and absurd stunts run this risk.	• Humorous political stunts contribute to *discursive guerrilla war*, challenging dominant perceptions about what is true and just. • Absurd stunts can break power within the activists' own group.
Utopian enactment	• Ridicule and humiliation can be counterproductive when it comes to the utopian enactment.	• Many stunts give positive and constructive images of an alternative and more just future with room for tolerance and diversity. • Corrective stunts clearly point towards an alternative.
Normative regulation	• Humour perceived as aggressive might cast doubt on how deep the commitment to nonviolence is.	• The playful attitude of humorous political stunts speaks to a shared humanity.

of temporarily taking control of physical spaces: the prison walls and the courtroom. These stunts also had a dialogue-oriented element towards the general public, who were not aware of the situation of the total resisters. On the other hand, the deception with the fake prosecutor and the provocation in the jail-ins did not facilitate dialogue with Norwegian authorities. However, KMV as a campaign was pursuing other ways of engaging in dialogue with the Norwegian authorities. They met with the political parties to present their arguments, they wrote letters to the editors in the newspapers, and during the juridical procedures the government was forced to listen to their arguments. Although a court is very far from the place for an ideal speech situation, it is considerably better than not being listened to at all. Thus, even if the humorous political stunts in themselves were not directly facilitating dialogue, they contributed to force an issue on the agenda which did improve communication considerably. However, these two actions were not utopian enactments since they did not "speak" about the alternatives KMV sought.

The second form of power breaking concerns the breaking of dominant discourses. The Santas in Copenhagen is a good example of a humorous political stunt which broke the power of the discourses of theft and private property. They were also strong on the element of utopian enactment, hinting as they did on how society could be more generous and fun. Whether the Santa action should be considered dialogue-oriented or not is a matter of what to compare it with, but it did not result in any dialogue with the owners of the shopping centres.

There is also a third way to look at power breaking, which concerns the internal dynamics of a group. Social movements have their own hierarchies and systems of power. Although many political groups are aware of this and consciously work to counter inequalities through their decision-making practices and ways of organising their work, it is difficult to completely abandon such systems. Humorous political stunts, especially absurd ones, can also be a way to point towards a movement's own power structures and aim to transform them. Clowns, for instance, can create uncertainty not only among representatives of the authorities but also among activists of the "old school" who are most comfortable with rational arguments.

When it comes to utopian enactment, stunts involving radical clowning and carnival visualise and temporarily enact a world turned upside down where hierarchies are dismantled, colour and festivity prevail and the world as we know it is suspended. These stunts also provide the best try when it comes to normative regulation, but as with all humorous political stunts, the contribution is only superficial because of the temporary nature of the stunts.

That a single action or stunt is not able to be the ideal when it comes to all four aspects is not a problem unique to humorous political stunts. Nonviolent activists encounter the same contradictions between the different dimensions of an action when they engage in non-humorous action planning. This issue is something for both activists and academic researchers to consider further. There is no "solution" to this problem, and no perfect humorous political stunt exists. Judging what is most appropriate will always be a question about which aspect of a nonviolent action one considers most important in the circumstances.

Conclusion

Humorous political stunts have an ability to appeal to the imagination, to people's desire for spectacle and drama. Political activists who undertake stunts like these see a possibility to de-stabilise established relations of power when communication becomes even more complex than usual. This is not to say that humour is automatically at the service of those with less power, but those already in power have much less interest in modes of communicating based on an unpredictable ambiguity with an uncertain outcome.

Looking at the humorous political stunts from the perspective of Vinthagen's four dimensions of nonviolent action revealed that most stunts' biggest contribution is to temporarily and symbolically break the power of dominant discourses. By engaging in this discursive guerrilla warfare, humorous political stunts show the potential of a different future. A single humorous political stunt is unlikely to achieve much, but as part of bigger campaigns and movements stunts provide attention-grabbing

dissenting voices that speak from a different position than conventional forms of protest.

In addition to their power-breaking potential, some humorous political stunts are also oriented towards dialogue facilitation, although they are far from Habermas's ideal speech situation, which is based on logic and reason. Humorous political stunts seldom lead to increased dialogue with the opponent, but they communicate with a much wider audience. Activists who find it unproblematic to remain dignified and calm are probably better off with non-humorous forms of communication if the dialogue element of nonviolent action is what counts most for them. However, if the alternative to a humorous political stunt is displaying anger and smashing windows, even the most provocative humorous political stunt is more dialogue-oriented. Although the target might not experience it as dialogue-oriented, other audiences are more likely to see a smart provocateur with a message rather than frustration out of control.

In most nonviolent actions, there is a built-in tension between the dialogue-facilitating and the power-breaking elements. Dialogue without power breaking is unlikely to move the powerful to change that matters. On the other hand, power breaking without dialogue becomes a way of polarising political differences and cementing established points of view rather than searching for ways to create change together in the Gandhian spirit of holding on to one's truth while approaching Truth.

Many humorous political stunts also contribute to the utopian enactment element of the nonviolent action when they display a tolerance for diversity or temporarily enact alternative courses of action for powerful institutions. At one level, all the humorous political stunts are contributing to the normative regulation aspect of a nonviolent action since they question the discourse that violence is normal. On another level, because they are only a temporary power breaking, they are very far from Gandhi's idea of the constructive programme on which Vinthagen based this notion.

Notes

1. Stellan Vinthagen, *A Theory of Nonviolent Action*: *How Civil Resistance Works* (London: ZED Books, 2015). For a short introduction, see Stellan Vinthagen, "Four Dimensions of Nonviolent Action: A Sociological Perspective", in *Civil Resistance*: *Comparative Perspectives on Nonviolent Struggle*, ed. Kurt Schock (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015). Vinthagen's work was originally published ten years earlier in Swedish as: Stellan Vinthagen, *Ickevåldsaktion*: *En Social Praktik Av Motstånd Och Konstruktion* (Göteborg: Institutionen för freds- och utvecklingsforskning (PADRIGU) Göteborgs universitet, 2005), PhD thesis. My exploration of humour in relation to the theory is based on the original Swedish version.
2. For recent overviews of the study of nonviolent action, also known as civil resistance and people power, see April Carter, *People Power and Political Change*: *Key Issues and Concepts* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2012); Kurt Schock, *Civil Resistance Today* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2015).
3. Vinthagen, *Ickevåldsaktion*: p. 26.
4. For an excellent discussion of the misunderstandings regarding nonviolence from a social science perspective, see Kurt Schock, "Nonviolent Action and Its Misconceptions: Insights for Social Scientists", *PS*: *Political Science* & *Politics* 36, no. 4 (2003).
5. Majken Jul Sørenen and Jørgen Johansen "Nonviolent Conflict Escalation" (in press) *Conflict Resolution Quarterly*.
6. See, for instance, Judith Stiehm, "Nonviolence Is Two", *Sociological Inquiry* 38, no. 1 (1968); Brian Martin, "Researching Nonviolent Action: Past Themes and Future Possibilities", *Peace* & *Change* 30, no. 2 (2005). Stiehm is an early example of making this distinction, although she used the term "conscientious nonviolence" rather than "principled". Sometimes what I call *pragmatic nonviolence* is called *strategic nonviolence*, but the problem with this label is that it implies that *principled nonviolence* is not strategic.
7. This is also the title of his autobiography. Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, *The Story of My Experiments with Truth* (Ahmedabad:

Navajivan Publishing House, 1927). Gandhi wrote extensively about nonviolence in the form of letters and articles and his collected work consists of 100 volumes. Many scholars have systematised his ideas. In English, see, for instance, Joan Valerie Bondurant, *Conquest of Violence*: *The Gandhian Philosophy of Conflict* revised ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1965); Arne Næss, *Gandhi and Group Conflict*: *An Exploration of Satyagraha*: *Theoretical Background* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1974).

8. Vinthagen, *Ickevåldsaktion*. pp. 60–62.
9. Gene Sharp, *The Politics of Nonviolent Action* (Boston: Porter Sargent, 1973).
10. Brian Martin, "Gene Sharp's Theory of Power", *Journal of Peace Research* 26, no. 2 (1989); Kate McGuinness, "Gene Sharp's Theory of Power: A Feminist Critique of Consent", *Journal of Peace Research* 30, no. 1 (1993).
11. Sharp developed the first three categories in Sharp, *The Politics of Nonviolent Action*. For disintegration, see Gene Sharp, *Waging Nonviolent Struggle*, *20th Century Practice and 21th Century Potential* (Boston: Porter Sargent, 2005). p. 46–47.
12. Thomas Weber, "'The Marchers Simply Walked Forward until Struck Down': Nonviolent Suffering and Conversion", *Peace* & *Change* 18, no. 3 (1993).
13. Sammy Basu, "Dialogic Ethics and the Virtue of Humor", *Journal of Political Philosophy* 7, no. 4 (1999): p. 396.
14. Basu, "Dialogic Ethics and the Virtue of Humor", p. 394.
15. Email correspondence with Sammy Basu July 31, 2012.
16. Janjira Sombutpoonsiri, "The Use of Humour as a Vehicle for Nonviolent Struggle: Serbia's 1996–7 Protests and the *Otpor* (Resistance) Movement" (PhD Thesis, La Trobe University, 2012), p. 289.
17. I am grateful to Håkan Thörn for a conversation that helped me clarify this point about communication and dialogue.
18. Peter L. Berger, *Redeeming Laughter*: *The Comic Dimension of Human Experience* (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1997). p. 205. Berger refers to this as "transcendence in a lower key" and uses "transcen-

dence in a higher key" to describe a religious experience of the comic in the human condition that is not relevant here.

19. Jerry Palmer, *Taking Humour Seriously* (London: Routledge, 1994).
20. For an overview of all the responses to nonviolent actions, see Majken Jul. Sørensen, *Responses to Nonviolent Campaigns*: *Beyond Repression or Support* (Sparsnäs; Sweden: Irene Publishing, 2015).
21. Personal communication with Sombat Boonngam-anong translated by Janjira Sombatpoonsiri, October 23, 2015.
22. Palmer, *Taking Humour Seriously*: p. 169. Hans Speier, "Wit and Politics: An Essay on Power and Laughter", *American Journal of Sociology* 103, no. 5 (1998): p. 1386.
23. See, for instance, James M. Jasper, *The Art of Moral Protest*: *Culture*, *Biography*, *and Creativity in Social Movements* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997). Other sources are the contributions in Jeff Goodwin, James M. Jasper, and Francesca Polletta, eds., *Passionate Politics*: *Emotions and Social Movements* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001). Marcyrose Chvasta, "Anger, Irony, and Protest: Confronting the Issue of Efficacy, Again", *Text and Performance Quarterly* 26, no. 1 (2006).
24. Sharon Erickson Nepstad and Christian Smith, "The Social Structure of Moral Outrage in Recruitment to the U.S. Central America Peace Movement", in *Passionate Politics*: *Emotions and Social Movements*, ed. Jeff Goodwin, James M. Jasper, and Francesca Polletta (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).
25. L. M. Bogad, "Tactical Carnival: Social Movements, Demonstrations, and Dialogical Performance", in *A Boal Companion*: *Dialogues on Theatre and Cultural Politics*, ed. Jan. Cohen-Cruz and Mady Schutzman (New York: Routledge, 2006); L. M. Bogad, "Carnivals against Capital: Radical Clowning and the Global Justice Movement", *Social Identities* 16, no. 4 (2010); Sombutpoonsiri, "The Use of Humour as a Vehicle for Nonviolent Struggle".

8

Conclusion: Humour, Power and Nonviolent Resistance

Nonviolent resistance has been practised for centuries and studied within academia for decades, but understandings of the dynamics of nonviolent action are still rudimentary. Because nonviolence has been neglected and violent resistance glorified to such a degree, there is much history to recover and contemporary practice to document in order to provide reliable analysis of what impact nonviolent action can have on relations of power. When it comes to studying the use of humorous methods as part of a nonviolent campaign, hardly any research has been done previously.

In humour research, it has long been debated whether humour can be a form of resistance or whether it is merely a vent for frustration. However, framing humour's subversive potential as a question of either-or is a simplification of complex processes. Some political humour is probably meaningless in the context of struggles for social and political change. Nevertheless, jumping straight from this to the conclusion that humour cannot make a difference or even that it is counterproductive seems rather premature. Authors such as Michel Foucault, James C. Scott and Asef Bayat have investigated the subtle workings of power and resistance in ways that take into consideration that neither power nor resistance can be considered one-dimensional. Humour researchers who are sceptical about

M.J. Sørensen, *Humour in Political Activism*,
DOI 10.1057/978-1-137-57346-9_8

humour's ability to play a role in resistance do not appear to take these authors' work on power into consideration. Instead, they speak generally about resistance as if it is something that is either openly declared and will lead to violent revolution or totally absent. This book has demonstrated why such an approach is inadequate. In order to investigate how humour can sometimes be resistance, it is necessary to use a more sophisticated language on what humour is as well as a nuanced power theory which can reflect the dynamic interaction between all the actors involved.

Although there has been little systematic inquiry into the relationship between humour and nonviolence, what has been done shows that the interesting question is not whether a single instance of humour can change relations—which is, of course, unreasonable to expect—but rather what role humour can play in facilitating resistance to dominant discourses and powerful institutions.

Both in academic research and everyday language, it is common to speak about humour as if it is one "thing", thereby allowing all humour to be judged and evaluated from the same perspective. This is probably also a reason why a number of humour scholars (as shown in Chapter 2) have insisted that humour cannot have an effect on resistance. Considering one type of data (often jokes), they make overly broad generalisations about all humour. The only thing all humour has in common is that it includes an incongruity that causes at least part of the audience to be amused. Apart from this very basic characteristic, humour is extremely diverse. Humour is a way of communicating and is not inherently positive or negative. Just like any other form of communication, it can be used to make people happy or to cause them intended or unintended harm. Some humour will reinforce the status quo, whereas other humour encourages rebellion, and some may even have mixed effects.

Humour can be expressed through a wide range of techniques such as irony, exaggeration, parody and impersonations through different media, including jokes, cartoons, theatre, music and graffiti. This complexity means that participants in social movements discussing the pros and cons of humour in general terms might actually be discussing very different things without realising it. If they want to discuss whether humour can be used as an appropriate method, it is probably wiser to talk about the possible benefits and potential risks of a specific action. Likewise, academics

interested in understanding humour must specify exactly what type of humour in what context they are interested in. Additionally, it is difficult to isolate the humorous activism from other forms of actions. Humorous political stunts are one tactic activists can use, alongside many other options for communication. In most cases, the same people who carry out humorous political stunts also engage in non-humorous, rational activism as the work of, for instance, Ofog and KMV shows. A few groups or individuals have specialised in humorous political stunts, but nevertheless they are usually part of larger movements fighting for similar goals about social justice.

Another problem with both academic and everyday language is labelling the opposite of humour "serious". This implicitly assumes that something cannot be humorous and serious at the same time. Since a lot of political humour is both, it is better to call the opposite of humour "rational" or "non-humorous". This is not to say that those who use humour are not rational, but that their method of communication instead is based on contradictions and ambiguity which distort usual forms of logic communication.

Humorous Political Stunts and the Power of Nonviolence

In order to investigate what role humour can play in facilitating resistance to dominant discourses, I have focused on one particular form of humorous action and performance that I call *humorous political stunts*. I chose the term "stunt" because it is not so clearly associated with one particular activist or academic tradition as other possibilities such as "action", "hoax", "performance" or "prank". I have defined a humorous political stunt as

> *a performance/action carried out in public which attempts to undermine a dominant discourse. It either is so confrontational that it cannot be ignored or involves a deception that blurs the line between performers and audiences. It includes or comments on a political incongruity in a way that is perceived as amusing by at least some people who did not initiate it.*

However, even within this particular form of humorous political activism, there is a huge diversity in the way it is practised. I have identified five distinct ways for those who perform humorous political stunts to position themselves in relation to dominant discourses and people in positions of power.

Supportive stunts use irony, parody and exaggeration to disguise their critique. Instead of being openly critical, they pretend that they support and celebrate their target or want to protect it from harm. The targets will know that they are being watched, and the audiences are presented with an image of the target's vulnerable sides.

Corrective stunts aim to transcend the inequality in power by presenting an alternative version of "the truth". They temporarily "steal" the identity of the institutions and companies they are aiming to unmask. From this disguise, they present a more honest representation of who the target really is. The correction can, for instance, be an exaggeration that exposes greed and selfishness or it might just be the facts, expressed in language that everyone can understand.

Naïve stunts bring the unequal relations of power to everyone's attention by tackling the opponent from behind an apparent naïveté. What is actually critique is camouflaged as coincidences or a normal activity. Whereas the supportive and corrective stunts often exaggerate and overemphasise what those in positions of power say, people who carry out naïve stunts pretend that they are not aware that they have challenged any power.

Absurd stunts rely on total silliness and absurdity. From this position, the activists are ridiculing everything and everyone claiming to know the one and only truth—be it governments, institutions, or people within their own movement who take themselves a bit too seriously. The absurd action shares some similarities with the naïve regarding the apparent naïveté of the activists, but whereas the participants in the naïve stunt appear not to understand, the absurd pranksters refuse to acknowledge that any truth exists.

Provocative stunts do not pretend anything like the four other strategies. They are an openly declared challenge to claims to status and power. They include an element that part of the audience considers amusing, such as when they manage to expose shortcomings and present the "almighty" as humans with flaws. The pranksters do not deny the unequal relations of

power, as in absurd stunts, or present any alternatives like the corrective actions do: they simply appear not to care about the consequences of their actions.

This typology of humorous political stunts takes some of the complexity of the phenomenon into consideration. What happens in an absurd stunt is so different from what happens in the supportive and corrective that one cannot evaluate and analyse them as if they were the same. They have the incongruity in common, but when it comes to how they temporarily de-stabilise relations of power, they are very different—both in the way they position themselves in relation to dominant discourses and the responses they generate. People exposed to political humour react in many different ways, of course, depending on whether they are passive bystanders, an audience getting involved, police ordered out to intervene, or the target of ridicule and humiliation. In addition, reactions depend on the context, the message and the medium used.

Another method to approach the diversity of humorous political stunts I have developed is to apply the *theatre metaphor*. Since all political activity can be understood as a form of theatre where the actors enact a drama, the metaphor can be a way to catch other elements of the diversity. Analysing the stunts from the perspective of the *stage*, *actors*, *audiences* and *timing* can provide insight for both activists and academics. For researchers, it is a way of analysing the relational and dynamic aspects of the stunts. One can ask who initiates the stunts and who involuntarily becomes an actor in the play of politics? Where do the stunts take place, and who are the audiences? How do the different audiences respond, and how is the whole affair timed? For academics, these questions might provide new insights, but the four elements can also be a way for activists to consider how to maximise the impact of their stunt according to their goals. If an action has not had the desired effect, changing some elements might increase the pressure on governments, appeal more to media or challenge dominant discourses more effectively. If it is difficult to get close to certain main actors like prime ministers, maybe the effect can increase if one attempts to capture another stage or considers changing the timing. Writing about politics in terms of theatre does not mean that challengers who interrupt the show are just "playing" and not serious about the issue concerned. Using this metaphor is a way to take a step

back and create an analytical distance. It is also a reflection of the fact that all social interaction can be thought of as a "performance" and that both the representatives of the dominant discourses and the challengers play their part in this interaction.

Stellan Vinthagen's theory of nonviolent action has identified four central dimensions which he has termed dialogue facilitation, power breaking, utopian enactment and normative regulation. Looking at humorous political stunts through this framework as I did in Chapter 7 reveals some of the ways that humour can contribute to the goal of the nonviolent action but also indicates situations where humour might be counterproductive.

When it comes to Vinthagen's first dimension of dialogue facilitation, humorous political stunts are more dialogue-oriented than resistance that involves smashing windows and setting cars on fire, at least when looking from the tradition of nonviolence and considering audiences other than the target. On the other hand, one can imagine forms of communication that are more dialogue-oriented than a humorous political stunt, since the ambiguity of humour can distort communication when it is not clear what the message is or who is behind it. In addition, ridicule might hurt in a way that hinders dialogue, and campaigns that rely on ambiguity, double meanings, and incongruity might be perceived as unpredictable. Targeted governments and companies might not experience it as worthwhile to have a rational dialogue. Although humour can contribute to presenting a friendly face to outsiders, target companies and institutions might become more cautious in their attempt to engage in a dialogue with humorous activists.

If one is interested in humorous political stunts' ability to challenge relations of power, Vinthagen's second dimension of a nonviolent action, power breaking, is perhaps the most interesting. A single humorous political stunt can usually not be expected to have more than a temporary and symbolic effect, but all resistance has to start from somewhere. A humorous strategy can be built around a series of stunts. If one agrees with Foucault and believes control of discourses to be one of the most important aspects of domination in a society, then it follows that attacks on the core of these discourses are an important method of resistance. I have introduced the term *discursive guerrilla warfare* to indicate how

humorous political stunts can be "hit and run" attacks on such dominant discourses. Many of the stunts are not just suggesting small adjustments or moderate reform of the current world order, but have attacked essential aspects of dominant discourses like neoliberalism, consumerism and militarism.

The naïve and absurd stunts have demonstrated a particular ability to contribute to the part of a nonviolent action expressing the third and fourth dimensions of Vinthagen's theory: the utopian enactment and normative regulation. The naïve and absurd Santas, clowns and elves speak to people's imagination, popular myths and folklore as well as childhood memories. Although this is also temporary, these figures are one way of illustrating what a different world order valuing spontaneity, creativity and imagination could look like.

Lessons Learned About the Power of Humour

The ways researchers gather information influence the type of answers they can provide. No knowledge is neutral and research that does not explicitly attempt to speak from the perspective of those in subordinate positions will almost inevitably benefit those with status and privilege and further cement established relations of power. My research on humorous political stunts was explicitly developed to investigate humour from the perspective of nonviolent activists in order to see how humour can be used as part of a struggle for a more just and peaceful world. Inspired by the values behind participatory action research and feminist standpoint theory, I used many different examples from around the world to explore the phenomenon of humorous political stunts.[1] Two groups in particular, KMV and Ofog, were investigated in depth through a triangulation of methods. When insights from their experiences are combined with all the other examples as well as other people's scholarship on humour, it is possible to some degree to draw more general conclusions about humorous political stunts.

Ofog is a Swedish anti-militarist network working against Swedish arms production and the militarisation of society. Together with the network, I investigated how humour can be used as part of a strategy to

challenge militarism. Some of these findings are presented in Chapter 4. I used participant observation, carried out interviews and initiated workshops to investigate humour. This generated a considerable amount of data about what meaning humour has for the activists who engage in it and how they perceive its effect when it comes to facilitating outreach, mobilisation and sustaining a culture of resistance.

Activists perceive humour as a good way to facilitate outreach to media and passers-by. One person I interviewed suggested that because understanding humour requires an intellectual detour, it reaches people at a different level. Activists have the impression that because many people meet conventional non-humorous protest with a preformed opinion about what the activists are going to say and how they themselves are going to respond, it is difficult to reach them. The detour that is required to reconcile and grasp the incongruity of humour creates a crack where it might be able to catch people off guard. However, when it comes to the media, the situation is not straightforward. Although many groups have successfully reached out to mass media through a humorous political stunt, Ofog has not had the same experience.

Secondly, many activists consider humour a good way to mobilise new activists. However, to know more precisely how effective humour is for mobilisation would require a different type of study where one observes whether an increase in the use of humour is followed by more people joining in. Alternatively, it is possible to interview newcomers about their perceptions about what motivated them to become involved.

Thirdly, when it comes to facilitating a culture of resistance, many activists experience clowning and other types of humour as a personal liberation and a way to make activism more sustainable and prevent burnout. Contrary to some perceptions, energy for activism is not a zero-sum game where time and energy spent on one thing automatically mean less time and energy for other activities. Instead, some of the humorous actions are felt to create a good atmosphere and new energy, which in turn can be used on non-humorous activities. The feeling of contributing to resistance might become self-reinforcing.

Investigating the meaning of humour also revealed that the distinction between humour and other types of creative activism might make sense from an analytical perspective but it does not reflect the lived experience

of all political activists. Interviewing people about "humour" provided many examples of creative and spectacular activism that did not necessarily include the appropriate incongruity which is central to the definition of humour. Likewise, my perception that there would be a clear distinction between "internal" humour and humour which was directed outwards to communicate with media, the general public, potential new activists as well as the target of an action also turned out to be naïve. Although some humour was clearly internal or directed outwards, Ofog activists also provided examples of humour which was visible to outsiders but nevertheless appeared mainly to be for the benefit of the activists themselves.

Kampanjen Mot Verneplikt (KMV) was a Scandinavian campaign active in the 1980s in support of total resisters who refused both military and substitute service. My research, included in Chapter 5, focused on the campaign's work in Norway, where the primary goal was to change the law that sent the total resisters to prison for 16 months without calling it a punishment. KMV pursued two major strategies in this work. Firstly, the campaign developed a strategy of creating a spectacle around the court hearings and imprisonments of the total resisters and selective objectors. Part of the spectacle consisted of two types of humorous political stunts—a provocative stunt where the activists jumped the prison walls, not to escape, but as a jail-in where they demanded either that their friend be released or that they go to prison with him since they shared his opinions. KMV activists were also behind a supportive stunt where one activist showed up in court as the prosecutor when another activist was having his court hearing that would send him to jail for total resistance. In spite of the exaggerations, the parody of the prosecutor was so convincing that the judge did not notice anything wrong, something which subsequently generated much media attention.

KMV's other strategy was to use the legal system against the Norwegian state. One activist filed a complaint with the European Commission of Human Rights at the Council of Europe, and two others made a court case against the Norwegian state for violating the constitution when they were sent to prison without a proper trial. KMV participants lost both these cases, but nevertheless they generated so much attention that in 1989 the civil servants in the department of justice proposed a law change in accordance with what KMV found acceptable. In 1985, there had

been no interest among the parliamentarians in the fate of total resisters, but a few years later the department of justice's proposed change of the relevant paragraphs was accepted unanimously by the parliament.

The case of KMV showed in detail how various humorous and non-humorous aspects of a campaign can complement each other when confronting a state. Humour has the potential to play an important role within a campaign that combines humorous and non-humorous elements. Here, it was the ability to generate attention from media and interest from potential new total resisters that seemed to be decisive. Although the department of justice did not keep track of the numbers of total resisters, KMV's list of contacts grew and an increasing number of young men decided to become total resisters during the 1980s.

When I was looking for cases that would be rich in information about humour, it was not a sampling criterion that the political activists in the case studies be concerned about the same or similar themes. As it turned out, both Ofog and KMV are/were radical anti-militarists organised like networks that work as marginalised groups within a democratic setting. Although it is not possible to make strong conclusions based on just two case studies, it is striking that both of these marginal groups organised in network structures found it useful to use humour. It might be worth exploring further whether small and marginalised organisations see humour as an opportunity to gain attention while larger organisations do not see the need for humour or fear the risks associated with it. Even if the persistence of logical argument could be found in Ofog, it might be even more pronounced in formal organisations where all activities need to be approved at the top of the organisation.

The Risks and Limitations with Humorous Political Stunts

Using humorous political stunts has many potential benefits for social movements that aim at facilitating outreach and mobilisation, cultivating a culture of resistance and challenging established relations of power. However, as discussed in Chapter 6 this should not make activists and

academics blind to the risks and limitations. Using humour includes a risk of not being taken seriously and a risk of the humour becoming too internal. Trying to combine the humorous and the non-humorous might also become a challenge.

Many of the humorous political stunts included here were extremely successful in generating media attention. However, Ofog has not had the same experience, so one should not assume that humorous political stunts are a guaranteed path to the front pages. Since the stunts that become most known are often spread via mass media, there is an inevitable selection bias in the stunts included here. We know little about all the attempts made that never reach the media because of issues like unfortunate timing, bad planning or journalists' hesitation to cover it. To uncover all the attempts that never succeeded would require ethnographic research comparable to what I did with Ofog.

All social movements with political messages face the problem that some people do not understand their message, but the risk seems to increase when humour is involved. Irony, in particular, can be a tricky technique since it based on saying one thing but meaning something entirely different. Although other humorous techniques and rational communication sometimes result in confusion or bewilderment, ironic statements risk being mistaken for the real opinion. On some occasions when people in Ofog were experimenting with irony to confront militarism, their statements were understood literally as support for arms manufacturers and NATO. In such situations, it is not unusual to blame the audiences for being stupid, but as Linda Hutcheon has written, irony requires a discursive community which had not been created on these occasions and might be more difficult to establish than we think. Activists engaging in ironic communication must be careful not to create ironic distance and hierarchies between those who "get it" and those who do not.

Humorous political stunts provide an opportunity for social movements to be creative in search of new ways to challenge dominant discourses. Many people might find an outlet for their creativity and talents that otherwise have little value among fellow activists. However, this constant changing and shifting is demanding. If the stunts are not reinvented, they lose their energy, so a certain stunt can be repeated only a limited number of times in a certain context. In addition, humorous

political stunts predominantly seem to be carried out by small tightly knit groups who spend a lot of time preparing their stunts. Some people might consider this a potential problem that results in elitism, since not everyone can afford to spend so much time on activism. Although it has not been a problem in my case studies, there is also a potential trap in humour becoming an end in itself. Because humour generates good feelings for the activists themselves, they need to evaluate whether humour is a self-indulgence that is no longer considered one potential method in a struggle but creates an ironic distance to the subject.

Using humour, and especially ridicule, can also be discussed from an ethical perspective. What is experienced as humour by the initiators and part of the audience might look entirely different to the butt of the ridicule. Jure Gantar found an epistemological dead-end regarding this question and concluded that it is impossible to judge humour from an ethical perspective. Nevertheless, political activists are likely to be judged from this perspective anyway and ought to take it into consideration when planning.

I have suggested that if one insists on judging humorous political stunts along ethical lines, an important place to start is the position of those who use humour and ridicule. There ought to be a major difference between ridicule initiated by those in positions of power that kick down and ridicule initiated by marginalised political activists kicking upwards.

However, although this can be a good starting point for an ethical judgement, two examples illustrate some of the dilemmas that will inevitably arise. Although Ofog and KMV wanted to challenge the discourse of militarism and those on top of the hierarchies, the individuals they encountered did not always feel very powerful. On one occasion, a group of openly homosexual soldiers from the Swedish armed forces participated in the Pride Parade in Stockholm. Next to them a group of Ofog activists walked with speech bubbles made out of cardboard with statements that were supposed to look as if they were the soldiers' statements. Although the text was related to war, the death of civilians, and Sweden's military presence in Afghanistan, the individual soldiers experienced it as an attack on their sexuality since it took place during the parade.

Likewise, the judge in the case where KMV turned up with a fake prosecutor was quoted in a newspaper as saying "I was shocked when I

heard what had happened", and he made his superior file a report to the police.[2] He did not explicitly say that he felt abused, but it is not unreasonable to assume that at least some people would have felt that way under similar circumstances. KMV was targeting the court system, not an individual, in order to expose the system as a farce. Nevertheless, this judge, just as the soldiers in the Pride Parade, became the direct victim, raising the question of whether Ofog and KMV behaved unethically. In both cases, it was people in subordinate positions who ridiculed those they saw as representatives of powerful institutions—the court system and the military. Nevertheless, those who initiate a stunt cannot dictate the emotional responses of others.

Further Research and Experiments in the Field

As mentioned in the Introduction, this study has generated more questions than answers, something which is often the case when researching an area where little was known previously. To date, most experiments with humorous political stunts have been rather small-scale. The week-long Santa action is one of the most extensive examples when it comes to the number of participants and time. But the culmination in the shopping centres did not involve more than 50 people during one afternoon. What would have happened if the humorous political stunts had been carried out on a larger scale? How would it affect those in powerful positions if they had involved 10 times as many people and occurred 10 times as frequently? The answers to these questions, of course, involve speculation or counter-factual history-writing, but asking the questions assumes that the potential of humour might only just have been touched.

Imagine an army of Santas handing out presents in every single shop in Copenhagen before Christmas, not just two places. Imagine Reality AB actually bringing hundreds or even thousands of victims of "collateral damage" to a NATO exercise: how would Swedish authorities have reacted then? Imagine Ofog's ad corrections being present on every ad, not just a few. And not just on one occasion, but every single time the military advertises in order to recruit new soldiers. It is up to creative activists to scale up their experiments with humour, but researchers

might have a role to play in designing experiments. Researchers with access to money and research time have a tremendous responsibility to use such resources wisely. It is important to choose topics and questions that not just are interesting for the researcher herself and will benefit her career but also make a difference for people struggling for peace and justice. Much inspiration can be drawn from participatory action research and intervention research for activists and academics aiming at bridging the gap between these two worlds. There is a huge potential for systematic comparative "experiments" about nonviolence in general and humorous political stunts in particular. One line of experiments would be to compare the consequences of using humorous and non-humorous methods about the same political issue. Another type of intervention/action research would be to work together with activists in order to make "bigger" humorous political stunts in terms of frequency and number of participants. My research has pointed out some of the potential with humorous political stunts, but it has properly documented only the tip of the iceberg of what is achievable through this type of action.

Other research about humour's role in nonviolent resistance remains to be done. For starters, it would be interesting to see whether the typology of humorous political stunts applies worldwide, namely whether it is possible to classify examples from other cultures according to the same five types that I have used here. And is the use of this type of humorous political activism really spreading globally and increasing in frequency as some authors have indicated? A related task is to continue the theoretical exploration of the borders of humorous political stunts.

Equally interesting would be more research on the reactions to humorous political stunts. I have focused on the meaning humour has for the activists, but other studies could do more to uncover what others think about it. A whole range of thrilling questions remain unanswered: Is it really true that humorous political stunts are better at getting media attention, or is this assumption a reflection of a selection bias when one is forced to analyse stunts already described in the literature or known from mass media? What can be observed about a target's reaction when they are confronted with a humorous political stunt, and what do they themselves think about it? Do they experience it as dialogue-oriented, or does the ambiguity of humour distort the communication? How do other

audiences, such as potential new activists and the general public, respond? Can the detour demanded by humour really find or create cracks and reach people at a deeper level? Does the ambiguity of humour make it easier to communicate complex messages, or does humour increase the risk of side-tracking so the focus ends up on the method and the spectacle rather than the message that the activists want to communicate?

In order to investigate social movements' humorous political stunts, it is a requirement that the groups' histories be documented. For both of my case studies, it was necessary to document their activities in order to provide context for their use of humour. The world over, there are numerous small networks whose histories need to be written.

The main data for this research was from two Scandinavian case studies, but a few of the other examples as well as earlier research have documented that humour can play an important role under authoritarian circumstances, such as in reducing fear. Researchers with access to this type of data can bring important insights to the study of nonviolent resistance that can also have practical implications.

Theoretically my research has relied primarily on the theory of nonviolent action. It has only touched the surface when it comes to perspectives from performance studies and social movement theories. There are whole bodies of literature with insights about street performance and emotions within social movements that might be interesting for future studies.

One finding from the study was that from the perspective of activists, the distinction between humour and other types of creative and spectacular activism appears rather artificial. Research on the effect of all kinds of creative activism could investigate differences between humorous activism and other types of creative activism.

Notes

1. For a detailed discussion of the ethical and epistemological assumptions underlying my research, see Chapter 2 in Majken Jul. Sørensen, *Humorous Political Stunts*: *Nonviolent Public Challenges to Power* (Sparsnäs, Sweden: Irene Publishing, 2015), PhD thesis, School of Humanities and Social Inquiry, University of Wollongong, Australia.

The works that have inspired and guided the research process the most are Leslie Brown and Susan Strega, eds., *Research as Resistance*: *Critical*, *Indigenous and Anti-Oppressive Approaches* (Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press, 2005); Caelie Frampton et al., eds., *Sociology for Changing the World*: *Social Movements/Social Research* (Black Point: Fernwood, 2006); Abigail A. Fuller, "Toward an Emancipatory Methodology for Peace Research", *Peace* & *Change* 17, no. 3 (1992).

2. Tormod Haugstad, "Her Blir Dommeren Lurt Av Falsk Aktor", [Here the judge is fooled by fake prosecutor] *Dagbladet*, September 20, 1983.

Bibliography

Aftenposten. 1983. Falsk Aktor Og Impliserte Politianmeldt. [False prosecutor and implicated reported to the police] *Aftenposten*. September 21, 1983, 4.

Aftenposten. 1982. Vernepliktsnektere Til Sak Mot Staten. [Draft refusers file charges aginst the State] *Aftenposten*. January 9, 1982.

Alfsen, Terje. 1983 . *Report to Alfsen's superior*. Report. Accessed September 20, 1983.

Barker, Colin. 2001. The Making of Solidarity at the Lenin Shipyard in Gdansk, Chap. 10. In *Passionate Politics*: *Emotions and Social Movements*, ed. Jeff Goodwin, James M. Jasper and Francesca Polletta, 175–194. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Bayat, Asef. 2010. *Life as Politics*: *How Ordinary People Change the Middle East*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Basu, Sammy. 1999. Dialogic Ethics and the Virtue of Humor. *Journal of Political Philosophy* 7 (4): 378–403.

Belarusian Human Rights House. 2012. Two Belarusians Detained on Charges of "Teddy Bear Drop". *Humanrightshouse.org*, July 23 2012. Accessed August 13, 2012. http://humanrightshouse.org/Articles/18403.html

Benton, Gregor. 1988. The Origins of the Political Joke, Chap. 2. In *Humour in Society*: *Resistance and Control*, ed. Chris Powell and George E. C. Paton, 33–55. New York: St. Martin's Press.

M.J. Sørensen, *Humour in Political Activism*,
DOI 10.1057/978-1-137-57346-9

Berger, Peter L. 1997. *Redeeming Laughter*: *The Comic Dimension of Human Experience*. New York: Walter de Gruyter.

Bertelsen, Annebrit. 1983. Fred Ove Reksten Fri Igjen. [Fred Ove Reksten free again] *Klassekampen*. July 14, 1983.

Bichlbaum, Andy, Mike Bonanno, and Bob Spunkmeyer. 2004. *The Yes Men*: *The True Story of the End of the World Trade Organization*. New York: Disinformation.

Billig, Michael. 2005. *Laughter and Ridicule*: *Towards a Social Critique of Laughter*. Theory, Culture & Society. London: Sage.

Blee, Kathleen, and Amy McDowell. 2012. Social Movement Audiences. *Sociological Forum* 27 (1): 1–20.

Bleiker, Roland. 2000. *Popular Dissent*, *Human Agency*, *and Global Politics*. Cambridge Studies in International Relations. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Bogad, L. M. 2010. Carnivals Against Capital: Radical Clowning and the Global Justice Movement. *Social Identities* 16 (4): 537–557.

Bogad, L. M. 2006. A Place for Protest: The Billionaires for Bush Interrupt the Hegemonologue, Chap. 14. In *Performance and Place*, ed. Leslie and Helen Paris Hill, 170–179. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Bogad, L. M. 2006. Tactical Carnival: Social Movements, Demonstrations, and Dialogical Performance. In *A Boal Companion*: *Dialogues on Theatre and Cultural Politics*, ed. Jan Cohen-Cruz and Mady Schutzman, 46–58. New York: Routledge.

Bondurant, Joan Valerie. 1965 [1958]. *Conquest of Violence*: *The Gandhian Philosophy of Conflict*, Revised edition. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Boulding, Elise. 2000. *Cultures of Peace*: *The Hidden Side of History*. Syracuse Studies on Peace and Conflict Resolution. 1st ed. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press.

Boyd, Andrew, and Dave Oswald Mitchell. 2012. *Beautiful Trouble*: *A Toolbox for Revolution*. New York: OR Books.

Branagan, Marty. 2007. The Last Laugh: Humour in Community Activism. *Community Development Journal* 42 (4): 470–481.

Breast Cancer Action. n.d. Before You Buy Pink. Accessed September 12, 2013. http://thinkbeforeyoupink.org/?page_id=13

Brissenden, Michael. 2007. 7:30 Report—Australian Broadcasting Corportion—Campaign Focuses on Rates Fallout. Sydney: Australian Broadcasting Corporation. November 8, 2007.

Brown, Leslie, and Susan Strega, eds. 2005. *Research as Resistance*: *Critical, Indigenous and Anti-Oppressive Approaches*. Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press.

Bruner, M. Lane. 2005. Carnivalesque Protest and the Humorless State. *Text and Performance Quarterly* 25 (2): 136–155.

B.T. 2015. Kendt Forfatter I Det Røde Felt: Værsgo Inger Støjberg, Her Er Min Farmors Ring! *B.T*, December 25 2015. Accessed February 5, 2016. http://www.bt.dk/politik/kendt-forfatter-i-det-roede-felt-vaersgo-inger-stoejberg-her-er-min-farmors-ring

Carlbom, Mats. n.d. Vitryssland Utvisar Sveriges Ambassadör. [Belarus expels Sweden's ambassador] *dn.se*, August 3 2012. Accessed August 4, 2012. http://www.dn.se/nyheter/sverige/vitryssland-utvisar-sveriges-ambassador

Carlsen, Jon Bang. 1975. Dejlig Er Den Himmel Blå [Beautiful Is the Blue Sky]. 45 min: C&C productions Aps.

Carter, April. 2012. *People Power and Political Change*: *Key Issues and Concepts*. Abingdon, England: Routledge.

Chvasta, Marcyrose. 2006. Anger, Irony, and Protest: Confronting the Issue of Efficacy, Again. *Text and Performance Quarterly* 26 (1): 5–16.

Clementsen, Conrad. n.d. Anmeldelse. Letter from Conrad Clemetsen to Oslo Politikammer. Accessed September 30, 1983.

Collin, Matthew. 2001. *This Is Serbia Calling*. New York, NY: Serpent's Tail.

Corrigall-Brown, Catherine. 2012. *Patterns of Protest*: *Trajectories of Participation in Social Movements*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Council of Europe. 1950. European Convention on Human Rights. Accessed October 2, 2012. http://www.echr.coe.int/NR/rdonlyres/D5CC24A7-DC13-4318-B457-5C9014916D7A/0/CONVENTION_ENG_WEB.pdf

Critchley, Simon. 2002. *On Humour*. Thinking in Action. London: Routledge.

Dagens Nyheter. n.d. Ofog Svarar: "Självklart Är Pride Politiskt". [Ofog responds "Of course Pride is political"] *dn.se*, July 25 2012. Accessed August 13, 2012. http://www.dn.se/insidan/insidan-hem/ofog-svarar-sjalvklart-ar-pride-politiskt

Davies, Christie. 2007. Humour and Protest: Jokes under Communism. *International Review of Social History* 52 (S15): 291–305.

Day, Amber. 2011. *Satire and Dissent*: *Interventions in Contemporary Political Debate*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.

Debord, Guy. 1970. *Society of the Spectacle*. Detroit: Black & Red.

Diani, Mario. 2004. Networks and Participation, Chap. 15. In *The Blackwell Companion to Social Movements*, ed. David A. Snow, Sarah Anne Soule and Hanspeter Kriesi, 339–359. Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub.

Downe, Pamela J. 1999. Laughing When It Hurts: Humor and Violence in the Lives of Costa Rican Prostitutes. *Women's Studies International Forum* 22 (1): 63–78.

Downton, James V., and Paul Ernest Wehr. 1997. *The Persistent Activist*: *How Peace Commitment Develops and Survives*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Duncombe, Stephen. 2007. *Dream*: *Re-Imagining Progressive Politics in an Age of Fantasy*. New York: New Press.

Duree, Ashley. 2009. Greed at the New York Stock Exchange and the Levitation of the Pentagon: Early Protest Theatre by Abbie Hoffman and Jerry Rubin. *Voces Novae*: *Chapman University Historical Review* 1 (1): 51–72.

Ekdahl, Micael "Totte". n.d. Cyniskt Angrepp i Prideparaden. [cynical attack in the pride parade] *etc.se*, August 11 2011. Accessed September 2, 2011. http://www.etc.se/nyhet/cyniskt-angrepp-i-prideparaden

Euronews. n.d. Swedish Activists Behind Belarus Teddy Bear Stunt. *euronews.com*, August 2 2012. Accessed August 7, 2012. http://www.euronews.com/2012/08/02/swedish-activists-behind-belarus-teddy-bear-stunt/

European Commission of Human Rights. 1985. Decision of the Commission as to the Admissibility Application No. 10600/83 by Jørgen Johansen against Norway. In *10600/83*. Strasbourg.

FairFin. n.d. History. Accessed February 11, 2016. http://www.fairfin.be/en/about-fairfin/history

FairFin. n.d. Vision. Accessed February 11, 2016. http://www.fairfin.be/en/about-fairfin/vision

Fletcher, John. 2009. Of Minutemen and Rebel Clown Armies: Reconsidering Transformative Citizenship. *Text and Performance Quarterly* 29 (3): 222–238.

Forhandlinger. n.d. Forhandlinger I Odelstinget Nr. 28. Sak Nr. 7.Innstilling Fra Justiskomiteen Om Lov Om Endringer I Lov Av 19. Mars 1965 Nr 3 Om Fritaking for Militærtjeneste Av Overbevisningsgrunner Og Militær Straffelov Av 22. Mai 1902 Nr 13. (Innst O. Nr. 75, Jf Ot.Prp. Nr 35). Accesses June 11, 1990.

Forhandlinger. n.d. Forhandlinger I Stortinget Nr. 192. Sak Nr. 3. Innstilling Fra Justiskomiteen Om Verneplikt. (Innst. S. Nr. 111, Jf. St. Meld. Nr. 70 for 1983-84). Accessed March 12, 1985.

Fortun, Gunnar. n.d. Rømning—Feil Vei. [Escaping—wrong way] *Arbeiderbladet*. Accessed June 24, 1983.

Fortun, Gunnar. n.d. Spilte Aktor. [Played prosecutor] *Arbeiderbladet*, September 19 1983, 1 and 11.

Foucault, Michel. 1976. Disciplinary Power and Subjection, Chap. 11. In *Power*, ed. Steven Lukes, 229–252. New York: New York University Press.

Foucault, Michel 1982. The Subject and Power. *Critical Inquiry* 8 (4): 777–795.

Foucault, Michel 1980. Two Lectures, Chap. 5. In *Power/Knowledge*: *Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972–1977*, ed. Colin Gordon, 78–108. New York: Pantheon Books.

Foucault, Michel, and Paul Rabinow. 1984. *The Foucault Reader*. 1st ed. New York: Pantheon Books.

Frampton, Caelie, Gary Kinsman, A. K. Thompson, and Kate Tilleczek, eds. 2006. *Sociology for Changing the World*: *Social Movements/Social Research*. Black Point: Fernwood.

Francis, Linda E. 1994. Laughter, the Best Mediation: Humor as Emotion Management in Interaction. *Symbolic Interaction* 17 (2): 147–163.

Fuller, Abigail A. 1992. Toward an Emancipatory Methodology for Peace Research. *Peace & Change* 17 (3): 286.

Galperina, Marina. 1959. Why Russian Art Group Voina 'Dicked' a St. Petersburg Bridge. Accessed April 19, 2011. http://animalnewyork.com/2010/06/why-russian-art-group-voina-dicked-a-st-petersburg-bridge/

Goffman, Erving. n.d. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday Anchor Books.

Gandhi, Mohandas Karamchand. 1927. *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*. Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House.

Gantar, Jure. 2005. *The Pleasure of Fools*: *Essays in the Ethics of Laughter*. London: McGill-Queen's University Press.

Goffman, Erving. 1959. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. Doubleday Anchor Books. Garden City, NY: Doubleday.

Goodwin, Jeff, James M. Jasper, and Francesca Polletta, eds. 2001. *Passionate Politics*: *Emotions and Social Movements*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Hariman, Robert. 2008. Political Parody and Public Culture. *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 94 (3): 247–272.

Harold, Christine. 2007. *Ourspace*: *Resisting the Corporate Control of Culture*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

Harrebye, Silas. 2012. Cracks: Creative Activism—Priming Pump for the Political Imagination or a New Compromising Form of Democratic Participation Balancing between Critique, Cooperation, and Cooptation on

the Margins of the Repertoire of Contention? PhD thesis, Roskilde University, Roskilde.
Hašek, Jaroslav. 1974. *The Good Soldier ŠVejk and His Fortunes in the World War*. New York: Crowell.
Haugerud, Angelique. 2013. *No Billionaire Left Behind*: *Satirical Activism in America*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
Haugerud, Angelique 2012. Satire and Dissent in the Age of Billionaires. *Social Research* 79 (1): 145–168.
Haugstad, Tormod. n.d. Her Blir Dommeren Lurt Av Falsk Aktor. [Here the judge is fooled by fake prosecutor] *Dagbladet*. Accessed September 20, 1983.
Helsingeng, Terje. n.d. Advokat Må I Fengsel. [Lawyer must go to prison] *VG*. Accessed September 12, 1985.
Henriksen, Birger. n.d. Svensker Teddy-Bombet Hviterussland [Swede teddy-bombed Belarus] *www.TV2.no*, August 2 2012. Accessed August 3, 2012. http://www.tv2.no/nyheter/utenriks/svensker-teddybombet-hviterussland-3843398.html
Henzlert, John. n.d. Soldater Kränkta under Prideparaden. [Soldiers offended during pride parade] *http://www.svd.se*, August 7 2011. Accessed August 7, 2011. http://www.svd.se/nyheter/inrikes/soldater-krankta-under-prideparaden_6373850.svd
Higgie, Rebecca. 2014. Kynical Dogs and Cynical Masters: Contemporary Satire, Politics and Truth-Telling. *Humor*: *International Journal of Humor Research* 27 (2): 183–201.
Holmbäck, Christopher, and Urban Hamid. 2012. Framtidens Svenska Militärer Rekryteras Tidigt. *Re*:*public*, 10–19.
Hong, Nathaniel. 2010. Mow Em All Down Grandma: The 'Weapon' of Humor in Two Danish World War II Occupation Scrapbooks. *Humor*: *International Journal of Humor Research* 23 (1): 27–64.
Hutcheon, Linda. 1995. *Irony's Edge*: *The Theory and Politics of Irony*. London: Routledge.
ICR Skandinavia. 1981. *Verneplikt*: *Statlig Tvangsarbeid*: *Et Hefte Fra ICR—Skandinavia* [Conscription: state forced labour: A booklet from ICR—Scandinavia]. Fmks Fredspolitiske Skriftserie; 4. Bergen: FMK.
Independent Institute of Socio-Economic and Political Studies. 2012. Teddy-Bear Landing—How the Belarusians Evaluated It. Independent Institute of Socio-Economic and Political Studies.
Jacobs, Ronald N., and Philip Smith. 1997. Romance, Irony, and Solidarity. *Sociological Theory* 15 (1): 60–80.

Jasper, James M. 1997. *The Art of Moral Protest*: *Culture*, *Biography*, *and Creativity in Social Movements*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Johansson, Anna, and Stellan Vinthagen. 2016. Dimensions of Everyday Resistance: An Analytical Framework. *Critical Sociology* 42 (3): 417–435.

Johnsen, Alf Bjarne. n.d. Fengsel for Totalnekter? [Prision for total resister?] *VG*. Accessed March 16, 1985.

Jorgensen, Aage. 1982. Touring the 1970's with the Solvognen in Denmark. *The Drama Review*: *TDR* 26 (3): 15–28.

Justis- og politidepartementet [Department of Justice and Police]. n.d. Ot Prp Nr 35 (1989–1990) Om Lov Om Endringer I Lov 19 Mars 1965 Nr 3 Om Fritaking for Militærtjeneste Av Overbevisningsgrunner Og Militær Straffelov 22 Mai 1902 Nr 13. ed. Justis- og politidepartementet [Department of Justice and Police], 1-10, March 2 1990.

Justiskomiteen. n.d. Innst O. Nr. 75. Innstilling Fra Justiskomiteen Om Lov Om Endringer I Lov 19 Mars 1965 Nr 3 Om Fritaking for Militærtjeneste Av Overbevisningsgrunner Og Militær Straffelov 22 Mai 1902 Nr 13. June 8 1990.

Jørgenssen, Steen A. n.d. Støjberg Efter Nazi-Sammenligninger: Kun Rimeligt at Tage Værdier Fra Flygtninge. *Jyllands-Posten*, December 18 2015. Accessed February 6, 2016. http://jyllands-posten.dk/politik/ECE8313942/St%C3%B8jberg-efter-nazi-sammenligninger-Kun-rimeligt-at-tage-v%C3%A6rdier-fra-flygtninge/

Kanonudvalget. n.d. Julemandshæren [the Santa Claus Army]. Det danske kulturministerium, Accessed June 18, 2012. http://kulturkanon.kum.dk/scenekunst/julemandshaeren/Begrundelse_Julemandshaeren/

Kenney, Padraic. 2002. *A Carnival of Revolution—Central Europe 1989*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Klandermans, Bert. 2004. The Demand and Supply of Participation: Social-Psycological Correlates of Participation in Social Movements, Chap. 16. In *The Blackwell Companion to Social Movements*, ed. David A. Snow, Sarah Anne Soule and Hanspeter Kriesi, 360–379. Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub

Klein, Naomi. 2001. *No Logo*: *No Space*, *No Choice*, *No Jobs*. London: Flamingo.

Klepto, Kolonel. 2004. Making War with Love: The Clandestine Insurgent Rebel Clown Army. *City* 8 (3): 403–411.

Kino Rama. 2011. *Egl*c*—Orgullo Patrio*. YouTube. Accessed September 8, 2015. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r_C8-bTHuCM&list=RDCPwfzoD27nE&index=3

KMV. n.d. Rettsal 8 Sprenges. Poster from KMV. Accessed September 12 1983.
KMV. n.d. Rundbrev 6. Kampanjen Mot Verneplikt. Accessed May 1984.
KMV. n.d. Rundbrev 9. Kampanjen Mot Verneplikt. Accessed November 1984.
KMV. n.d. Rundbrev 11. Kampanjen Mot Verneplikt. Accessed April 1985.
KMV. n.d. Rundbrev 13. Kampanjen Mot Verneplikt. Accessed September 1985.
KMV. n.d. Rundbrev 16. Kampanjen Mot Verneplikt. Accessed February 1986.
KMV. n.d. Rundbrev 17. Kampanjen Mot Verneplikt. Accessed October 1986.
KMV. n.d. Rundbrev 18. Kampanjen Mot Verneplikt, 1987.
KMV. n.d. Rundbrev 30. Kampanjen Mot Verneplikt. Accessed February 1990.
Kupchinsky, Oleg. n.d. Toys for Democracy: In a Siberian City, Activists Find a Creative Way to Protest *rferl.org*, January 16 2012. Accessed August 7, 2012. http://www.rferl.org/content/toys_for_democracy_siberia/24453688.html
Laska, Cattis. n.d. Krigsmotstånd Central Del Av Queer Kamp. [War resistance central part of queer struggle] *etc.se*, August 18 2011. Accessed September 2, 2011.http://www.etc.se/debatt/krigsmotst%C3%A5nd-central-del-av-queer-kamp
Lasn, Kalle. 1999. *Culture Jam*: *The Uncooling of America*. 1st ed. New York: Eagle Brook.
Letmark, Peter. n.d. Begreppet Queer Skapar Allt Större Oenighet. [The notion queer creates greater disagreements] *dn.se*, July 26 2012. Accessed August 13, 2012. http://www.dn.se/insidan/insidan-hem/begreppet-queer-skapar-allt-storre-oenighet
Letmark, Peter. 2012. Hela Paraden Blev En Enda Lång Pina. ["The whole parade became one long torment"] *dn.se*, July 25 2012. Accessed August 13, 2012. http://www.dn.se/insidan/insidan-hem/hela-paraden-blev-en-enda-lang-pina
Lilja, Mona, Mikael Baaz, and Stellan Vinthagen. 2013. Exploring 'Irrational Resistance'. *Journal of Political Power* 6 (2): 201–217.
Lilja, Mona, and Stellan Vinthagen. 2014. Sovereign Power, Disciplinary Power and Biopower: Resisting What Power with What Resistance? *Journal of Political Power* 7 (1): 107–126.
Lovdata. n.d. Lov 1965-03-19 Nr 03: Lov Om Fritaking for Militærtjeneste Av Overbevisningsgrunner [Militærnekterloven]. Accessed December 10, 2012. http://lovdata.no/all/hl-19650319-003.html
Lukes, Steven. 1974. *Power*: *A Radical View*. Studies in Sociology. London: Macmillan.

Martin, Brian. 2007. *Justice Ignited*: *The Dynamics of Backfire*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

MacLeod, Jason. 2015. Building Recilience to Repression in Nonviolent Resistance Struggles. *Journal of Resistance Studies* 1 (1): 77–118.

Marcuse, Herbert. 1969. Repressive Tolerance. In *A Critique of Pure Tolerance*, ed. Robert Paul Wolff, Barrington Moore and Herbert Marcuse, 95–137. Boston: Beacon Press.

Martin, Brian. 1989. Gene Sharp's Theory of Power. *Journal of Peace Research* 26 (2): 213–222.

Martin, Brian 2005. Researching Nonviolent Action: Past Themes and Future Possibilities. *Peace* & *Change* 30 (2): 247–270.

Martin, Rod A. 2007. *The Psychology of Humor*: *An Integrative Approach*. Burlington, MA: Elsevier Academic Press.

McGuinness, Kate. 1993. Gene Sharp's Theory of Power: A Feminist Critique of Consent. *Journal of Peace Research* 30 (1): 101–115.

McIntyre, Alice. 2008. *Participatory Action Research*. Qualitative Research Methods. Los Angeles: Sage Publications.

McIntyre, Iain. 2009. *How to Make Trouble and Influence People*: *Pranks*, *Hoaxes*, *Graffiti* & *Political Mischief-Making from across Australia*. Melbourne: Breakdown Press.

Meyer, John C. 2000. Humor as a Double-Edged Sword: Four Functions of Humor in Communication. *Communication Theory* 10 (3): 310–331.

Misztal, Bronislaw. 1992. Between the State and Solidarity: One Movement, Two Interpretations—the Orange Alternative Movement in Poland. *British Journal of Sociology* 43 (1): 55–78.

Nepstad, Sharon Erickson. 2008. *Religion and War Resistance in the Plowshares Movement*. Cambridge Studies in Contentious Politics. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Nepstad, Sharon Erickson, and Christian Smith. 2001. The Social Structure of Moral Outrage in Recruitment to the U.S. Central America Peace Movement, Chap. 9. In *Passionate Politics*: *Emotions and Social Movements*, ed. Jeff Goodwin, James M. Jasper and Francesca Polletta, 158–174. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Netwerk Vlaanderen. 2005. Demining Action 18/10/2005.

Netwerk Vlaanderen. n.d. Demining Team Begins Its Work at Axa. Netwerk Vlaanderen. Accessed October 12, 2011. http://www.netwerkvlaanderen.be/en/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=47&Itemid=268

Nichols, James. n.d. Jennifer Louise Lopez Asks Anti-Gay Harlem Church to Stone Her. *The Huffington Post* March 20 2014. Accessed February 5, 2016. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/03/20/lesbian-stoning-anti-gay-church_n_5000239.html

NOU. 1979. Nou 1979: 51 Verneplikt. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.

Næss, Arne. 1974. *Gandhi and Group Conflict*: *An Exploration of Satyagraha*: *Theoretical Background*. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.

Ofog. n.d. 7 Personer Inne På Flygflottilj—Krig Kan Inte Få Förberedas Ostört! Pressmeddelande Från Nätverket Ofog, 29 Juli 2010. Accessed March 6, 2012. http://ofog.org/press/7-personer-inne-p%C3%A5-flygflottilj-%E2%80%93-krig-kan-inte-f%C3%A5-f%C3%B6rberedas-ost%C3%B6rt

Ofog. n.d. English. Accessed January 10, 2012. http://ofog.org/english

Ofog. n.d. Ofog Visar Försvarsmaktens Verklighet I Prideparaden. Accessed August7,2011.http://www.ofog.org/nyheter/ofog-visar-f%C3%B6rsvarsmaktens-verklighet-i-prideparaden

Ofog. n.d. Vi Har Vad Som Krävs För Att Ha En Åsikt! Accessed August 15, 2011. http://ofog.org/nyheter/vi-har-vad-som-kr%C3%A4vs-f%C3%B6r-att-ha-en-%C3%A5sikt

Palmer, Jerry. 1994. *Taking Humour Seriously*. London: Routledge.

Peczak, Mirosław, and Anna Krajewska-Wieczorek. 1991. The Orange Ones, the Street, and the Background. *Performing Arts Journal* 13 (2): 50–55.

Persen, Åsne Berre, and Jørgen Johansen. 1998. *Den Nødvendige Ulydigheten* [the Necessary Civil Disobedience]. Oslo: FMK.

Pi-Sunyer, Oriol. 1977. Political Humor in a Dictatorial State: The Case of Spain. *Ethnohistory* 24 (2): 179–190.

Radio Australia. n.d. Burma and the Difficult Art of Humour. *blogs.radioaustralia.net.au*, November 22 2010. Accessed March 29, 2011. http://blogs.radioaustralia.net.au/today/burma-and-the-art-of-humour

Rasmussen, Nina. 2002. *Solvognen*: *Fortællinger Fra Vores Ungdom* [The Sun Chariot: Tales From our Youth]. Copenhagen: Rosinante.

RFE/RL. n.d. Belarusian 'Toy Protest' Inmate Goes on Hunger Strike. *rferl.org*, February 22 2012. Accessed August 7, 2012. http://www.rferl.org/content/belarusian_activist_jailed_over_toy_protest/24492383.html

RFE/RL. n.d. 'Police Detain Stuffed Animals' in Minsk Toy Protest. *rferl.org*, February 10 2012. Accessed August 7, 2012. http://www.rferl.org/content/belarus_activists_hold_toy_protest/24480210.html

Rodrigues, Suzana B., and David L. Collinson. 1995. 'Having Fun'?: Humour as Resistance in Brazil. *Organization Studies* (*Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co. KG.*) 16 (5): 739.

Rodrigues, Suzana B., and David L. Collinson 1995. 'Having Fun'? Humour as Resistance in Brazil. *Organization Studies* 16 (5): 739–768.

Romanos, Eduardo. 2015. The Strategic Use of Humor in the Spanish 15m Movement. In *Crisis and Social Mobilization in Contemporary Spain*: *The 15m Movement*, ed. B. Tejerina and I. Perugorría. Farnham: Ashgate. [in press].

Rosenbaum, Thane. 2004. *The Myth of Moral Justice*: *Why Our Legal System Fails to Do What's Right*. 1st ed. New York: HarperCollins.

Routledge, Paul. 2012. Sensuous Solidarities: Emotion, Politics and Performance in the Clandestine Insurgent Rebel Clown Army. *Antipode* 44 (2): 428–452.

Routledge, Poul. 2009. Toward a Relational Ethics of Struggle: Embodiment, Affinity, and Affect, Chap. 8. In *Contemporary Anarchist Studies*: *An Introductory Anthology of Anarchy in the Academy*, ed. Randall Amster, Abraham DeLeon, Luis A. Fernandez, Anthony J. Nocella and Deric Shannon, 82–92. New York: Routledge.

Roy, Carole. 2006. The Irreverent Raging Grannies: Humour as Protest. *Canadian Woman Studies* 25 (3/4): 141–148.

Roy, Carole 2007. When Wisdom Speaks Sparks Fly: Raging Grannies Perform Humor as Protest. *Women's Studies Quarterly* 35 (3/4): 150–164.

Sarpsborg Arbeiderblad. n.d. 16 Måneders Fengsel Er Ikke "Straff", Sier Myndighetene. [16 months in prison is not "punishment", says authorities] *Sarpsborg Arbeiderblad.* Accessed April 20, 1982.

Schechter, Joel. 1994. *Satiric Impersonations*: *From Aristophanes to the Guerrilla Girls*. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press.

Schock, Kurt. 2015. *Civil Resistance Today*. Cambridge, UK: Polity.

Schock, Kurt 2003. Nonviolent Action and Its Misconceptions: Insights for Social Scientists. *PS*: *Political Science* & *Politics* 36 (4): 705–712.

Schulman, Sarah. n.d. Israel and 'Pinkwashing'. *New York Times*, November 22, 2011. Accessed September 12, 2013. http://www.nytimes.com/2011/11/23/opinion/pinkwashing-and-israels-use-of-gays-as-a-messaging-tool.html?_r=3&

Scott, James C. 1990. *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts.* New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Scott, James C. 1985. *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Sharp, Gene. 1973. *The Politics of Nonviolent Action*. Boston: Porter Sargent.

Sharp, Gene 2005. *Waging Nonviolent Struggle, 20th Century Practice and 21th Century Potential*. Boston: Porter Sargent.

Shepard, Benjamin, L. M. Bogad, and Stephen Duncombe. 2008. Performing Vs. The Insurmountable: Theatrics, Activism, and Social Movements. *Liminalities*: *A Journal of Performance Studies* 4 (3): 1–30.

Shepard, Benjamin Heim. 2010. *Queer Political Performance and Protest: Play, Pleasure and Social Movement*. Routledge Advances in Sociology. New York: Routledge.

Solvognen. 1974. Solvognens Julemandshær (Synopsis Og Invitation).

Sombutpoonsiri, Janjira. 2012. The Use of Humour as a Vehicle for Nonviolent Struggle: Serbia's 1996-7 Protests and the *Otpor* (Resistance) Movement. PhD thesis, La Trobe University.

Sombatpoonsiri, Janjira. 2015. *Humor and Nonviolent Struggle in Serbia*. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press.

Sombatpoonsiri, Janjira forthcoming. Playful Subversion: *Red Sunday's* Nonviolent Activism in Thailand's Post-2015 Crackdown. *Peace & Policy* vol. 20.

Somekh, Bridget. 2006. *Action Research: A Methodology for Change and Development.* Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Speier, Hans. 1998 Wit and Politics: An Essay on Power and Laughter. *American Journal of Sociology* 103, (5): 1352–1401.

Stiehm, Judith. 1968. Nonviolence Is Two. *Sociological Inquiry* 38(1): 23–29.

Stokker, Kathleen. 1997. *Folklore Fights the Nazis: Humor in Occupied Norway, 1940–1945*. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press.

Sombatpoonsiri, Janjira 2001. Quisling Humor in Hitler's Norway: Its Wartime Function and Postwar Legacy. *Humor* 14 (4): 339–357.

Stortinget. n.d. Parliamentary Procedure. Accessed October 9, 2013. http://stortinget.no/en/In-English/About-the-Storting/Parliamentary-procedure/

Stringer, Ernest T. 2007. *Action Research*. 3rd ed. Los Angeles: Sage Publications.

Strudwick, Ruth M., Stuart J. Mackay, and Stephen Hicks. 2012. Cracking Up? *Synergy* 2012: 4–7.

Studio Total. n.d. Why We Did It. Accessed August 8, 2012. http://www.studio-total.se/teddybears/why-we-did-it.html

Sturdee, Nick. n.d. Don't Raise the Bridge: Voina, Russia's Art Terrorists. *The Guardian*, 12 April 2011. Accessed December 17, 2011. http://www.guardian.co.uk/artanddesign/2011/apr/12/voina-art-terrorism?INTCMP=SRCH

Szego, Julie. n.d. Four Play First Thing in the Morning: That's Some Fan Club. *The Age*, November 2 2007, 8. Accessed June 1, 2012. http://go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?id=GALE%7CA280757832&v=2.1&u=uow&it=r&p=AONE&sw=w

Sønstelie, Erik H., and Bjørn Aslaksen. n.d. Sett Oss I Fengsel. [Put us in prison] *VG*, June 24 1983, 8.

Sørensen, Majken Jul. 2008. Humor as a Serious Strategy of Nonviolent Resistance to Oppression. *Peace & Change* 33 (2): 167–190.

Sørensen, Majken Jul. 2015. *Humorous Political Stunts*: *Nonviolent Public Challenges to Power*. Sparsnäs, Sweden: Irene Publishing. PhD thesis, School of Humanities and Social Inquiry, University of Wollongong, Australia.

Sørensen, Majken Jul. 2013. Humorous Political Stunts: Speaking "Truth" to Power? *European Journal of Humour Research* 1 (2): 69–83.

Sørensen, Majken Jul. 2006. Humour as Nonviolent Resistance to Oppression. MA thesis, Coventry University.

Sørensen, Majken Jul. 2015. Radical Clowning—Challenging Militarism through Play and Otherness. *Humor*: *International Journal of Humor Research* 28 (1): 25–47.

Sørensen, Majken Jul, and Brian Martin. 2014. The Dilemma Action: Analysis of an Activist Technique. *Peace & Change* 39 (1): 73–100.

Tarrow, Sidney G. 2011. *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics.* Cambridge Studies in Comparative Politics. Rev. & updated 3rd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Taylor, Phil, and Peter Bain. 2003. 'Subterranean Worksick Blues': Humour as Subversion in Two Call Centres. *Organization Studies* 24(9): 1487–1509.

The Santas from the theatre group Solvognen. Solvognen: Derfor Malede Vi Byen I Folkets Farve. [Solvognen: The reason we painted the city in the colour of the people] *B.T.*, December 23 1974.

Thompson, Nato, Gregory Sholette, Joseph Thompson, Nicholas Mirzoeff, C. Ondine Chavoya, Arjen Noordeman, and Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art. 2004. *The Interventionists: Users' Manual for the Creative Disruption of Everyday Life*. North Adams, MA: MASS MoCA.

Tsakona, Villy, and Diana Elena Popa. 2011. Humour in Politics and the Politics of Humour: An Introduction. In *Studies in Political Humour*: *In between Political Critique and Public Entertainment*, ed. Villy Tsakona and Diana Elena Popa, 1–30. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Vinthagen, Stellan. 2015. Four Dimensions of Nonviolent Action: A Sociological Perspective, Chap. 9. In *Civil Resistance: Comparative Perspectives on Nonviolent Struggle*, ed. Kurt Schock, 258–288. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Vinthagen, Stellan. 2005. *Ickevåldsaktion*: *En Social Praktik Av Motstånd Och Konstruktion* [Nonviolent Action: A Social Practice of Resistance and

Construction]. Göteborg: Institutionen för freds- och utvecklingsforskning (PADRIGU) Göteborgs universitet. PhD thesis.

Vinthagen, Stellan. 2015. *A Theory of Nonviolent Action: How Civil Resistance Works*. London: ZED Books.

Vos, Pieter De. 2006. *The Ace-Bank Hoax*. Accessed June 4, 2012. http://vimeo.com/10899863

Weber, Thomas. 1993. 'The Marchers Simply Walked Forward until Struck Down': Nonviolent Suffering and Conversion. *Peace & Change* 18(3): 267–289.

Westwood, Robert I, and Allanah Johnston. 2013. Humor in Organization: From Function to Resistance. *Humor: International Journal of Humor Research* 26 (2): 219–247.

Wormer, Katherine van, and Mary Boes. 1997. Humor in the Emergency Room: A Social Work Perspective." *Health & Social Work* 22 (2): 87–92.

WRI. 2014. *Handbook for Nonviolent Campaigns*. 2nd ed. London: War Resisters' International.

Index

M.J. Sørensen, *Humour in Political Activism*,
DOI 10.1057/978-1-137-57346-9