University of Southampton

Faculty of Environmental and Life Sciences

<u>Geography and Environmental Science</u>

Subvertising: on the Life and Death of Advertising Power

By

Thomas Dekeyser

Thesis for the degree of <u>Doctor of Philosophy</u>

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Abstract

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This thesis sketches an image of intricate advertising-subvertising relations. 'Subvertising' is a portmanteau for 'subverting advertising', referring to a wide-range of illicit artistic and activist interventions into the materialities of urban advertising spaces (including destruction, reversal, replacement, removal, supplementation, and cutting). Through a 28-month-long ethnographic engagement with prominent subvertising practitioners (in London, Newcastle, Brussels, Paris, and New York) and in-depth interviews with advertising practitioners, this thesis details a contested geography of advertising which complicates conceptions of advertising power. Contemporary approaches to advertising power, in geography and the social sciences more broadly, tend to describe a double production: advertising power as the production of space-time, and as the (representational-affective) production of consumer subjects. Tracing ethnographic stories of subvertising-advertising relations, in this thesis we witness a more expanded account of advertising power, one that takes contestation to advertising (and more broadly to capitalist spaces, times, affects, subjectivities, imaginations) as a central field of intervention. This, the thesis argues, deepens advertising's capacities to embed itself into and intervene into everyday social realities, where it exerts powers to exhaust the conditions necessary for alternative imaginaries to reshape the world.

Examining these powers to exhaust, the thesis details how advertisers enrol social, legal, performative and material methods into a 'regime of order' which depletes the affective charge of a disorderly city. Further, the thesis illustrates the significance of advertisers' affirmative work in what will be referred to as 'recuperation': the generation of monetary value out of lifeworlds at odds with capital through the engineering of amicable atmospheres. Following this line of thought, the final part of the thesis poses the question: what mode of contestation, if any, outlives the exhaustive, recuperative logic of late capitalism? To this end, the thesis considers the figure of the contemporary Vandal, and its promise of an ethics after advertising.
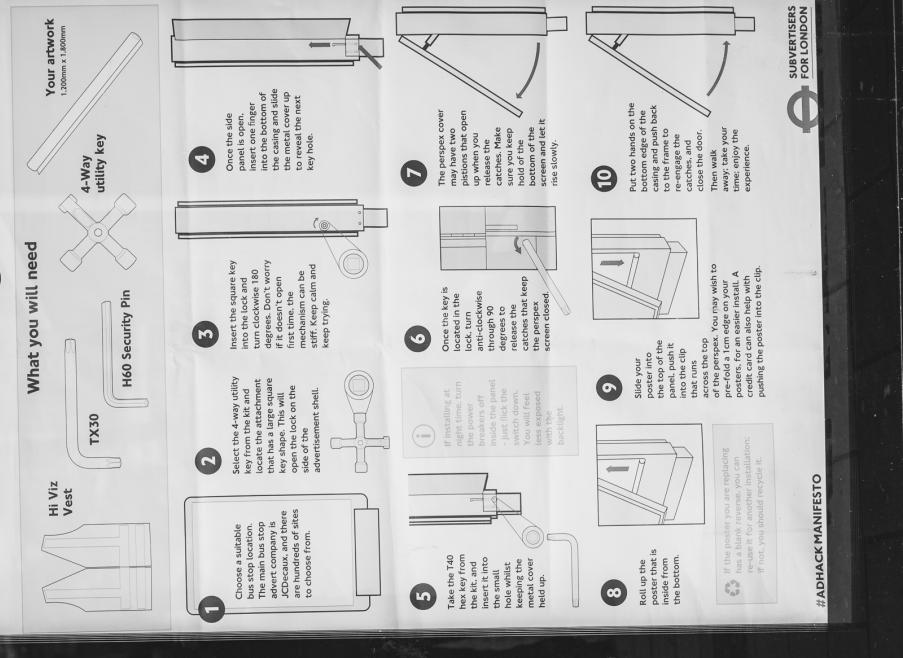
Figure 1 - Hack this ad space: illicit subvertisement installed by Donna. (London, December 2017)

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Note: All images are the author's, unless the caption explicitly states otherwise.

Declaration of Authorship

I, Thomas Dekeyser, declare that this thesis and the work presented in it are my own and has been generated by me as the result of my own original research.

Thesis title: *Subvertising:* on the Life and Death of Advertising Power.

I confirm that:

1. This work was done wholly or mainly while in candidature for a research degree at this University;

2. Where any part of this thesis has previously been submitted for a degree or any other qualification at this University or any other institution, this has been clearly stated;

3. Where I have consulted the published work of others, this is always clearly attributed;

4. Where I have quoted from the work of others, the source is always given. With the exception of such quotations, this thesis is entirely my own work;

5. I have acknowledged all main sources of help;

6. Where the thesis is based on work done by myself jointly with others, I have made clear exactly what was done by others and what I have contributed myself;

7. Parts of this work have been published as:

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Signature:

Date: 14 December 2018

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to all those friends and anonymous actors adventuring across the social, legal and material borders of advertising. You have offered me the weapons for forging my way out of the advertising industry when I was still so engulfed by it. For this, I will remain forever grateful.

Acknowledgements

'I CLOSE MY EYES AND THINK OF ALL THE THINGS I DON'T WANT. AND VISUALISE THEM ROLLING BY, VACUUM CLEANERS, 3-D TVS, NEW PHONES AND CARS AND HAND BAGS, A NEAT HOUSE IN THE SUBURBS. I THINK OF HOW UNHAPPY THESE THINGS WOULD MAKE ME AND THEN I AM FREE. IF YOU DON'T WANT THESE THINGS THEY CAN NEVER TRULY HAVE YOU. THEN I THINK OF WOOD AND I THINK OF MY BONES AS WOOD, SOMETHING SLOW AND PUT HERE A LONG TIME AGO' (Billboard Poem, Robert Montgomery, London, date unknown)

Prologue

5.45 a.m., a cold winter morning in Paris. I am sitting in the back of a white van rushing along empty wide boulevards. Beside me sit 100 posters and four women. My stomach is battling an early-morning caffeine overdose, awkwardly interrupting the nervous silence filling the vehicle. In the wake of the terror attacks exactly two weeks ago, Paris has become a heavily militarised city. Perhaps not the ideal time for an illicit intervention.

Nearing the centre of the capital, we roll past patrolling members of police and army forces into a side-street of one of Paris' most luxurious shopping streets. Screen-printed JCDecaux vests, legal numbers, four-way utility keys and six-sheet posters in cardboard tubes are circulated swiftly inside the parked van. All is going according to plan. I follow one of the two installation couples at distance as they approach their first target: a back-lit Louis Vuitton model shielded behind bus shelter glass. Although they are breathing loudly, their confidence convinces. No-one looks up as they rip out the native poster, click the alter-poster into the metal frame, roll it down and close the bus shelter space. They step back, the subvert glows in the night: a polar bear drowning in a rising sea of grey and blue shades, writhing and gasping for breath. Throughout the city, dozens of 'subvertisers' from the Brandalism collective are currently tearing out advertisements and replacing them by posters critiquing the COP21 UN Climate Change Conference before its initiation in two days.

Figure 2 - Brandalism poster during COP21 subvertising intervention. (Paris, November 2015)
Image by Benoit Tessier (for The Guardian).

As I stay behind to snap shots of the drowning ice bear, one of the installers, Sarah, runs past me, screaming, 'We need to go back to our squat!'. I wait for more information but receive none. 'Now!', she barks. I jump into the van, overwhelmed and panting. When we get there, police in riot gear are marching down the street toward the squat. We slowly drive up. A police officer tells us to turn around immediately: the entire street is blocked off for 'terrorism-related issues'. Once everyone is allowed to re-enter the squatted building, John, who had stayed in the squat to help organise the subvertising action from a central location, tells us what had happened:

> 'So, suddenly there were loud bangs on the door. A man was yelling in French *Police! Police! Ouvers! Ouvers!*, louder and louder. At the same time, I heard noise from upstairs, the same type of screaming, but I couldn't quite make out what was happening. [...] All I could think was, fuck, this is it, they'll find our printer, high vis vests, all the printing material, our laptops, hard drives, and, you know, whatever bait shit we have lying around. [...] So I rushed up and down the stairs, hiding whatever I could find in plant pots, beneath pillows, on top of shelves and wherever really. They finally stormed in via the roof, in full riot gear, pointing their machine guns at us, yelling in our faces. Like, what the hell! I figured they wanted me to put my hands behind my head and so I did and knelt. I got pushed

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over by one riot cop who plunked his boot down hard on my back. As they searched the building, all I could hear was the ringtone of that damn phone you were all calling me on. It was completely surreal, that squeaky boot on my back, me lying there, and this cheesy ringtone in the background going on and on and on...' (John, November 2015)

1 Introducing advertising and its discontents

1.1 Subverting advertising

Despite the financial crisis of 2008, the advertising industry continues to show no signs of slowing down. The expenditure on advertising by corporations has been growing yearly for the last eight years. In 2018, it is forecasted, the industry will reach its ultimate peak of 579 billion US dollar spent globally on advertising (Zenith, 2018). In their ongoing emergence, advertising geographies grew both quantitatively and qualitatively. Along the way, they have ceased to occupy a neatly bounded space and time.

It has spilled beyond and across the demarcations of 5-minute movie intervals, half-page newspaper adverts, and printed brochures. Its contemporary field of intervention has expanded into the deep richness of everyday life (Klein, 2000; Lazzarato, 2014; Moor, 2007) via the often diffuse and interlinked spheres of sponsored newspaper articles, celebrity endorsements on Youtube and Instagram, location-based search engine adverts, digital face-recognition billboards, pop-up banners, adverts sprayed onto pavements, branded products in television shows, branded social media posts, and mobile application adverts that track your phone; together producing a burgeoning branded space of advertising texts, images, technologies and infrastructures keen on affecting our range of possibilities along a path that makes-profitable our movements, friendships, moods, bodies, spaces, beliefs and passions. As advertising develops its expenditure, pervasiveness, and methodologies, it is timely and crucial to examine the contemporary production of advertising space. Starting from the need to explore 'the *particularities* of power, the diverse and specific modalities of power that make a difference to how we are put in our place' (Allen, 2003, p. 2; emphasis added), this thesis investigates how, exactly, contemporary advertising space intervenes into the circuitry of everyday life. To get to these particularities, the thesis empirically starts from the bodies, spaces and practices that materially contest advertising power.

This interest originates in the author's personal, professional contribution to the booming industry of advertising. On the 17th of September 2012, three years before Brandalism's COP21 intervention into advertising and subsequent police raid, I landed my dream job. I recall the day vividly. Just as I thought I had reached the end of yet another unpaid internship, my mentor invited me to join her into a meeting room. She closed the door behind us, took my hand and said, with a caring smile: 'Welcome to Saatchi & Saatchi. From next week onwards you'll be working with us as a junior

advertising strategist. Congratulations!' For a moment, I thought this was some lucid dream. This couldn't *actually* be happening. It took a moment for the words to seep in. I almost hugged her in my excitement when they did. This was the grand finale to five years of expensive university education, countless unpaid internships, and lots and lots of dreaming about a future in advertising. I was starting a career in one of the world's most celebrated ad agencies. Bright days were ahead and I felt more engaged, inspired, excited than at any point before in my life.

Soon my days as an advertising strategist were dedicated to conducting fieldwork across Europe, attending client meetings, reading trend reports, analysing marketing research data produced by the client, and so forth; all towards the aim of developing strategies most adequate to an advertising campaign, its particular objective, its audience, and the product or service it is hoping to sell. My strategies would inform multinationals' TV commercials, social media campaigns, outdoor advertising campaigns, or whichever output the 'creative department' decided on. I was working along the brightest, most creative minds in the industry. I worked days and nights, not because I had to, but because I desired to.

But the early days of delight soon withered, and eventually darkened. I remember one afternoon in the winter of 2013 walking through the halls of Saatchi & Saatchi alongside my colleagues. We had just had a meeting with one of the company's key clients, one of the world's largest car manufacturers. In this meeting, the marketing director of the car company had proposed we consider organising branded events in primary schools, because if there is one thing we are certain about our customer base from research, he told us, it is that 'if we get them to buy one of our cars as their first car, they'll stick with us for the rest of their lives.' 'That's how deep brand loyalty runs with our customers,' he had exclaimed proudly, and then asked, seemingly rhetorically, 'so when better to reach them then before they are even old enough to drive?' When the client had left, we made our way back to our desks. I kept some distance in order to summon the courage to speak. At last, I asked: 'Don't you think that, if anything, children need to be educated on carbon emission problems, rather than undergoing attempts at being tied to a motorised future?' They turned around and looked at me, first puzzled, then embarrassed. One colleague nodded but said nothing.

A few days later, that same colleague walked up to me, excited, and asked: 'Have you heard of subvertising?' Before I could respond, he flipped his laptop in my direction. 'I think you might like it.' I stared at an article in the UK newspaper *The Independent*: 'Brandalism: Street artists hijack billboards for 'subvertising campaign.' (Battersby,

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2012) Below the headline, a billboard casting two simple words that are dripping in a bloody red: 'CONSUME THIS'. I read the article and felt concurrently repulsed and comforted by Brandalism's material contestation of the spaces I co-produced, upset for seeing my professional career and personal beliefs assaulted, whilst feeling somehow less alone and understood in my mounting doubts. I spent the following nights investigating 'subvertising'.

The cultural critic Mark Dery was the first to coin the term (Dery, 1991). By Dery's definition, subvertising is 'the production and dissemination of anti-ads that deflect Madison Avenue's attempts to turn the consumer's attention in a given direction.' (Dery, 1993, n.p.; see also Dery, 1991, p. 44) Thus, for Naomi Klein, subvertising is an act of 'forcing a dialogue where before there was only a declaration.' (Klein, 1997, n.p.) Subvertising commonly takes the form of 'illegal, late-night sneak attacks on public space by operatives armed with posters, brushes, and buckets of wheatpaste.' (Dery, 1993: n.p.) More broadly speaking, and updating it into a contemporary context, subvertising refers to all manners of illicit, material interventions into billboards, digital advertising screens, bus shelter advertising, advertising inside trains and buses, advertising on train and metro platforms, and a wider plethora of advertising spaces that make up the outdoor advertising landscape.

Subvertising is one of a handful of practises that show how the production of space, as envisioned by Henri Lefebvre (1991) and other urban scholars (Harvey, 2009; Iveson, 2013; Mould, 2015; Smith, 2010), is never one-directional, the project of a single author. Instead, the production of space, and more particularly of advertising space, has always been tangled up in negotiation, struggle and contestation. Even the very earliest expressions of what would much later become the outdoor advertising landscape (see Section 2.1 for a history) were a site of dialogue and resistance. In the first centuries BC, for instance, inscriptions promoting gladiatorial battles on the houses of the wealthiest in Pompeii commonly encountered passers-by who would inscribe their own humorous or insulting responses. While subvertising endured century after century, it was not until the commercialisation of paint markers and spray paint in the 1960s that it became a more prominent and documented urban sight. During May 1968 in Paris, protesters found in billboards a site for voicing their frustration with and for responding to consumerist language, imagery and ideology - *Buy and shut up!*; *Your desire is fictional, a function of consumption*; *I spend so I am* (Michel and Schwach, 1973, pp. 114-117; translations mine).

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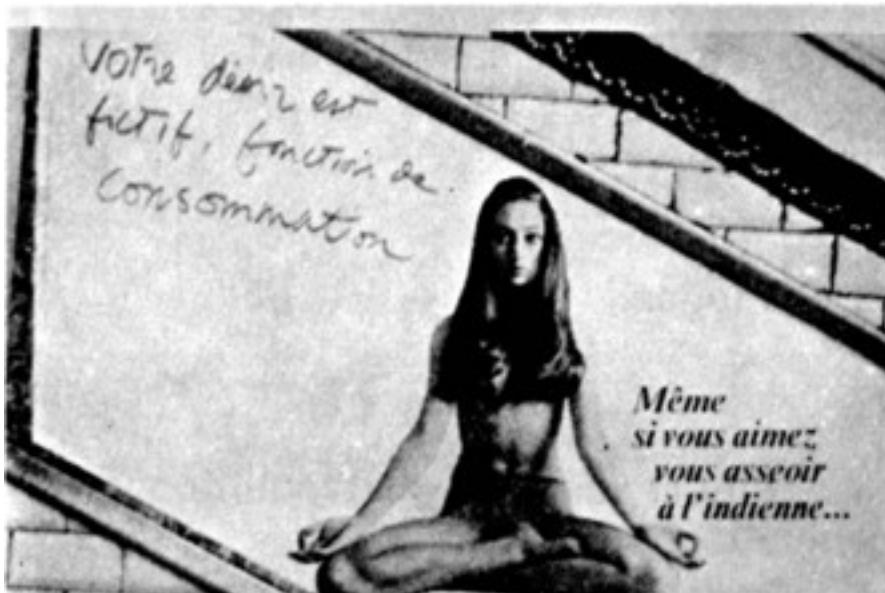
Figure 3 - Your desire is fictional, a function of consumption. (Paris, May 1968) Image by Michel and Schwach.

A decade later, subvertising became a sustained, much more carefully-organised effort with the emergence of collectives. In San Francisco, the Billboard Liberation Front altered the meaning of a diverse range of billboards by selectively adding or removing words. During those same years, the Billboard Utilising Graffitists Against Unhealthy Promotions, a collective of activists, artists and medical professionals, commenced their material offense in Sydney, employing spray paint to alter the words and images of billboards promoting cigarettes and alcohol. Alongside the rise of self-proclaimed anti-consumerist magazine Adbusters, these collectives, through the publication of 'how-to manuals' (Billboard Liberation Front, 1990), helped spark the expansion and diversification of subvertising practices across cities around the globe. Today, subvertising, a portmanteau for 'subverting advertising', is an emergent spatial practice taking the form not only of graffiti interventions or even full replacements, as with the COP21 intervention of the prologue, but also of supplementation, removal, reversal, cutting, digital hacking, or destruction, each act of co-production or contestation sparked by a peculiar intention, impulse or desire. A detailed history of subvertising is presented in Appendix I.

1.2   Aims and contribution of thesis

This thesis recognises that in order to study the geographies of advertising power with any breadth or nuance, it is crucial not to just acknowledge those who advertise but equally those who contest it, especially given that the latter are carried by a long, but often unnoticed historical legacy. To this end, the thesis sketches an image of two worlds, and the relations that bind them. It ethnographically traces the entangled

story of advertising and subvertising, and explores what this story tells us about the contemporary agenda and impact of advertising power.

The main contribution of the thesis lies in recognising, illustrating and conceptualising a new development of advertising power. This development has significant implications for our conception of how deeply, exactly, advertising is embedded in the circuitries of everyday life. The thesis argues that, in the rush to view advertising as the acceleration of consumption behaviour, by way of texts and images enrolled to 'win over the hearts and minds of consumers' (Allen, 2003, p. 102), we have lost sight of the diverse and distinctive modalities of power common to contemporary advertising and how these produce, and reproduce, normative everyday life. The central argument is that contemporary advertising largely exceeds its initial powers to incite, seduce (Allen, 2003), mystify (Hartwick, 1998; Kearns and Barnett, 1997) or manipulate (Adorno and Horkheimer, 2002; Jhally, 1990); it equally, and significantly, operates by *the power to exhaust*. I argue that, through various more-than-representational (social, material, performative, legal, affective) arrangements, advertising is expanding its capacities to intervene and embed itself into social life: it undermines, exhausts and wears out the conditions necessary for the emergence of radical, alternative imaginaries and their capacities to remould the world.

When contestation itself becomes part of the operating terrain of power, advertising takes on a special role in late capitalism. Through methods of inhibition and affirmation, advertising facilitates the exhaustion of that which contests capitalist logics and functionings. Here, contestation often ends up accelerating rather than blocking or decelerating what it seeks to contest. Thinking through this raises pertinent, political questions: how does advertising power's capacity to exhaust and make-profitable contestation affect the capacity to contest? Is subvertising, as one mode of contestation, capable of co-producing advertising space and triggering alternative capacities of thought, action, feeling, in the city and elsewhere? What does this tell us about the bodies, spaces, practices and materialities enrolled in contemporary power-contestation relations?

Exploring such themes, the aim of this thesis is to formulate theoretical, empirical and methodological contributions to the field of cultural geography. On a primary level, the thesis contributes critical perspectives on the cultural geographies of advertising. As the literature review will illustrate, the production of advertising space as a political project is a concern for an interdisciplinary range of scholars, including geographers, media scholars, marketing theorists, and anthropologists. The present

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thesis offers a contested geography of advertising, one that reveals a more extensive spatiality of power largely in excess of a concern with producing cities and consumer bodies.

On a second level, in focusing on how power plays out beyond images, texts, identities and other forms of signification, the argument is aligned with geographers' concern with non-representational, or more-than-representational, theories (Anderson and Harrison, 2010; Lorimer, 2005). However, through its empirical investigation, particularly in Chapter 6, the thesis will complicate non-representational theorists' tendency to prioritise affirmation as the preferred mode of contesting power, questioning this particularly in light of advertising's own affirmative gestures, its desires to connect with that which opposes it.

On a third level, the thesis queries the production of counter-spaces by activists and artists. The study particularly gestures towards the capacity of 'urban subversions' (Mould, 2015) to co-produce space and incite a range of alternative discourses and imaginaries in excess of the material, social and political conditions of the urban present. In conducting the first ethnographic study of subvertising, it contributes to existing geographic examinations of practices of urban subversion, including skateboarding (Borden, 2001), urban exploration (Garrett, 2011a), parkour (Saville, 2008), urban knitting (Price, 2015), squatting (Vasudevan, 2015), urban art (Dekeyser, 2016; Dekeyser and Garrett, 2015; McAuliffe and Iveson, 2011) and graffiti writing (Cresswell, 1992).

Finally, on a methodological level, the thesis offers a double contribution. Firstly, the thesis asks: can we truly recognise the problem of advertising from within the territory of advertising? In response, the thesis presents a methodological experimentation with researching power through practices, spaces and bodies of resistance. As I will discuss in the literature review, this Foucauldian methodology promises to reveal the unexpected corners of power that are either overlooked or remain invisible when limiting our analyses of power to the terms and practices set out by those people and institutions we consider to be exercising this power. Secondly, weaving together a 28-month ethnography with subvertising practitioners, (participatory) audio-visual production and qualitative interviewing with advertising professionals, the thesis develops cultural geographers' conceptual interest in 'vitalism' into an experiment with a vitalist methodology. Such methodological orientation examines the potential of: refuting simple epistemological categorisation, staying with the 'eventfulness' of the world, taking the more-than-representational qualities of a practice seriously, 'affective' research outputs, and a politics besides

affirmation. This double methodological contribution is elaborated upon in the literature review and methodology chapters, and will be critically evaluated in the conclusion.

1.3   Meet the subvertisers

Throughout the many stories told in this ethnography, we will encounter a variety of subvertisers in London, New York, Paris, Newcastle and Brussels. Four key figures, each with their own practice, methodology and rationale, deserve a brief introduction. Further details regarding the rationale behind selecting these research-participants and regarding gaining access to them are discussed in the methodological chapter (Chapter 3).

Figure 4 - Sylvie's subvertisement installed during visit in London. (London, October 2015)

The first subvertiser I ever encountered in person was Sylvie. It was 1 a.m. on an empty street in South London. A tall, thin woman stood in front of my tiny studio. A huge piece of luggage at her side carried all the tools required for a few months of subvertising across Europe. Her face carried restless eyes, and sharp, bony features. She was dressed in all-black; a feature that turned out so stubbornly characteristic of her style that, years later when I encountered an image of her dressed in white dress in the Egyptian desert, I was deeply puzzled, upset at the seeming inconsistency. The same aesthetic charm extends into her subverts: black & white shapes, arranged in

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enciting symmetries, that stand stark against the chaos of urban life. The black &
white contrast reflects the public's split reactions to her subverts. She is concurrently
one of the most notorious subvertisers in New York, adored by artists, news
journalists and activists alike; and despised by authorities and advertising
corporations, who would rather see her locked up, abolished from their cities' streets.
Despite these dichotomies, Sylvie is, herself, a nuanced, well-reflected soul, excited
by the promise of a more diverse urban landscape of debate and exchange, a promise
she helps materialise by sending out sculpted advertising keys that unlock the global
urban advertising landscape.

When Sylvie introduced me to Marco, one of her best friends and an equally
prominent New York subvertiser, I was instantly charmed by his broad, relaxing
smile. But Sylvie had warned me: Marco does not know (or care for) the concept of 'a
quiet night'. To spend an evening with him, she had told me, is to enter into a high-
energy haze. This was a profound understatement. Within an hour of meeting him,
we were rushing across town, posters and sloshing buckets of glue in our hands,
from one billboard to another, under and over fences, making snappy visits to
plentiful cocktail joints, Mexican bars and abandoned warehouses, the delirium
swelling, the night spinning, stories of unimaginable police escapes and secret pool
parties, me forever trying to catch-up, but never quite managing, only to end the
night, on some rooftop, witnessing the sun rising enormously over Manhattan, Marco
sitting in a leather sofa, cracking a final beer. For a man of big statements (including
his characteristic deep-cut tank tops) and memorable one-liners, his usual large-scale
billboard takeovers are surprisingly abstract. They refuse the advertiser's play with
words, images, messages, instead producing nonfigurative counter-spaces of shapes
and colour that blend into the environment. Unlike advertisements, they desire
concealment, withdrawal, invisibility.
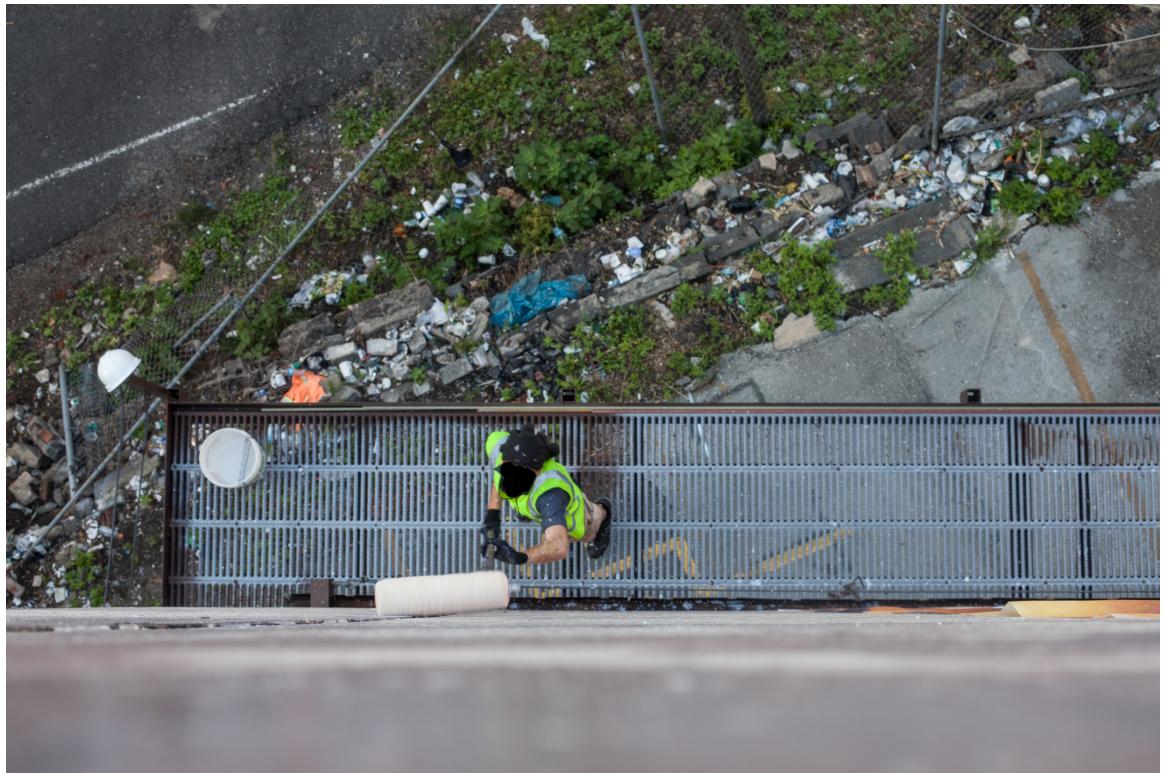
Figure 5 - Marco preparing billboard. (New York, June 2016)

Contrasting Marco's, the subvertiser Donna's project is manifestly political, in the way an activist might approach it. Often designed and installed in collaboration with a range of activist groups, her subverts brim with a craving for abolition: the end of advertising, policing, patriarchy, xenophobia, capitalism. She once installed posters attacking London's Metropolitan Police in front of their Scotland Yard headquarters; in the middle of the day, using a crow bar. One of the posters, replicating the design of official London Metropolitan Police adverts, read: 'You're 28 times more likely to be stopped and searched in London if you don't have white skin, because we're still *really* racist.' The police didn't know how to respond. They cordoned off the bus shelter, impatiently waiting for the outdoor advertising company to come and remove the posters, to the amusement of passers-by. The next day she was interviewed anonymously by news channels across the country who seemed incapable of deciding whether to be enraged or thrilled. Donna's capacity to trigger affectionate responses equally prevails in the subvertising workshops she organises in London and elsewhere. Clear-headed and articulate, she gives a mean talk, leaving the workshop participants with much more than they came for.

If Donna is a wizard of words, then John is her visual counterpart. As an artist, based in Barcelona, he launches deceivingly gorgeous, but unforgiving critiques at the advertising's world exacerbation of global warming and species extinction. As one of the masterminds behind Brandalism, the world's largest and most renowned

contemporary subvertising collective, he has the unique capacity to make impossible things happen; like getting 80 international artists to deliver art works in time before the COP21 talks, printing their large works, organising translations, cutting bus shelter keys, training dozens of installers and co-planning their routes, ensuring world-wide media exposure through carefully crafted press releases, all amidst a general state of emergency and paranoia, with police openly circling the squat, waiting to strike. When two nights before the raid of the Parisian squat, totally unhinged by the lack of sleep, I asked him why he hadn't collapsed yet, he looked me in the eyes dead-seriously, then shrugged, lit another cigarette, and asked me to read through an excel sheet. It is rumoured he never sleeps.

1.4 Overview of chapters

Following these four figures, their subvertising friends and the advertising worlds they encounter, we will engage the spaces, subjects, objects, encounters and lifeworlds of advertising-subvertising contestation, and examine what they tell us about the geographies of advertising power. This examination is stretched across the six chapters and two interludes that follow the introduction. The central aim of the interludes, each elaborating a singular concept, is to temporarily distance the narrative from conceptual argumentation, and instead, to dwell in the emotional geographies of advertising-subvertising contestation, further complicating any narrow, representational or instrumentalist account of advertising power.

The following chapter, 'Advertising power', contextualises and specifies the research aims of the thesis by reviewing investigations into how advertising is a technique of power capable of intervening into bodies' capacities to act and be acted upon. Drawing on literature in cultural geography, media studies, marketing theory, anthropology and cultural theory, the chapter details two strands of scholarship. If the first strand surveys advertising as the production of urban space-time, then the second one conceives it primarily as the production of consuming bodies. The chapter proceeds by detailing the conceptual need, insufficiently articulated by those two strands, to take seriously advertising as a geography that is unavoidably co-constituted and contested. Following this conceptual line of thought, the chapter ends by arguing for the need to study how, exactly, contestation informs, implicates and complicates the geographies, encounters and politics of advertising power. In doing so, the chapter offers an explanation for why the thesis investigates power by way of contestation.

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The third chapter, 'Researching the contested geographies of advertising', begins by articulating the potential of a 'vitalist' epistemology by setting out five conceptual orientations: thinking-in-the-event, remaining multiple, studying the more-than-representational, generating affective outputs, and engaging a politics besides affirmation. The second section of this chapter details how the potential of such epistemological approach is, in this thesis, harnessed via a methodological assemblage of (auto)ethnography, interviews, photo/video-elicitation and participatory video methods.

The fourth chapter, 'Profaning the advertising city: Chaos and the regime of order', offers a conceptual and empirical exploration of the *urban* entanglements between advertising and subvertising. It starts from the protagonist in Nietzsche's novel 'Thus Spoke Zarathustra' who envisions a fixation on order in which chaos is fundamentally depleted, exhausting the tools for (self-)transformation. The chapter contextualises ethnographic stories from New York through an engagement with Giorgio Agamben's notion of 'profanation', to suggest that a particular ideal of urban space, that of a 'regime of order', is folded into the hegemonic spatial management of urban life by advertising actors. Weaving together social, legal, performative and material processes, this regime prevents and resolves not only contestation, but equally, and importantly, those radical alternative imaginations of spatial engagement that start from the affective potential of a disorderly city of surprise, excess, contestation and social expressiveness. Following this chapter, the short interlude 'A story of allure' traces one object from the regime of order into the hands of subvertisers, to underscore the often complex, excessive and contradictory expression of advertising's power to exhaust.

The fifth chapter, titled 'The affirmative life of power: Amicability and recuperation', unpacks the *personal* entanglements between advertising and subvertising. This examination reveals a second register of advertising's power to exhaust, after the urban regime of order (Chapter 4), where through more-than-representational techniques, advertising comes to intervene into and deplete contestation and its radical imaginaries. More specifically, through the engineering of what I will call 'amicable atmospheres', advertisers affirm and celebrate, rather than inhibit, the bodies and performances of subvertising. Tracing these atmospheres, the chapter argues, reveals advertising as a central facilitator of recuperation, where contestation to capitalist expansion unintentionally ends up accelerating it. This signals an important development in the impact and agenda of advertising power. Recuperation, the chapter suggests, is not a mere ornament to capitalist logics of functioning, simply a source of inspiration; instead, perhaps provocatively, it could be argued

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following Brian Massumi, contestation conducts a service that, in a certain sense, can be understood as a mode of engagement it is actually reliant on. The interlude 'A story of paranoia' follows in a similar vein, bringing to life a third and final expression of advertising's exhaustive logics. It further details personal advertising-subvertising entanglement by telling the (auto-)ethnographic story of encountering private investigators, and how this excessive encounter exhausts the capacity to know, let alone act against, the reach of advertising power.

Acknowledging the various registers along which contemporary advertising power embeds itself into the circuitry of everyday life, exhausting the emergence of radical imaginaries, the sixth chapter, 'In praise of the Vandal', asks: what mode of advertising-subvertising contestation, if any, outlives the workings of advertising's seemingly totalising reach? Is there an 'outside' to the exhaustive and recuperative logics of capitalist life? In response, the chapter draws on Deleuze and Guattari to present the darkest figure of subvertising - the Vandal - as a recurrent historical presence worthy of redemption. The concluding chapter offers an interdisciplinary, theoretical contextualisation of the different paths along which advertising exerts its power to exhaust, offering final reflections on their implications for our understanding of power and contestation in late capitalism. After offering a critical evaluation of the methodological potential of exploring power via contestation and vitalism, the chapter ends by setting out directions for future research on the relationship between power and resistance, as it unfolds in light of, but also beyond, advertising and its discontents.

Part one. Geographies of advertising

2 Advertising power

Over 20 years ago, geographers Peter Jackson and Peter Taylor noted that advertising is 'an inherently spatial practice.' (1996, p. 356) And yet, they suggested, there was also, given advertising's symbolic richness and place-making capacities, a deeply surprising lack of geographical scholarship into it. Advertising, they subsequently proclaimed, is a sphere in dire need of geographical scrutiny. Over the last two decades, geographers have taken up this call, investigating not just advertising as a representational venture (Hartwick, 1998; Jackson, 1994; Leslie, 1997b), but also more broadly its spatialities (Cronin, 2010; Iveson, 2010; Sedano, 2015), its temporalities (Cronin, 2006; Sedano, 2015), its shifting industries (Faulconbridge *et al.*, 2010; Leslie, 1995; 1997a; 1997b; Pratt, 2006), its research practices (Cronin, 2008b; 2011; Leslie, 1997b; 1999), its branding practices (Pike, 2009a; 2009b; 2017), its target audiences (Cronin, 2010; Glennie and Thrift, 1992; Jackson, 1993; 1999b; 2002; Pred, 1996), its identity formations (Crang, 1996; Jackson, 1994; Leslie, 1993; 1995; Van Stipriaan and Kearns, 2009), and its materialities (Dekeyser, 2018; Mansvelt, 2008). Drawing on and complicating the work of 'mass-persuasion theorists' such as Adorno and Horkheimer (Jackson and Taylor, 1996, p. 367), these geographers of advertising, consumption and branding have, in all their diversity, been concerned with how we might attend to advertising as an operation of power capable of intervening into bodies' capacities to act and be acted upon.

It is worth briefly noting that, in articulating 'power' in this vein, I am following Michel Foucault's broad definition of the concept. He writes: 'what defines a relationship of power is that it is a mode of action which does not act directly and immediately on others. Instead, it acts upon their actions: an action upon an action, on existing actions or on those which may arise in the present or the future.' (Foucault, 1982, p. 789) Rather than conceiving power in terms of rewards or punishment, thinking power in terms of an 'action upon an action' opens the concept up to an almost endless list of expressions: 'to incite, to induce, to seduce, to make easy or difficult, to enlarge or limit, to make more or less probable, and so on.' (Deleuze, 1988, p. 70) It is this definition of 'power', particularly carefully outlined by Deleuze in his reading of Foucault (Deleuze, 1988, pp. 70-93), as an action that diminishes or increases potential for other actions that I will follow throughout the thesis.

What becomes apparent when turning to the scholarship into advertising's operations of power is that it presents itself as a messy arena, where multiple fields of study

converge into intricate patches of knowledge. To avoid disciplinary bias, I therefore also turn to the fields of media studies, anthropology and marketing theory, where an interest in the topic of advertising power, in its various manifestations, has likewise been brought to the fore in the last few decades. These myriad interdisciplinary debates regarding advertising power together form the intellectual and critical milieu of the thesis, which I both contribute to and complicate.

Broadly speaking, existing accounts in geography and beyond can be grouped around two themes: those who take advertising as a central component of the production of (urban) space-time, and those concerned with advertising as the production of consumer subjects. It is these two groupings that are appropriated to structure the literature in this present chapter. As I will outline in this chapter, while existing literature across this division has been helpful in articulating diverging and piercing critiques and critical conceptualisations of advertising power, they tend to be underpinned by a shared theoretical conception of agency. Advertising is commonly conceived of as addressing consumer and urban bodies that are either duped by the spaces, images and texts of advertising, or resistant only 'passively' to the extent of encountering advertising as socio-culturally differentiated bodies in differing, often messy and incompatible spatio-temporal conditions.

Moving beyond this tendency, I ask: what might it mean to start our considerations of advertising power from the viewpoint of those lifeworlds and practices that actively contest it? I thus propose moving towards a *contested* geography of advertising, one that takes up instability, excess, and importantly, *active resistance* into its ontological constitution. Ethnographically tracing such geography, I will suggest, brings into view the unexpected but concrete relations emerging between advertising power and that which contests it, ones that might seem dismissible at first sight but end up accumulating into the peculiar yet central functionings of advertising as a contemporary technique of power. Contestation invites us to explore a more extensive geography of power largely in excess of a concern with producing cities and consumer bodies; a geography without hard edges, consumed by and consuming contestation, and spilling over into contradictions: lawsuits, fetishes, sleights of hand, paranoid terror, free lunches. The central aim of this review chapter, then, is to position the ambitions of this thesis within a broader set of academic debates on advertising power. A number of these debates will be explicitly and implicitly returned to throughout the following chapters.

Chapter 2

2.1 An urban geography: producing cities

As one moves through most cities in the world, whether by car, foot, bike or public transport, one inevitably negotiates a plethora of advertising spaces. The only 'traditional'[1] advertising medium to still expand its market share in times of advertising's becoming digital (Outdoor Advertising Association of America, 2017), outdoor advertising grows its presence not only in the streets, but equally in contemporary scholarship. Here questions of aesthetics, democracy and performance are platforms from which the outdoor advertising industry, its practices, and its spaces, are sometimes praised, and, more commonly, criticised. It is to each of these academic and popular concerns of the *urban*[2] effects of advertising practices that I turn after first formulating the historical emergence and contemporary functionings of outdoor advertising.

The urban geographies of outdoor advertising cannot be taken for granted. Despite the contemporary commonplaceness of its omnipresent form, to speak of outdoor advertising is to engage an ever-emergent geography[3], one constituted by a range of

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[1] In the advertising industry, 'traditional' media channels include outdoor advertising infrastructure (including bus shelters and billboards), magazines, newspapers, television, events, radio, brochures, postal mail and in-store promotional material.

[2] It is worth briefly clarifying the urban focus across the thesis, and most specifically in this section and in Chapter 4. This prioritisation of the urban over the non-urban echoes the tendencies of both advertising and subvertising communities. The former indicates a clear corporate emphasis on cities in its enrolment of outdoor advertising spaces and content. The urban constitutes the space with the highest monetary value for advertisers and outdoor advertising companies since it is where large audiences are concentrated most evidently. It is therefore where the highest amount of outdoor advertising spaces is installed. But it is also the promotional emphasis of outdoor advertising companies such as Lamar, JCDecaux and Clear Channel, where technological advancements are tested before being rolled out across non-urban geographies. It is thus not just where, historically, outdoor advertising came to the fore, but it is also the future focus of the industry; its playground for technological innovation and self-marketing. A similar urban bias is found within the practices and practitioners of subvertising. If, as I illustrated in the introduction, subvertising emerged in large cities such as Sydney, Paris and San Francisco, then today the emphasis maintains internationally on the urban (see also Appendix I). One of the reasons for this, I would like to suggest, is in line with outdoor advertising's bias towards the urban: larger concentrated groups of people and thus more chance for your intervention to be witnessed by a large number of individuals. It is also where advertising is most prevalent, and therefore constitutes, for most subvertisers I spoke to, the geography most in need of intervention. While there are clearly outdoor advertising spaces outside of cities, none of the practitioners I spoke to have intervened into those spaces or showed a particular interest in doing so in the future.

[3] This development is however, by no means, a simple linear progression, with certain countries picking up particular technologies and modes of operation earlier than others.

economic, technological, socio-cultural and legislative forces unravelling throughout time. The arrival of outdoor media and its use for publicity purposes can be traced back to the promotional wall inscriptions of ancient Rome executed by slaves for businessmen (Huhtamo, 2009; Henderson and Landau, 1981; McDonald and Scott, 2007). Living alongside everyday insults, declarations of love, painful remembrances, riddles, and, simply, *Gaius was here*, the inscriptions by slaves in Pompeii advertised everything from gladiatorial battles to political campaigns.

In the following centuries, billposting on public squares, sides of churches and public buildings became an accepted means to express one's grievances and demands publicly in Europe. Moving further towards a commercial development of billposting, by the beginning of the 19th century in the United States, circus companies began painting event posters on rocks, fences, and walls, embedding an unorganised and uncontrolled commercial fabric into the urban landscape (Hendon and Muhs, 1986). With the advent of lithography technology, billposters started being pasted onto any available urban gap large enough to house the posters. The advance men of these same circus companies started securing locations by handing out free circus passes to farmers and merchants willing to turn their walls, store windows and even wooden sidewalks into commercial façades (Hendon and Muhs, 1986). It is only with the entry of opera companies into this adscape that actual boards dedicated to messaging (initially posters promoting the companies' own opera nights) were erected, giving rise to the first official outdoor advertising companies who were subcontracted to manage those spaces (Hendon and Mush, 1986). These unfolding events, around 1870, are what initially attracted commercial advertisers to the potential of the advertising medium (particularly in the light of technological print advancements). Yet the proliferation of advertising and the rise of the industry also triggered regulation. The trade became organised into national industry associations; outdoor advertising space became legally monitored. Unrestrained 'snipe posting' became prohibited. Companies gained exclusive right to surveilled spaces. It is within this development that the arrival of the first large-scale outdoor advertising providers such as JCDecaux, Lamar, Titan, and Clear Channel can be situated. The crux of their business model: to commodify, structure, standardise and monopolise outdoor

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Kiosks, the column-shaped billboards covered in multiple billboards, for instance, were widely used in European cities in the 1970s and only came to the United States in the following decade (Henderson and Landau, 1980).

advertising and its surfaces (Cronin, 2006). In other words: to turn outdoor advertising into a lucrative, global pursuit.

Alongside Fordist modes of mass-production, applied here to the materials of the advert, this formed the basis of the outdoor media landscape as known today across the globe's largest cities (Gerbaudo, 2014); with the exception of a handful of cities that have banned outdoor advertising – such as São Paulo, Chennai, and Grenoble – and those remaining communist cities such as North-Korea's capital Pyongyang and Cuba's Havana where billboards are either absent, in the hands of state parties or only now slowly proliferating across the urban landscape (Abrahamian, 2016; Serazio, 2016). Over time, advertising has horizontalised and verticalised its urban reach, coming to occupy a progressively eclectic range of media spaces (Iveson, 2012): hoardings, bus shelters, entire buildings, scaffolding, stand-alone boxes, interactive billboards, large high-way billboards, banners behind airplanes, phone-boxes, audio-visual screens, buses, trains, touchable screens, bicycles, pavements, and just about any surface that can be projected upon. Despite its pervasive physical materiality, it is no longer possible to speak of outdoor advertising as an 'offline' or 'analogue' advertising medium. The latest breath of technological advancement enhanced the outdoor advertising landscape into a deeply *digital* geography underpinned by networks of hardware, data, software, code, and internet-connectivity (Dekeyser, 2018). The augmented flows of investment into digital technologies (Koeck and Warnaby, 2014; Taylor, 2015; Berry, 2013), and the increased formation of public-private collaborations between local council governments and outdoor advertising providers (Iveson, 2012) are just two of the central drivers giving form to the industry as it is governed and appears today, and the corresponding ubiquity of the encounters we all have with its spaces on an everyday basis.

To offer an insight into the industry's contemporary working, it is worth briefly introducing the world's largest outdoor advertising company. Established six decades ago in the French city of Lyon, JCDecaux now offers access to more than 1.5 million advertising panels in over seventy countries, and amasses a yearly revenue of 3.47 billion USD (Trentmann, 2018). Depending on their spatial specificity, JCDecaux attains access to urban advertising spaces either by renting existing ones from local councils (for instance in the case of bus shelter advertising), by building their own infrastructures once local councils offer planning permission, or by paying the owner of the land on which the advertising frame is positioned (for example in the case of billboards positioned on private land alongside highways). To gain the legal rights to these spaces, JCDecaux will often enter into a commercial 'pitch' with a range of other outdoor advertising companies. Once a contract has been agreed upon and

signed off, JCDecaux operates by offering the negotiated space to advertisers. The latter in turn 'rent' advertising space, usually in pockets of two weeks, and often as part of a broader advertising campaign using a range of different advertising channels including TV, radio, magazines, newspapers, online advertising, and social media advertising. This renting sometimes involves a direct financial interaction between advertiser and outdoor advertising company. More commonly, however, the advertiser works with an advertising agency and a media agency (Pratt, 2006). If the former (for instance my past employer Saatchi & Saatchi) helps to cultivate the content of the advertising posters (in terms of both strategic intentions and visual development), then the latter aims to plan most profitably how the advertiser's media budget should be spent (based on demographic, psychographic, behavioural, and temporal data of a particular 'target audience') and to enter into the most cost-efficient deals with JCDecaux (often renting advertising spaces for multiple advertisers at the same time). In some cases, and this is becoming increasingly rare (Leslie, 1997b; Pratt, 2006), 'full-service' marketing agencies combine the services of advertising agencies with those of media agencies under one roof.

2.1.1 Aesthetics: Polluting the visual landscape

Throughout the history of these developments, the encroachment of urban space by outdoor advertising geographies has been celebrated and critiqued for its (de-)aestheticisation effects (Gudis, 2004; Taylor and Chang, 1995). While Oscar Wilde's bewildered response to outdoor advertising was that it provided 'colour into the drab monotony of the English streets' (Wilde, cited in Huhtamo, 2009, p. 21), a range of campaign and opposition groups throughout the 19th and 20th century insisted that outdoor advertising was an unruly assault on the 'proper appearance of the city.' (Gudis, 2004, p. 168) At the beginning of the 19th century, the City Beautiful movement arose across the United States in an attempt to curb the increasing disorder of urban space. As the historian Catherine Gudis outlines, it portrayed a strong belief in the promise of scientific urban planning as the ultimate means towards 'order, cleanliness, edifying aesthetic beauty, community cohesion, civic responsibility.' (Gudis, 2004, p. 168) In this light, outdoor advertising spaces were considered a kind of infectious, parasitic 'landscape leprosy' (Gudis, 2004, p. 193) infiltrating and smothering the purity of ordered space. It was, then, an expansive force to be reckoned with through control and regulation. The National Committee for Restriction of Outdoor Advertising, for instance, was launched in 1924 with the slogan 'Save the Beauty of America: The Landscape is No Place for Advertising' in an attempt to rescue urban and rural beauty from the visual pervasiveness of outdoor advertising through its lobbying for regulatory and restrictive policies. Almost a

century earlier, in London, campaigning efforts led to the 1839 Metropolitan Police Act, which created greater control over street advertising. The Society for Checking the Abuses of Public Advertising, founded in 1893, continued to fight against what it saw as the 'disfigurement' of country and town scenery whilst promoting statutory and voluntary regulation through pushing Advertisements Regulation Acts.

In a contemporary context, similar arguments countering 'visual pollution', understood here as 'a compounded effect of clutter, disorder, and excess of various objects and graphics in the landscape' (Chmielewski *et al.*, 2016, p. 801) are taken up by scholars such as Michel Serres, who in his book 'Malfeasance: Appropriation through Pollution' states that '[c]ompanies fill the space now with their hideous brands, waging the same frenzied battle as the jungle species in order to appropriate the public space and attention with images and words.' (Serres, 2008, p. 55) In line with Serres' critique, São Paulo's decision to rid its streets from outdoor advertising in 2006 as part of its *Clean City Law*, for instance, unfolded on the back of critical narratives against the perils of visual pollution.[4] Its desires: to engender a local pastoral cocooned from a globalised aesthetic. These same arguments continue to fuel both public concern (see for instance Hooper (2008) on the 'smother[ing] of cultural jewels' by large billboards in Venice) and the enrolling of regulatory policies across the globe. To 'protect landscapes or maintain visual order,' the latter generate 'guidelines and provisions that dictate size, content (the advertised product), and placement (such as vertical limits)' and include 'restrictive zones and proximity buffers.' (Chmielewski *et al.*, 2016, p. 803)

In addition to threatening aesthetic ideals of urban purity, advertising's ongoing visual and material expansion across an infinite range of urban surfaces is suggested to accelerate the 'growing uniformity of landscape' (Relph, 1976, p. 120; Jana and De, 2015), the ghettoisation of particular urban areas (Kwate and Lee, 2006) and the emergence of 'civil indifference' expressed in response to sensory over-stimulation stifling capacities to imagine and open up to other potential urban worlds (Giddens, cited in McQuire, 2008, p. 133; Simmel, 1971).

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[4] The *Lei Cidade Limpa* law was introduced to São Paulo by the city's mayor Gilberto Kassab, prohibiting outdoor advertising across the city. Eight years later, following a similar aesthetic argument, the French city of Grenoble and its Green party mayor Eric Piolle followed suit by ending their contract with outdoor advertising provider JCDecaux. It has since started removing its 300 advertising spaces across the city, with the intention of replacing them with community boards and trees.

While significant to varying degrees, some of the critiques of aesthetic pollution, such as those asserted by the American National Committee for Restriction of Outdoor Advertising (Gudis, 2004), hold a very particular understanding of what constitutes scenic beauty worthy of preservation: vast forests, spectacular canyons, grand mountains with snow-capped peaks, and tidy urban landmarks. As such, 'they wished not simply to create a more beautiful environment, but to impose upon others their moral and aesthetic ideals of what was proper.' (Gudis, 2004, p. 169) These ideals were often, as Gudis continues, embroiled in an entire web of class-based categories drawn from Romantic ideals of 18th and 19th century high-brow artistic productions (Gudis, 2004; Daniels, 1993). The British landscapes painted by 19th century artist John Constable, for instance, were often enrolled in the promotion of the rural picturesque and pristine, showcasing 'England in all her wealth of picturesque beauty' (Redgraves, cited in Daniels, 1993, p. 207) not only 'to soothe urban tourist tastes' but equally to protect it from the rapid invasion of disorderly, modern development (Daniels, 1993, p. 204, p. 220). In this vein, the Council for the Protection of Rural England drew upon the landscape paintings of Constable in its fight against the chaos and pollution of signs and spaces of consumerism (Daniels, 1993). The aesthetic ideals central to these arguments favour the 'natural' over the 'cultural', the rational over the emotional and affective, the controlled over the spontaneous, the tidy over the untidy (Cresswell, 1996). But furthermore, we might add that underpinning this aesthetic imagination, so commonly translated into idealised landscapes, is a deeply Western cultural impulse that presents itself as universal, thus disregarding, for instance, those major South-East Asian cities celebrating the beautiful messiness arising out of 'complete mismatching of form and content', and in doing so, happily contradicting 'the logic, coherence and aesthetic beauty pursued by modernists.' (Chou-Shulin, 2010, p. 292; Chalana and Hou, 2016)

Here we arrive at the two Kantian paths along which the aesthetic has primarily been attended to in geography: as distant judgement and as direct multi-sensuous, embodied experience in time and space (Hawkins and Straughan, 2015; see also Dixon *et al.*, 2012). Albeit different in logic – one of the wild, Romantic sublime, the other of Modernist dreams of order and control – the critiques of visual pollution in rural space and cities share an understanding of the aesthetic as an object in need of protection, calculation, and division;[5] and therefore they favour the aesthetic as an art

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[5] What is thus dismissed in accounts underscoring the need for a protection of 'natural' aesthetics are the ways in which the 'rural' is thoroughly calculated in its own particular

of distant judgement, predicated upon a celebration of human rationality, over the aesthetic as processes of embodied experience and sensation. As such, the American National Committee for Restriction of Outdoor Advertising speaks of scenic beauty as holding pictorial possibilities for motoring spectators, as touristic images rather than lived realities, something to 'behold, not necessarily a place of activity, interaction, or even depth.' (Gudis, 2004, p. 188) The aesthetic proclaimed here is, then, thoroughly Kantian in its human-centricity and in its 'firm rejection of a nature in and for itself.' (Dixon *et al.* 2012, p. 252)[6]

Similarly, in regard to cities, the environment staked out is a Modernist imagination of image, representation and calculation, one produced for a particular kind of inhabitant or visitor. It is a city effortlessly embedded into the policies and marketing strategies of neoliberal local governments and the outdoor advertising industry itself (Iveson, 2012). The UK Clutter Code (1960), for instance, enforced tighter spatial and visual regulation to counter the unprofitability of visual chaos (Iveson, 2012). In a similar vein, the aesthetic ideal of rational distance offers an incentive to outdoor advertising companies to install infrastructures that are aimed at distinguishing their productions from what they deem to be visual pollution: graffiti. The interventions of the latter are considered as threatening not only aesthetic harmony, but also moral order. As the cultural geographer Tim Cresswell notes persuasively: 'a perceived disorder in space caused by graffiti is linked to a moral disorder, a particular inappropriateness.' (Cresswell, 1996, p. 49) Focusing on the aesthetic in terms of order and harmony allows outdoor advertising to re-appear in novel forms, while dismissing graffiti, as a potentially in-depth interaction with urban space, as non-aesthetic, and therefore, unsuitable.[7] The subsequent partial ordering of urban messaging, through the predetermination of what can and should be made available

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manners, from the management of national parks to the territorial division, chemical treatment and labour practices of farming industries. The argument for aesthetic preservation is, therefore, built upon a narrow, classed understanding of what constitutes human intervention into the aesthetic.

[6] Indeed, as Dixon *et al.* (2012, p. 255) have noted following philosophers Elisabeth Grosz and Alfred North Whitehead, conceptions of the aesthetic must undo 'the ontological privilege of 'being' human, extending 'experience' to encompass all subjects', whether they are 'a dog, a tree, a mushroom, or a grain of sand.' (Shaviro, cited in Dixon *et al.*, 2012, p. 255)

[7] I will explicitly return to graffiti as perceived 'chaos' in Chapter 4, where I will expand on it in light of subvertising as a practice assaulting what I will call the 'regime of order' (see in particular Section 4.3).

to the senses in particular spaces, produces a particular 'aesthetic regime' (Dikeç, 2013) operating on the level of the 'visibility and sayability of phenomena.' (see Dixon, 2009, p. 412 on Rancière and the distribution of the sensible) Graffiti, then, belongs elsewhere; not in the epicentres of urban capitalism, nor in the sublime wilderness of national parks,[8] but on the ghetto fringes of metropoles or on the distant walls of third world nations. Some outdoor advertising companies, such as City Outdoor in Los Angeles, set up partnerships with local councils that allow them to lease certain media spaces in return for their maintenance services keeping a certain area around the billboards graffiti-free. The broader effects of outdoor advertising practices and geographies, urban geographer Kurt Iveson (2012) proclaims, are left unaddressed by critiques of visual pollution. In fact, the aesthetic sensibilities formulated by accounts of visual pollution, as historian Laura Baker (2007, p. 1207) underscores, even spurred the private monopolisation of public space by the industry in the first place. Indeed, Jean-Claude Decaux underlined his aim 'to fight against surplus and unsightly advertising' as an ideological driver behind the emergence of his outdoor advertising company JCDecaux (Decaux, cited in Iveson, 2012, p. 160).

How might we spark an alternative orientation towards aesthetics; one that starts from a concern with participation in the distribution of what is seeable (to urban communities) *and* sayable (by urban communities), rather than taking aesthetics as that which shows good sense or judgment (Rancière, 2004)? This, in turn, asks us to take seriously questions around advertising's shaping of urban accessibility. It is to these questions that I now turn.

2.1.2 Democracy: Commercialisation and accessibility

Moving beyond reservations about the visual geographies of outdoor advertising, a second series of urban questions gather around the commercialisation of public space. The acceleration of public-private partnerships between city councils and outdoor advertising companies (Iveson, 2012), together with the expansion of urban surfaces lawfully available to advertisers (from pavements, to benches and lampposts;

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[8] The recent graffiti interventions of Casey Nocket into some of the best-known national parks in the United States led to an outrage across social media networks and press platforms (Golgowski, 2016). Various actors called for an 'online witch hunt', eager to punish Nocket for her scandalous actions. By comparison, her previous interventions in urban ghettos were never deemed particularly offensive or harmful.

see Hicks, 2009; Hutter and Hoffman, 2011; Saucet and Cova, 2015), is arguably leading to the further prioritisation of private interests over public commons (Baker, 2007). Thus, it is argued, outdoor advertising geographies help to reduce the potentially diverse relationship between the urban and its citizens into a landscape of commercial beings and spaces of consumption (McQuire, 2008). This is attained through the commercial organisation of urban space, as much as through the commercial narratives they profess. These two modes of commercialisation, taken together, show us that the history of outdoor advertising is one of deepening exclusion. Outdoor advertising haunts progressive dreams of the city as a space supposedly accessible to all. Commercialisation reduces democratic accessibility, and thus also bodies' capacities to affect and be affected by urban encounters. A double issue of accessibility emerges.

First, in relation to its proliferation of commercial narratives, outdoor advertising affects *corporeal accessibility* by restricting access to urban space for certain racialized, classed and gendered groups, while confirming the accessibility of others (Law, 1997; Rosewarne, 2005; 2007a; 2007b). Intentionally or unintentionally, advertising separates those bodies deemed welcome, from those who aren't. As political scientist Lauren Rosewarne notes in reference to highly sexualised imagery:

> '[It] displays work to make public space a gallery for men where women are used to decorate space in a way that sexually objectifies women and offends and harasses female public space users, thus making it less pleasant – and even impossible – for women to enjoy public space.' (Rosewarne, 2005, p. 68)

Second, concerning the commercial organisation of urban space, outdoor advertising articulates a particular kind of *media accessibility.* As Iveson remarks: 'access to outdoor media is increasingly restricted to those who can afford to purchase space from commercial outdoor advertising companies.' (Iveson, 2012, p. 162) Legal, material, and social worlds are brought into interaction to bound the democratic ability for spatial and textual production by urban communities. Individuals, collectives and companies illegally claiming access to outdoor advertising spaces are open to criminal prosecutions triggered by local authorities, outdoor advertising companies or outdoor advertisers (Smith-Anthony and Groom, 2015). At the same time, designers of outdoor advertising spaces are progressively undertaking a range of protective measurements to delimit the potential for unsolicited access (Iveson, 2012), enrolling for instance graffiti-proof glass into bus shelter advertising spaces and patent-protected anti-hacking software into their digital equivalents (see Dekeyser, 2018). These factors of limitation help construct a particular modelisation

of urban space which, as contended by Dawkins and Loftus (2013, p. 674), enacts a 'restriction on sensory engagement' for those lacking the monetary means to access outdoor media geographies legally, including everyday citizens, cultural institutions, and activist collectives (Gerbaudo, 2014). The commercialisation of public space is thus inseparable from an unequal distribution of rights to public expression. I will return to the processes making-possible inaccessibility, and its implications, in Chapter 4.

Together these two modes of commercialisation and their effects on urban accessibility push the city further as 'the locus of commerce' (Baudrillard and Guillaume, 2008, p. 30) with a resultant narrowing of the set of imagined functionalities and sensibilities of public space. Outdoor advertising marks the flattening of the exciting lifeworld that is urban existence. The bountiful mixture of passions and desires circulating amongst dwellers and public spaces are re-directed towards ends of consumption and consumerism. The result is an increasingly economic experience of interacting with urban space and of increasingly commercialised encounters with other dwellers. Public life is reduced from a 'place-ballet' to a set of quotidian and expected transactions (Seamon and Nordin, 1980).

This is equally a question of urban temporality. Until the beginning of the 20th century, outdoor advertising disappeared into the shadows of the night. As billboards became up-lit, back-lit and eventually, more recently, reached new levels of glaring brightness with their digitisation, they helped accelerate the transition into a '24/7' city, where 'the rhythmic oscillations of solar light and darkness, activity and rest, of work and recuperation' are not only destabilised, they are actively reworked towards an economisation of night-time (Crary, 2013, p. 11; Edensor, 2015). This, for geographer Robert Shaw (2010; 2015), is not the simple eradication of the night, but rather, more subtly, its steady fragmentation as a temporal frontier of repose and sleep guided by a force of capitalist expansion that increasingly draws in the qualities and activities of diurnal consumerism. Bright nightscapes of outdoor advertising, street lighting and neon-covered bars, as art theorist Jonathan Crary richly describes, engender a peculiar and bewildering visceral experience of nocturnal urbanity:

> '[I]t is like a state of emergency, when a bank of floodlights are [sic] suddenly switched on in the middle of the night, seemingly as a response to some extreme circumstances, but which never get turned off and become domesticated into a permanent condition.' (Crary, 2013, p. 17)

However, this set of criticisms around democratic integrity has been countered for its tendencies towards a dichotomous, romanticised understanding of what private and

public space-times are, ever were and should be (Gudis, 2004); for its Habermasian (1991) delimitation of political bodies to rational and deliberate beings; and relatedly, for its reduction of the production of 'publics' to a limited set of textual creations and rational debates (Cronin, 2010). For sociologist Anne Cronin (2010, p. 190), because 'there are many other forms of more diffuse 'dialogue' occurring,' each of which are processual, undetermined, and unpredictable, the question of advertising power in urban space requires more complex, more-than-textual, and by extension more nuanced, conceptualisations. Following this path, we will encounter a multi-layered, conjoined image of advertising-city relations irreducible to unitary causality.

2.1.3   Performance: Production of urban space-time

The most sophisticated and extensive account of outdoor advertising power comes from sociologist Anne Cronin (2006; 2008a; 2008b; 2010; 2011). In her work, advertising is entangled with the urban in a fashion that largely exceeds representational registers – that is, its aesthetic and semiotic cladding of urban surfaces and contexts. Instead, in effectuating the *production* of urban space and time, the industry, its production of marketing knowledges and its socio-spatial forms co-constitute what might be called the ontological foundations of the city (Cronin, 2008a). As Cronin maintains: 'these practices or commercial experiments go towards forming the nature and potential of that space.' (Cronin, 2008a, p. 2747) From this perspective, there is no urban space-time prior to outdoor advertising. Outdoor advertising performs urban life, rather than offering 'a straightforward 'input' of semiotic content into a preformed urban context,' in ways that affect human-city relationships beyond the grasp of intentionality (Cronin, 2008b, p. 113). In Cronin's work, advertising features as an elusive and ambiguous form, incessantly withdrawing from the advertiser's hands and re-emerging as something much more volatile – a victim to the flux of urban life. Advertising has at least four unintentional lives.

First, for Cronin, the textual life of advertising makes 'available to people moving through urban space alternative ways of understanding that space.' (Cronin, 2008b, p. 112) One example offered by Cronin relates to the experience of urban mobility: 'the glamorous associations of the ads that populate billboards may rub off on the experience of driving in the city, but equally may jar and irritate when juxtaposed with the reality of traffic jams and pollution.' (Cronin, 2008b, p. 107) Since the 'reading' of advertising geographies occurs in a fragmented, diffuse, and embodied manner – often below the thresholds of awareness – there is the potential for unintended dialogues to flare up between a range of human and non-human urban

bodies, spaces and flows (Cronin, 2010; Sedano, 2015). Advertising is unavoidably tied up in all manners of excess, perpetually swept away by a messy field of (non-)human relations that 'consists of multiple pasts and futures differentially actualised in the present in unpredictable and open-ended ways.' (Latham *et al.*, 2008, p. 121) Consider, for a moment, how an elderly man sitting in front of a bus shelter poster promoting a facial cream marketed towards women might alter the affective geographies of that space and the ways bodies come to make sense of it.[9] Or consider an even more surprising instance: in Jorge Luis Borges' short story 'The Aleph', a billboard promoting cigarettes suddenly emerges as a painful reminder of mortality:

> 'On the burning February morning Beatriz Viterbo died, after braving an agony that never for a single moment gave way to self-pity or fear, I noticed that the sidewalk billboards around Constitution Plaza were advertising some new brand or other of American cigarettes. The fact pained me, for I realised that the wide and ceaseless universe was already slipping away from her and that this slight change was the first of an endless series.' (Borges, 2000, p. 118)

Here, outdoor advertising offers unintentional textual resources for making sense of existing and producing novel ways of thinking about life, urban or otherwise.

Second, the familiarity with these textual resources (brand names and logos, visual identities, cultural references), in combination with the often-standardised format of the outdoor advertising panel,[10] may make unfamiliar spaces appear less alien. Cronin

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[9] However, it is important here to avoid stifling the play of urban worlds, human bodies and affective atmospheres into relations of stability or certainty. Indeed, as I will go on to discuss below in reference to the philosopher Jacques Rancière, the 'spectator' is a 'storyteller' co-producing the narratives written, said, performed, or shown as much as the artist, researcher, performer or writer is (Rancière, 2009). Thus, the spectator's singular (in terms of time and space) qualities affect the ways in which the potential urban encounter with the elderly man is felt and experienced; in the same way that you, the reader, will come to understand or relate to my words in your very own terms. The mediation of the encounter is therefore, as street photographers are so apt at portraying to us (Liggett, 2003), productive of its own space-time of endless multiplicity, openness and heterogeneity.

[10] Because of the often global operation of the largest outdoor advertising companies such as Clear Channel and JCDecaux (and the bus shelter and billboard manufacturers), and because of a range of national regulations, the most common forms of outdoor advertising tend to have the same format across the world, from Santiago, New York and Montevideo, to Barcelona, Berlin and London, to Tokyo, Ulaanbatan and Tel Aviv. The most common sizes are 'six sheets' (the six by four feet sized bus shelter advertising

suggests that 'although we may never have visited the city in question, advertising can make its urban spaces feel more 'like home', or may apparently render more legible new cultures that initially seem opaque.' (Cronin, 2006, p. 623) On-going exposure to outdoor advertising helps ground, habitualise and naturalise particular urban forms and flows, thereby acting as a reference point for interacting with unknown urban spaces and impacting the qualities of our experiences with those spaces (Cronin, 2008b). Outdoor advertising is therefore one example of a commonplace landscape element that may function as an important point of reassurance throughout in-flux times and spaces (Jackson, 1989). As a result, cities like Grenoble or São Paulo, both of which have banned outdoor advertising, attain a certain atmospheric of unfamiliarity and even eeriness for those visitors travelling from advertising-saturated cityscapes.

Third, the temporal life of outdoor advertising enters into dialogue with experiences of the urban. The fast-paced rhythms of poster promotion, commodity production, panel innovation and product consumption, each of which are central to the practice and form of outdoor advertising, contribute to 'the experience of urban excitement or raciness - the buzz of the city.' (Cronin, 2006, p. 628) Almost every two weeks, posters are swapped, shedding light on new or existing products, services and brands, and marking a particular kind of urban temporality. These rhythms hint at a city of constant change and innovation, containing a vital 'metabolism' of which urban communities become a part and help perform (Cronin, 2006).

Fourth, the temporalities of outdoor advertising may unveil a particular city (or city area) as a site of deterioration or regeneration (Cronin, 2006; 2010). If regeneration may help construct narratives of the economic prosperity and hopefulness of the city then temporary advertising hoardings and wraps around construction sites turn attention to and further perform or accelerate the bodily perception of positive urban change through its materialisation of such capitalist processes (Cronin, 2010). These may carry either computer-generated visualisations of the smiling faces, suave marble bathrooms, and lush balcony gardens of the building-to-come (Degen *et al.*, 2017), or may hold non-specific commercial advertising material. Yet equally, following Walter Benjamin, a fading billboard may present the instabilities, fragilities and failures of urban process and the lives it embroiled in those processes (Cronin, 2010) potentially

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posters) and 'forty-eight sheets' (the fourteen by forty-eight feet sized billboard advertising posters).

shrinking the capacity for 'regeneration programmes' to constitute an atmosphere of positivity. In a similar vein, for some, the signs of wear and decay, where advertising becomes faded or reveals a multi-layered and fragmented mixture of torn posters, point toward a potential for fecundity. The New Realist artist Jacques Villeglé, for instance, takes abandonment in billboards as a source for artful production and critical reflection on mid-twentieth century French society, literally cutting into, stealing and framing the work that was 'really done by someone else, time passing, or the weather.' (Lazic and Villeglé, 2014, n.p.) Through the medium of outdoor advertising spaces then, both past and present can become joint into the 'present-tense of perception' (Cronin, 2010, p. 141) of urban bodies – in the form of hope and hopelessness, exhilaration and anxiety – and thus in the performing of urban space-time.

Central to outdoor advertising's performance of urban space-time is the production of marketing knowledge and calculation (regarding, amongst other data, the mobility of bodies, their 'dwell time', their demographics, their tendencies to adopt and adapt to technological innovation), which are increasingly enrolled into the form, content and rhythms of advertising spaces (Cronin, 2008a; 2008c). In spite of this, clearly advertising 'does not fully determine individuals' experience and use of city space.' (Cronin, 2006, p. 623; Cronin, 2010) Advertising creates a permeable, unfinished and unstable web that is open to a range of non-human and human interventions, both intentional and unintentional, in ways that disrupt simple casual models between advertising power and the aesthetics, democratic models and bodies of the urban. Therefore, Cronin (2010; 2011) and urban geographer Brian Rosa (2015) maintain attempts at controlling and delimiting (non-)human intervention through legal, material and social constitutions are always bound to flounder: security systems falter, paste fails to keep the edges of a poster in place, illicit posters find their way through security systems or find a second life online beyond the control of legal systems, stickers remain unnoticed by maintenance crews, and outdoor media frames take on an alternative meaning and affective potential when re-formulated into the shelter for a homeless person. It is to the development of this concern with advertising as a *contested* geography that I return in Section 2.3.

2.2   A consumer geography: producing consumer subjects

A second strand of literature and popular concern circles narratives around advertising power. This branch of scholarship around the *consumer* geographies of advertising largely exceeds a concern with *outdoor* advertising to include, often without any differentiation, the multiple ways advertising comes to relate to and

produces the consumer body. As I will go on to show, the literature regarding the economies of affect, and relatedly the 'engineering of affect', offers a fruitful starting point from which to develop these debates. Before introducing this literature, however, I first attend to critiques of advertising as representation.

2.2.1 Representation: Advertising and the political economy of the sign

The Frankfurt School and its successors have, in their devastating charge against the culture industry, offered an initial Marxist theorisation of advertising power. In simple terms, for these writers advertising is 'the main weapon that manufacturers use in their attempt to 'produce' an adequate consuming market for their products.' (Jhally, 1990, p. 3) Advertising's modus operandi is a game of signs and semiotics, played by the rules of a referent system, in which 'advertisements use 'meanings' as a currency and signification as a market.' (Williamson, 1978, p. 177; MacRury, 2009) The control over the symbolic code is deeply undemocratic. It rarely slips out of the hands of those in power, allowing brands, products and services to be ascribed any meaning suited to the economic cravings of the advertiser and its advertising agency. This, according to communication theorist Sut Jhally (1990, p. 12), sums up the 'true essence of advanced capitalism.' For the Frankfurt-inspired theorists, advertisers' dominance over signification severely reshapes material, social and political life in at least three ways.

On a first level, for Williamson, advertising removes experiential authenticity, depriving us of one of life's dearest possibilities: 'a true knowledge of social realities.' (Williamson, 1978, p. 170) Following a similar narrative, Baudrillard (1998) alludes to the limitation of and distraction from 'authentic' affective life, and its replacement by spectacular simulacra. Through this attempt, advertising not only constructs 'false needs' – false because, in the words of Jhally, 'they are the needs of manufacturers rather than consumers' (Jhally, 1990, p. 3; also see Adorno and Horkheimer, 2002; Ewen, 1976) – it also obscures 'real needs' by proffering 'false fulfilment' in place of authentic experience (Williamson, 1978; Williams, 1980). It does this by conducting a 'system of magical inducements and satisfactions, functionally very similar to magical systems in simpler societies' (Williams, 1980, p. 185) that obfuscates real sources of material and social fulfilment, inciting some Marxist political thinkers, such as the geographer Andy Merrifield, to propose the need for a *counter*-magical Marxist insurgency that threads together the political with the magnificent, surreal, fantastical and poetic into a force capable of replacing those dizzying 'serial dreams' constructed by ad-men, news producers, TV directors,

supermarket clientele, and other members of dominant capitalist cultures (Merrifield, 2011, p. 14).

On a second level, for Adorno and Horkheimer (2002), Leiss *et al.* (1990), Williams (1980) and Jhally (1990), the Marxist notion of 'commodity fetishism', initially conceptualised by Marx with regards to the economic exchange of commodities, is supplemented and accelerated by forces of advertising. If the economic relationships deriving from the production and consumption process 'empty' a product of the actual social relationships that make up a finished product, then the process of symbolisation, in the form of advertising, 'fills it' with novel appearances, meanings and sign values that remove it further from the actual social and material conditions of production (Jhally, 1990; Leslie, 1997b; Pike, 2017). As such, by constructing branded images and texts, advertising takes part in organising a 'masked ball' that obfuscates the true nature of goods (Leiss *et al.*, 1990, p. 348); what geographers Kearns and Barnett (1997, p. 179) detail as a form of 'mystification'. As Hartwick writes, advertising crafts an idealised image of consumption (see also Sheller, 2004) as 'effortless, lacking in responsibility, with no negative side effects,' carefully concealing the conditions of '[u]nderdevelopment, unequal exchange, profit flows, and power differences' (Hartwick, 1998, p. 427) that enable its very possibility. The dangerous result: advertising produces and connects with those lifestyle identities sparking consumerist fantasies (Jackson, 1993),[11] whilst muting those that might pave the way for collective solidarity in the workplace and elsewhere (see Clarke and Purvis, 1994).

Finally, on a third level, in drawing on 'recognizable *types* in order to tell stories in a single image,' advertisements reproduce and fashion the stereotyping of particular groups, thereby effectuating both social and psychic selves (Srinivas C., 2015, p. 55; emphasis in original). As a long history of feminist scholarship into advertising and

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[11] The particularities of advertising as a mode of identity-production are heavily debated in geography, cultural studies and anthropology along mainly two axes. Firstly, while for some, advertising produces identities fostering individuality (Leslie, 1997b), for others advertising (and consumption more broadly) is not necessarily at odds with sociality, enabling and mediating as it does manifold forms of social relation (Crewe and Lowe, 199; Glennie and Thrift, 1992; Jackson, 1999b; Miller, 1995b). Secondly, certain theorists proclaim that advertising and consumer culture more generally generates consumer identities that are global and homogenised (Adorno, 1957; Ortega y Gasset, 1957; Peet, 1989), while others (Glennie and Thrift, 1992; Thrift and Jackson, 1995; Miller, 1987; 1995a) underscore the omnipresence of localised differentiation and repurposing (see Crang, 1996 for an overview).

the male gaze has shown (for an overview in feminist media studies, see Shields, 1997; for an overview in marketing studies, see Grau and Zotos, 2016), women are commonly at the receiving end of social fixation. They enter the advertiser's frame 'as sexualised and consumable' (Rosewarne, 2005, p. 69), as objects rather than subjects (Amy-Chinn, 2006; Shields, 1990), as neoliberal and heterosexual (Gill, 2008; 2009), as vulnerable and delicate (Goffmann, 1976, pp. 29-31), as belonging in the private spheres of the home (Leslie, 1993), and as of importance only through relationships to others (McArthur and Resko, 1975; Lazier and Kendrick, 1993). While some marketing theorists praise the recent shift towards 'femvertising', portraying women as more empowered and autonomous (Grau and Zotos, 2016), for others this form of advertising is merely a smarter iteration of the same gendered representational systems; one that is intricately embroiled in the commodification of female empowerment, in the ongoing gendered nature of that empowerment (e.g. empowerment through health, beauty, youthfulness), and in the exhibition of unreachable female models (Lamb and Peterson, 2012; Rocha and Frid, 2018). But the gendered life of advertising messages also facilitates processes of socialisation for male audiences. Despite societal shifts towards arguably more gender-neutral iterations of collectivity (Gentry and Harrisson, 2010), the familiar tenor remains: masculinity exerts itself through domination (White and Gillett, 1994). These gendered narratives, alongside racialized (Jackson, 1994; Ramamurthy, 2003), generational (Stiegler, 2013), classed (Vestergaard and Schroder, 1985) and other categorical systems of reference, produce a multitude of socially-normed ways of thinking, feeling, acting, whilst deepening the potential of their self-regulation.

While helpfully critical to varying degrees, these accounts share a tendency towards particular problematics. Firstly, the ontological distinction between true and false, particularly central to the accounts offered by Williams (1980), Leiss *et al.* (1990) and Jhally (1990), delimits capacities for a more complex understanding of advertising's operation as a promotional geography of consumerism. For instance, speaking of Williams' analyses of advertising as a magical system (1980), Cronin notes 'a narrow focus on advertising as falsehood, or gloss over the true material quality or significance of goods, restricts the analysis of advertising's social significance.' (Cronin, 2010, p. 187)

Secondly, there is a tendency to think of advertising as a series of semiotic displays operating according to the logics of representation, as 'the systematic manipulation of signs.' (Jhally, 1990, p. 11) For both Anne Cronin and media scholar Andrew McStay, this dismisses the variety of registers drawn upon in attempts at producing consumer subjects. According to McStay 'advertising is less in the business of

symbols and more in the business of affect, sensation, intensity and the generation of artefacts and experiences that stimulate before we intellectually process.' (McStay, 2013, p. 14) Yet the Marxist reading also potentially misunderstands how advertising is 'read'. Extending on Simmel (1971), Cronin suggests outdoor advertisements, for instance, suffer from a blasé attitude:[12] 'It seems that people moving around the city rarely distinguish individual advertisements from those of other campaigns and rarely 'read' the advertisement in a classic sense.' (Cronin, 2006, p. 626; Cronin, 2010) Ironically then, as a monument constructed to be seen – adorned with the smoothest glass surfaces, bright back-lighting thwarting the shadows of the night, and startlingly crisp images, all of which are commonly cast against or high above the chaos of everyday urban existence – an advertisement is rarely actively noticed, let alone engaged along the exact paths outlined by its architects. Instead, our encounter with an advertisement should be considered as overwhelming in its complexity, given that it is largely embodied, pre-cognitive, multi-sensual, and that it is caught up in the deep intricacy of social and material everyday realities (Cronin, 2010; Mansvelt, 2008).

Thirdly and relatedly, as expressed by geographers (Glennie and Thrift, 1992; Jackson, 1999; 2002; Jackson and Taylor, 1996; Thrift and Jackson, 1995; Pred, 1996), media scholars (Lury, 2004; 2011) and anthropologists (Mazzarella, 1995; Miller, 1995b) alike, representational accounts of advertising show a clear tendency to promote a universal conception of those bodies encountering advertising as inherently and permanently marked by one principal sensibility: docility. While human intentionality is considered central to the actions and products of advertisers, it is unfairly sidelined in conceptions of 'passive' consumers. From the Frankfurt perspective, the body encountering advertising lacks agency and is systematically tricked by the 'hidden persuaders' of an ideological machine (Jackson, 1999b, p. 28), charmed into believing dark promises – advertising as the ultimate enchantment and betrayal of the body. In its attendance to *advertising as representation*, the

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[12] Importantly, for Cronin, this blasé attitude is not the result of a conscious decision but rather a productive coping mechanism. She writes: 'It is not simply that we are distracted or overwhelmed by the richness of visual stimuli in urban space, but rather that our perceptual processes allow to flow through us that which is not of immediate relevance or use. This filtering process is not the result of choice or agency: it produces the zone of indetermination, or temporal gap, in which agency is made possible.' (Cronin, 2010, p. 108)

complicated, situated and precarious encounters that make up advertising worlds are forgotten, or pushed aside as being negligible in examinations of advertising power.

The first two of these three problematic tendencies are addressed within the literatures on affective economies and the engineering of affect. Here, representation and meaning no longer seem to answer all questions. It is to these debates that I now turn in my discussion of advertising as *affective* consumer geographies.

2.2.2   Affective economies: Advertising and the engineering of affect

Contemporary spaces of advertising emerged in close relation to what has been termed the affective economy. A brief history will guide us. During the decades following World War II, Fordist levels of production (based on Taylorist beliefs in rationalisation and repetition) were confronted by the saturation of markets, decreasingly effective economies of scale, and combatant workers seeking ways to challenge alienation stemming from work (Slater and Tonkiss, 2013). At the same time, the enhancement of production technology offered an end to the economic world encapsulated by Henry Ford's infamous statement: 'A customer can have a car painted any color he wants as long as it's black' [sic]. This marked the termination of undifferentiated goods, and the soaring of possible product-categories and product-features (Harvey, 1990; Slater and Tonkiss, 2013). Differentiation became the novel cornerstone of economic management. This shift in production (and, by association, in consumption and a range of socio-political arrangements) throughout the 1970s and 1980s is recognised by theorists as the dawning of the post-Fordist economy (Bell, 1976; Slater and Tonkiss, 2001; Harvey, 1990).

Of particular relevance here is the parallel rising to prominence of 'informational capitalism' (Lash, 2002), which centralises 'lifestyle' and 'images' in economic planning, consumer research and marketing implementation (Arvidsson, 2007, p. 7). Brands thus increasingly compete through cultural product differentiation (Arvidsson, 2006), shifting the paradigm from rational logics of economy towards 'affective economics' (Jenkins, 2006; Ahmed, 2004). Media scholar Henry Jenkins defines the latter as a form of economic operation 'which seeks to understand the emotional underpinnings of consumer decision-making as a driving force behind viewing and purchasing decisions.' (Jenkins, 2006, p. 62) Here then, as philosopher Brian Massumi (2002, p. 45) has noted, 'affect is a real condition, an intrinsic variable of the late capitalist system, infrastructural as a factory,' and significantly, it surges as an inherent value of the relationships corporations now aim to constitute with their (potential) customers, exploring bodies' capacities to affect and be affected. Advertising, and brand management more broadly, is now much more 'about

managing investments of affect on the part of consumers.' (Lury, 2011, p. 159; 2004) However, to avoid over-emphasising those socio-material forces that exist outside of or before cognition (Pile, 2010),[13] affect should be understood as embodying a range of specific transpersonal or impersonal relational formations that constitute different modes of experience, including 'feeling', 'mood' and the 'atmospheric' (Anderson, 2014, p. 12), each of which have become valuable assets in brands' establishing of relationships with 'consumers' (Arvidsson, 2006; 2007; Lury, 2011).[14] The centralisation of affect becomes apparent in the promotional language of advertisers and advertising agencies: my previous employer Saatchi & Saatchi, emblematic of this shift, states it is not in the business of building 'brands', but of fashioning 'Lovemarks' that provoke 'loyalty beyond reason' (Roberts, 2005). The 'Lovemark', the ex-chairman Kevin Roberts notes, is an adventure in mystery, sensuality, and intimacy (Roberts, 2005).

The dedication to multi-sensual excess of desire, laughter, exhilaration, surprise, envy and other 'roiling maelstroms of affect' (Thrift, 2004b, p. 57) is not just the promotional fantasy of a keen advertising mogul. While advertising encounters always exceeded representation and conscious thought, affect is now actively and resolutely intervened into. On the one hand, this involves expanding a body's *capacities to be affected*. Surprising content personalisation (e.g. social media advertising based on one's political orientation; a face-recognition advertising campaign on the basis of one's gender and gestures), implicit forms of affection (e.g. subtle product placement in video games; see Shaw and Warf, 2009) and atmospheric, multi-sensual productions (e.g. spectacular 'brand installations' featuring sound, smell and sight – see Saucet and Cova, 2015) are but three of many recent steps taken towards circumventing cognition. On the other hand, advertising is now much more concerned with triggering certain bodily dispositions (rather than rational thought) that not only facilitates desire towards the product, service, event or brand advertised, but also engages *capacities to affect* in a broader sense: to share a brand

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[13] The relationship between thought and affect should therefore not be understood in terms of a clear separation, whether temporal or material (Pile, 2010). Affect informs and is informed by thought, and vice-versa (see Ash, 2013, p. 29).

[14] Or we might even say, in the 'production' of that 'consumer'. Indeed, affect is not simply that which operates in-between already-formed bodies and environments. Rather, it pertains to the active creation of relations which trigger, drive and sustain the corporeal and material becoming of (commercially compatible) bodies, thought and action (Lapworth, 2016).

story, to become an online brand ambassador, to visit a website, to live your life differently.

The management of capacities to affect and be affected is underpinned by contemporary methodologies of knowledge production. While once profiling customers on the basis of demographic facts – income, sex, age, region – and then towards the end of the 20th century, adding in marketing research on value, lifestyle and attitude to develop representations of populations (see Leslie, 1999), the marketing research industry is now 'turning to the measurement of sentiment, opinion and emotion on an unprecedented scale.' (Andrejevic, 2011, p. 609; Cronin, 2008b; see also Clough, 2008) Perhaps the most infamous of affective measurements is neuro-marketing: the investigation of subconscious emotional processes through physiological measurement – such as electroencephalography (EEG), galvanic skin response (GSR), functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) – to achieve insights into biometrics (neuronal activity, flows of visual attention, tactile skin responses, and so on). Such insight into bodily intensities is relevant to general understandings of consumer behaviour, methods of persuasion and the process of affective contagion of promotional material, as well as to particular knowledges about the affective capacity of specific branding concepts, brand identities and advertising material (Lee *et al.*, 2006; Wilson *et al.*, 2008). In 'neurocapitalism', Clough (2008, p. 2) asserts, 'contemporary forms of biopower […] are making it possible to grasp and to manipulate the imperceptible dynamism of affect,' rendering human corporeality into a 'biomediated body'. Along these lines, 'non-cognitive control' is not only considered ontologically possible, it is effectively recognised as central to modern advertising power (Sampson, 2011; Stiegler, 2013).

It is easy to read the renewed calculation and management of 'affect' by market researchers, marketing strategists and advertising executives as a primary example of the active 'engineering of affect' (Thrift, 2004b) pursued to maximise advertising efficiency (in response to specific 'marketing objectives'). For the geographer Nigel Thrift, 'new means of practising affect' are indicative of 'a whole new means of manipulation by the powerful.' (Thrift, 2004b, p. 58) The centralisation of affect in advertising, following this line of thought, contributes to accelerated processes of perception and affect instrumentalisation in ways that alter life into 'a senseless shadow of its former self.' (Thrift, 2004a, p. 161) Significantly, Thrift asserts, extending on Foucault and Agamben, the emerging tendency to modify bodily anticipation on the level of pre-conscious and bodily affect indicates a critical transformation of everyday power-formations, from biopolitics into 'micro-biopolitics'. The latter introduces 'a new domain carved out of the half-second delay,'

between trigger and action, 'which has become visible and so available to be worked upon through a whole series of new entities and institutions,' where the role of intentionality is reduced to supervision rather than governance of action (Thrift, 2004b, p. 67; Connolly, 2002; Leys, 2011).

However, narratives in line with Thrift's fierce critique ascribe considerable power to affective engineering in presenting it as 'an instrumental medium for doing groundwork on the political dispositions of massified subjects.' (Barnett, 2008, p. 195) By contrast, the geographer Clive Barnett recognises the radical limitations of assuming bodies as 'inherently susceptible, receptive, exposed' (Thrift, 2007, p. 239) and as drained of any potential 'conceptual space in which argument and disagreement can even get off the ground.' (Barnett, 2008, p. 190; Pile, 2010) Neuro-economics, such as those informing advertising knowledges and practices, are afforded substantial force in Thrift's account.

While I agree that Thrift exaggerates the manipulative potential of 'engineering affect', I do however take issue with the pragmatist thread running throughout Barnett's critique and his tendency towards a rationalist conception of the body.[15] In my view, the problem is not an inherent conceptual deficiency of 'affect' or of the related Spinozist-Deleuzian conception of the 'body', but lies in the narrow account of it presented in Thrift's particular paper on the engineering of affect (2004b). We must remind ourselves that affect is not a streamlined one-way street somehow operating in a vacuum – 'advertising-in/consumer response-out.' (McStay, 2011, p. 110) Instead, as we see in Cronin's scholarship (2006; 2008b; 2013), encounters with advertising unfold as part of an unpredictable coming-together of many texts, technologies, desires, images, urban bodies, materialities, sounds, smells, and indeed, affects along paths marked in ways that are often incommensurable with the desires of advertisers, advertising agencies, media agencies, research companies and

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[15] I do not follow the pragmatist tradition which takes as its starting point, politically and ontologically, the 'deliberate' body, where deliberation refers to 'an ongoing transformative practice that underwrites [an] expansive participatory conception of radical democracy as a process of debate, discussion, and persuasion.' (Barnett and Bridge, 2013, p. 1024) Beyond my alignment with affect theory's conception of the body, I also propose a non-rationalist orientation towards the political, as will become apparent in the empirical chapters of this thesis, where disagreement is a more-than-representational, often counter-intuitive and deeply irrational set of activities that largely (and fortunately) exceed deliberation.

advertising media owners. As already noted above, ambiguity and incompatibility are central to the advertising encounter.

But there are also important doubts about the ontological capacity of affect-driven research methodologies in advertising. For instance, the recognition of the 'capacity of affects to occur outside of the genetically formed individual' (Sampson, 2011, n.p.), given that affect exists amidst more-than-human transindividual processes (Lapworth, 2016), allows us to question the efficiency of measuring affective disposition through the individual body. Additionally, it needs to be kept in mind that advertising research companies have a commercial stake in announcing the magical potential of their research methodologies into 'the subconscious brain' (see for instance, Pradeep, 2010). Their promotional words cannot be taken for granted (Cronin, 2004). Any claim that these companies are simply 'tapping into' the unconscious brain should therefore be attended to with the greatest caution.

It follows then that while importantly overcoming the tendency of representational accounts to cleave the truthful from the false or the authentic from the inauthentic (Williams, 1980; Leiss *et al.*, 1990; Adorno and Horkheimer, 2002), which inevitably leads to an overreliance on representational registers (Williamson, 1980; MacRury, 2009; Jhally, 1990), thinking of advertising power linearly as the engineering of affect often still paints an image of a shamefully vulnerable consumer always exposed to the affective, pre-cognitive reign of advertising. In solely emphasising affect in terms of its engineering by advertisers, we are missing out on a very basic detail: affect is not a story told by advertisers only.

2.3 Towards a *contested* geography of advertising

The ontological centring of incompatibility and instability (Cronin, 2010; 2013) should not pronounce the last word on advertising power. One assumption binding Cronin together with the broad range of geographers, anthropologists, marketing theorists and media scholars I have so far discussed is the prioritisation of the relations between advertisers and the spaces they perform over the connections between those same spaces and the bodies they attempt to affect. But to conceptualise advertising power only in terms of the wilfulness of advertisers would be to continue to dismiss the equivocal, complex compositions that make up their unfolding.

Whilst including a much broader range of social and material forces into the advertising encounter and thus formulating a much more modest account of advertising power, there is still a tendency to mark the 'consumer' as a passive,

unintentional recipient, rather than as a dreaming, desiring, willing, subject brimming with its own capacities to affect. Here Jacques Rancière's critique of Guy Debord is particularly pertinent: 'There is *capacity* on one side and *incapacity* on the other.' (Rancière, 2007, p. 277; emphasis in original) Instead, in destabilising these dichotomous figurations, those interacting with advertising should be attended to as active collectives of 'emancipated spectators' with singular skills, ideas, moods, passions, and so forth (Rancière, 2007; 2009).[16] The principle of emancipation dissociates cause (advertising input) from effect (consumer output) in recognising the ontological impossibility of a simple transmission from the former to the latter, because an emancipated community is, in fact, 'a community of storytellers and translators.' (Rancière, 2007, p. 280) On one level, the activity of 'spectating' is a complex process of embodied observation, selection, interpretation, and comparison that connects the encounter to previous lived experiences in different times and spaces, and to future anticipations (Rancière, 2007). On another level, and here we supplement Rancière's bias towards the cognitive, rational human subject in his account of the emancipated spectator and politics,[17] bodies are not only singularly intertwined with different registers of time and space on a conscious level of 'observation' or 'interpretation'. They are simultaneously, and unavoidably, tied up pre-reflexively and subconsciously with other human and non-human forces. Considering both levels, what emerges is a reworked understanding of the make-up of advertising encounters. In the same way then that the content of the adverts, the entropy of advertising materialities and even elemental forces shape the constitution of the eventful encounter and its qualities, the 'market audience' of a particular advertiser co-constitutes the advertising event. This pushes us towards a conceptualisation of advertising power as equally co-instructed and co-affected by the 'consumers' of advertising, and their unintentional *and* intentional engagements with

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[16] In using the term 'singular', I am referring to a quality of irreproducibility. An occasion is therefore singular in that it carries 'a dynamic unity no other event can have in just this way.' (Massumi, 2013, p. 3)

[17] To exemplify Rancière's hierarchizing of the human capacity over non-human capacity, political theorist Jane Bennett recounts the following story: 'When asked in public whether he thought that an animal or a plant or a dog or a (nonlinguistic) sound could disrupt the police order, Rancière said no: he did not want to extend the concept of the political that far; nonhumans do not qualify as participants in a demos; the disruption effect must be accompanied by the desire to engage in reasoned discourse.' (Bennett, 2010, p. 106) However, she continues, '[d]espite his reply, I think that even against his will, so to speak, Rancière's model contains inklings of and opportunities for a more (vital) materialist theory of democracy.' (Bennett, 2010, p. 106)

advertising spaces. In short, if Rancière (2009, p. 2) suggests '[t]here is no theatre without spectators,' then similarly, this thesis pronounces clearly: there is no advertising without 'consumers'.

From this follows that the processes of *co-constitution* that cultivate advertising events are too often considered without any recognition of that which is unavoidably central to it: *contestation.* It is in this light that the tendency to translate the ontological impossibility of straightforward manipulation mainly in terms of a very narrow understanding of incompatibility becomes problematic. The advertiser maintains its status as a (however failing) intentional subject, the person encountering advertising being seen primarily as an unintentional body unaffected by deliberation, imaginations, passions or desires, an unintentional subject qualified only by its capacities to be affected, not by its capacities to affect. In the rare cases where the spatial practices of material and physical interventions in the form of 'subvertising' are considered, they are thought of as simply a reaction to (Iveson, 2012) or side-effect of advertising, or as but one articulation of urban subversion (Mould, 2015), urban commoning (Chatterton, 2010), guerrilla semiotics (Cresswell, 1998), or Do-It-Yourself Urbanism (Iveson, 2013).

Figure 6 - Advertising: a contested geography. (New York, July 2016)

Little attention is therefore paid to the particular more-than-representational complexities of such practices, performers and spaces of material resistance, and the

multiple ways in which they thoroughly implicate, extend, complicate and more generally relate to the encounters, practices, and politics of advertising power.[18] Subvertising begs us to dig deeper into the world of advertising. I, therefore, want to follow the conceptual and methodological path outlined by the anthropologist Anna Tsing when she writes that '[t]o understand capitalism […] we can't stay inside the logics of capitalists.' (Tsing, 2015, p. 66) My approach further echoes Michel Foucault's investigation of legality through the antagonism of illegality, of sanity through the field of insanity, and most specifically, of power relations through modes of resistance. As he writes, such approach 'consists of using […] resistance as a chemical catalyst so as to bring to light power relations, locate their position, and find out their point of application and the methods used. Rather than analyzing power relations from the point of view of its internal rationality, it consists of analyzing power relations through the antagonism of strategies.' (Foucault, 1982, p. 780)

Staying within the logic of advertising delimits our attempts at examination to the terms set out by the advertising industry, and its many gurus,[19] when it proclaims its supreme intentions: to establish relations between an advertiser (including its brand, products, and services) and (potential) 'consumers' that are profitable to the advertiser in terms of monetary expenditure, affective orientation, brand image, a competitor's brand image, product awareness, customer trust, and so forth. To think of advertising solely in terms of how it engages (potential) customers would be to overlook the complexity and multiplicity of advertising arrangements affecting everyday life, largely in excess of advertisers' own words. To understand advertising power more expansively, including in its forms emerging around the edges and corners of advertisers' self-drawn territory of engagement, we need to take seriously

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[18] Two exceptions in the geography literature from the late 1990s need to be highlighted here. Jackson and Taylor (1996, p. 360), in a brief sidenote, take account of how advertising incorporates criticism through 'subversive' copywriting. Similarly, Leslie (1997b) offers a few instances of the rise of what she calls 'antiadvertisements' that are self-mocking or self-critiquing. Following in a similar vein but moving beyond the realm of advertising *content*, my own account of subvertising-advertising relations details how advertising, through a much broader variety of legal, material, social, and performative registers, comes to attend to, inhibit and embrace contestation. In my argument, these are not ornaments to, but central features of advertising's contemporary functioning (see Chapter 5).

[19] I am thinking here in particular of popular writers Seth Godin (2010), David Ogilvy (1985) and Martin Lindstrom (2010). These figures are to students of advertising what Aristotle, Kant, and Nietzsche are to those of philosophy.

that which contests it. While it might have made sense to urge for 'advertising insider ethnographies' over two decades ago (Jackson and Taylor, 1996, p. 387), what is perhaps required now, I suggest, is its reversal: an ethnographic tracing of advertising's externalities – those moments and spaces performed by bodies hoping to betray the 'consumer' role assigned to them in their search for and enactment of imaginations brimming besides, or outside of, the imperatives of consumerist lifestyles, commercial spatialities and economic growth.[20]

The only non-normative way of engaging with advertising that has been considered by geographers and media scholars to date is the illegal raising of advertising spaces and the informal landscapes these produce (Sedano, 2016). What is missing then, and what this thesis evokes, is an in-depth account of material resistance as an emergent, unique form of advertising negotiation increasingly central to the material, social, historical and political life of advertising power. It is in the existing literature on advertising power's prioritisation of the advertiser over the advertised-to, of passivity or incompatibility over resistance, that the present thesis, and its ethnographic engagements with the practice of 'subvertising', finds its theoretical fuel for an exploration of a co-constituted, and therefore *contested* geography of advertising.

2.4   Research questions

This thesis introduces the practice of subvertising as an analytic device through which to better understand the paths along which advertising affects the potential of bodies, subjectivities, spaces, and politics of contemporary everyday life. The central interest of this thesis thus lies in examining the various and peculiar ways in which the practice of subvertising circulates within, and therefore, shapes and is shaped by the contested spaces of advertising. Tracing the contested geographies of advertising, where advertising and subvertising negotiations variously emerge as the clashing or blending of worlds, this thesis will offer insights into unexpected, but crucial corners of advertising's contemporary agenda, operations and effects.

Here we will witness the varied, often messy and contradictory, worlds of advertising industries, concerned not only with producing consumer bodies or peculiar space-times, but equally, and this will be the central premise of this thesis, with intervening

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[20] The question of subvertising practices as advertising 'externalities' is discussed and problematised in greater detail in Chapter 6.

into, arranging and exhausting lifeworlds at odds with advertising. Even if these might appear marginal at first glance, I will argue, they profoundly affect advertisers' rules of elaboration and methods of engagement. The advertiser is interested here less in a body's monetary capacity, its productive drive, and much more interested in, reliant on even, its capacity *not* to buy or work, its *un*productive capacity, its pull towards an antagonistic life. Following the manifold movements and imaginations of subvertisers, we will be taken into the affective undertow of advertising power, the unsaid or unthought of its power, variously (and barely) surfacing as awkward arrangements of amicability, sinister paranoid atmospheres, stubborn locking mechanisms, subvertisers' strange fetishisation of advertising objects, and other precarious, sometimes uncanny configurations. I hope to trouble commonplace understandings of advertising power as grounded within the semiotic and affective registers of advertising content, attributing it a much more expanded and distributed geography reliant on a wide range of socio-material-legal landscapes, affective tonalities, and modes of presence. The result: an advertiser largely in excess of the content, consumer bodies and cities it produces; an advertiser dislocated from its fixed points, positions, and identities. This will permit an image of advertising as an operation of power that is, in a sense, much more nebulous, somehow vaguely hovering outside and beyond the body, and much more deeply embedded in the perpetual circuits of social and material realities beyond the arguably bounded realm of the consumer and the urban. In exploring *advertising-subvertising entanglement* as its primary research theme, then, the thesis asks two central, inter-related questions.

1. *What do advertising-subvertising entanglements tell us about advertising power?* To this end, I will trace ethnographic scenes of subvertising-advertising relations to cast the varied, sometimes contradictory and always precarious, worlds of advertising power – worlds which are unpredictably social, legal, material, affective and performative in their engagement with the dreams, materialities and practices of those bodies at odds with advertising. On the one hand, these worlds take us into advertising power as a negational form that legally, socially, materially and affectively inhibits the emergence of radical imaginaries. On the other hand, they lead us into advertising's repeated affirmative, celebratory embrace of subvertising. Together pointing at advertising's powers to exhaust, they beg us to ask a second central question:

2. *What mode of advertising-subvertising contestation, if any, manages to outlive the exhaustive and recuperative logic of capitalism?* The thesis will introduce the figure of the Vandal to unpick how the intimate and intricate connection between

advertising and subvertising – in terms of aesthetic conformity, the drive towards identity, the lure of communication, the reliance on media spectacles and interest in social contagion – affects subvertising's potential for imagining life and ethics after advertising.

To address these questions, this research draws upon (1) a 28-month audio-visual ethnography with a range of subvertising individuals and collectives in London, Newcastle, New York, Brussels, and Paris; (2) qualitative photo-elicitation interviews with advertising professionals and subvertising practitioners in London and New York; (3) the existing interdisciplinary literature on advertising power mapped out in this chapter and (4) an interdisciplinary mixture of scholars (including Michael Taussig, Giorgio Agamben, Gilles Deleuze and Tiqqun). Let us, however, first turn towards the methodological decisions made throughout the thesis, with a particular emphasis on ethnographically negotiating one of the practice's central qualities: its unlawfulness.

3 Researching the contested geographies of advertising

'The birth of a methodology is in its essence the discovery of a dodge to live.' (Whitehead, 1929, p. 18)

As discussed, the thesis explores what the diverging and overlapping affects, performances, and subjectivities gathering into contested advertising-subvertising milieus tell us about advertising power. Conceptually, this echoes ontological concerns within geographical scholarship of late. Most commonly referred to as 'non-representational theory' in geography (Thrift, 2007), this emergent field draws from a wide-ranging set of theoretical traditions, from actor-network theory, process philosophy and performance theory to new materialism, object-oriented ontology, speculative realism and post-phenomenology. Some of the most notable sources of inspiration include Baruch Spinoza, Friedrich Nietzsche, Gilles Deleuze, Michel Foucault, Alfred North Whitehead, Erin Manning, Henri Bergson, Elizabeth Grosz, Brian Massumi, Isabelle Stengers, Gilbert Simondon and Donna Haraway.

While unapologetically varied in tenor and articulations, what binds their work together is nothing less than a reformulation of life, with particular attention offered to the spatial and temporal as always contested, processual, multi-layered, relational, excessive, irreducible and more-than-human (Dewsbury *et al.*, 2002). Here, '[a] whole is re-theorized as a diverse and diffuse field of co-constituting elements thrown together into an assemblage in and as events.' (Stewart, 2014, p. 549) Unavoidably, particularly in its attention given to the concepts of 'knowledge' (Dewsbury, 2000; 2003; Dewsbury *et al.*, 2002; Harrison, 2000; 2002; Thrift and Dewsbury, 2000), 'causality'[21] (Ash and Anderson, 2015) and the human 'subject' (Bennett, 2010; Braun and Whatmore, 2010; Dewsbury, 2012; Roberts, 2012; Ruddick, 2017; Simpson, 2017), this work spawns alternative considerations of thought, and thus, of analysis and methodology in geography and beyond (see in particular the edited collection in Vannini, 2015d). It tilts the geographer's emphasis from representation,

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[21] Causality is a relational force that exceeds a simple linear translation between two entities. It is constituted by emergent and complex encounters between multiple forces, altering that which is considered 'cause' and that which is thought of as 'effect' (Ash and Anderson, 2015). This doesn't do away with 'causes' as such. Instead, their durations are perceived as less grand and totalising.

categorisation and conclusion over to acts of 'witnessing' (Dewsbury, 2003), 'noticing' (Tsing, 2015), 'attuning' to (Stewart, 2011), 'listening' to (Stevenson, 2014) and 'animating' (Vannini, 2015c) lifeworlds. In these instances of an expanded, more modest understanding of what constitutes knowledge-production, the researcher is orientated within the eventfulness and 'vitality of the world as it unfolds.' (Dewsbury, 2003, p. 1923)

In what follows I further build on and complicate some of these developments, primarily conceptions towards a 'vitalist geography' (Greenhough, 2010), to work towards the potential of a critical vitalist methodology in my concern with what advertising-subvertising entanglements tell us about advertising power. To this end, and before describing the particular methods enrolled, I present five tentative principles. They are the orientations that make up the particular epistemological and methodological ethos of vitalism that guided me throughout the production of the thesis, my engagements with 'the field' and resultant 'field data'.

3.1 Epistemology and style: Five orientations towards a vitalist methodology

3.1.1 Vitalist thought: For thinking-in-the-event

A vitalist-inspired geography, drawing in particular from the philosophies Henri Bergson, Gilles Deleuze and Alfred North Whitehead, insists that it is a complex, indeterminate host of processes and relations that comes to constitute a singular present. Here, '[s]pace is a verb not a noun' (Dewsbury *et al.*, 2002, p. 439); or, following philosopher Edward Casey, '[p]lace is more an *event* than a *thing* to be assimilated into known categories.' (Casey, 1996, p. 26; emphasis in original) This is a call, then, for geographers attending to particular presents (or events), to 'focus on vital processes (becoming) as opposed to essential or given qualities (being) as a way of identifying life.' (Greenhough, 2010, p. 39; 2014) This also implies that these 'vital' processes largely exceed their spiritual or biological rendering. The former reveals a tendency towards universal origins of life, the latter too often holds a dichotomous view of the human and the nonhuman, the living and the dead, the animate and the inanimate. A vitalist rendering of the world, rather, instigates the processual relatedness of lifeworlds, where the event and its affective charge are equally troubled by the present as by the absent. Think, for instance, of the piercing devastation following the loss of one's partner, the shock of a chair pulled back, the uneasiness of a long break of silence, or the surprise of a street suddenly stripped of all advertising; each of which constitute and are constituted by the incessant

eventfulness of worlds. A vitalist methodology, then, is one in line with becoming in its manifold, often contesting iterations.

Following on from this, cultural theorist Erin Manning argues methods are variously enrolled as 'a cut that stills' and stops 'potential on its way, cutting into the process before it has a chance to fully engage with the complex relational fields the process itself calls forth.' (Manning, 2015, pp. 33-34) Central to this methodological tendency, for Manning, is a perceived division between the human and research object. This distinction overstates conscious knowledge, leaving little space for dealing with the ineffable and the unthinkable. Further, it pushes us towards a stifling of a range of animating processes of experience, thus signifying, to return to Whitehead's quote at the beginning of this chapter, 'the discovery of a dodge to live.' (Whitehead, 1929, p. 18) The result of such epistemological tendency is an 'analysis with a still-born concept.' (Manning, 2015, p. 58) So how does one avoid 'ontological freezing in which the excessive is recuperated for the sake of theoretical certainty, the flourish of generalisation, a well formed opinion and a resounding conclusion' (Dewsbury *et al.*, 2002, p. 437)? How does one, put simply, make methodological openings rather than closures?

As a fertile starting point, philosophers Erin Manning and Brian Massumi argue, building primarily on the vitalist philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead, for a more nuanced approach to knowledge and methodology which they conceptualise as 'thinking-in-the-event' (Manning and Massumi, 2014; Manning, 2015). Knowledge is understood here less as externalised judgement, 'claiming to see the whole world while remaining distanced from it' (Rose, 1997, p. 308) and instead, is attended to in terms of internal creation always unavoidably immanent to the event. In this vein, knowledge exceeds the wilful human subject, and exceeds articulation in language. Rather than considering this a failure of thought, I take this understanding to suggest the *capacity* of an active radical thinking-with the multiplicity and volatility of the event as it occurs.

3.1.2   Vitalist world: For remaining multiple

Thinking-in-the-event is about being in the midst of empirical richness, staying with its rampant heterogeneity rather than sifting through it to filter out truth(s). Towards this aim four related methodological approaches emerge.

Firstly, physical, emotional, tactile and affective closeness to the vitality of the events may hold potency for sticking with more-than-representational multiplicity. Importantly, in a refusal to reduce any event to a narrow spatio-temporal setting, the

event can get a hold of the researcher as it travels across an extended time and space. Secondly, the promise of remaining embedded with the multiple and the excessive at the heart of the event requires researchers to welcome becoming disoriented, losing bearing, if only temporarily. This is an approach that dragged sociologist Alice Goffman into the passenger seat of a car to be used in a drive-by shooting:

> 'I don't believe that I got into the car with Mike because I wanted to learn firsthand about violence […] I got into the car because, like Mike and Reggie, I wanted Chuck's killer to die. […] Looking back, I'm glad that I learned what it feels like to want a man to die – not simply to understand the desire of vengeance in others, but to feel it in my bones, at an emotional level eclipsing my own reason or sense of right and wrong.' (Goffman, 2014, pp. 260-261)

While this is obviously an extreme example, raising a number of ethical questions (see Volokh, 2015), the dedication to surrendering researcher subjectivity is inspiring and admirable. In 'letting go', in gearing towards unfolding intuition and openness, we can cultivate a 'noninstrumental relation to the world' that is 'in excess of our needs, and in excess of the self-presentation or immanence of materiality, to collapse ourselves, as things, back into the world.' (Grosz, 2001, p. 174) It is through this mode of 'intuition' (Bergson, 1946),[22] understood as an intentional 'process of enabling something unintended to emerge' through the act of submergence into the unique and often erratic flux of the world, that the researcher may most productively express new abilities, concepts and affects (Williams, 2016, p. 1559). In this sense, a vitalist methodology embraces the digressive, unpredictable quality of fieldwork, allowing it to bleed into a tangled, non-linear journey of circuiting in and out of chapter-writing, reading, researching, and the (re)formulation of research aims. This sits in an uncomfortable relation to many institutional formulations of research processes which often try to impose lab and library based empirical frameworks to process-oriented endeavours.

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[22] Elizabeth Grosz understands intuition in Bergsonian terms as the 'internal, intimate apprehension of the unique particularity of things, their constitutive interconnections, and the time within which things exist.' (Grosz, 2005b, p. 143) This method of intuition is a reversal of Kantian thought still so often central to human geography (Williams, 2016), instead shifting research thought and practice from *a withdrawal from* the event to an *approximation towards* the event in its fullest more-than-human complexity.

Thirdly, and to further stay with the multiplicity of advertising-subvertising entanglements I outline in this thesis, a vitalist methodology works *with* the practices and practitioners under study rather than *on* them. In this sense, geographical scholarship inflected by non-representational theory still often holds a personal, self-referential and unapologetically non-participatory quality (Mitchell and Elwood, 2012). The researching subject enjoys a surprisingly isolated and heightened status for a set of theories that prefer ideals of distributed agency over any notion of the sovereign human subject. This methodological tendency, I hold, is not an automatic or unavoidable result of the ontologies and epistemologies that inspire vitalist thought. Speaking to a similar concern, geographer Clive Barnett elaborates his worries about prioritising researcher knowledges over those of research-participants:

> 'So it is that the acknowledgement of embodiment has come at the cost of eliding considerations of mindedness, normativity and rationality almost entirely, in the gleeful embrace of aesthetic notions of pure creativity that escapes reason. The aestheticization of the affective dimensions of life into a causal object dubbed 'Affect' is associated with the habit of ontological trumping […], normally via authoritative appeals of some sort to neuroscience or psychology to establish this or that fact about how minds and bodies actually function.' (Barnett, 2012, p. 382)

Indeed, as already foreshadowed in the previous chapter,[23] this critique pushes us to consider people as neither always unavoidably dulled by the pre- or sub-cognitive, nor as autonomous and wilful beings capable of closing off entirely from more-than-representational intensities. In line with a vitalist conception of the body by geographers and cultural scholars,[24] this complicates the easy equalisation of 'affect

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[23] Where I also already stated my reasons for departing from Barnett's particular pragmatist ontology.

[24] Following the French philosophers Felix Ravaisson and Gilles Deleuze, geographers have formulated the body as metastable. This is a 'habit-body' situated in-between states of radical susceptibility and agential sovereignty, where we are ultimately 'open to influence but not continually confronting the world anew' (Blackman, 2013, p. 209; Lapworth, 2015). Of key significance to this renewed interest in the body as a habit body is the recent translation of Felix Ravaisson's doctoral thesis and key work 'Of Habit' (2008) into English by Clare Carlisle and Mark Sinclair, arguably launching habit to the foreground of critical thought as a key contemporary concept across the social sciences (Grosz, 2013). Indicative of this theoretical fascination are at least two recent Special Issues dedicated to the merits of conceptualising habit: one in body studies (in Body & Society – Blackman, 2013; Noble, 2013; Grosz, 2013; Lumsden, 2013; White, 2013; Crook, 2013) and one in the field of geographical enquiry (in Cultural Geographies –

with non-intentionality' and affirms the capacity for affective, embodied and situated forms of intelligence and evaluation (Blackman, 2013, p. 209). Importantly, this leaves space for thinking-with the words of research-participants, without 'assuming that such talk is either a mirror of the internal mind or an accurate account of action.' (Barnett *et al.*, 2011, pp. 119-120) A multiplicity of partial, situated and embodied vantage points (Haraway, 1988; see also Rose, 1997) from which to engage a series of ideas, practices and spaces are explicitly tied up in my vitalist methodology. This means actively working towards a mutual consideration of each other's partial knowledge, leaving space for participants' theorisations, words and actions to leak into and resonate throughout the research-directions, images and words of this thesis.

Fourthly, because of the peculiarity of any relation to the event and of the event itself, an example 'can only be ethical if it remains faithful to the singularity of the event rather than presenting this singularity as a particular instance of a general rule.' (McCormack, 2003, p. 501) A vitalist methodology is then explicit in articulating but one way of *dealing with* and *thinking with* a research question: by seeing worldly situations as unique unravelings of which we as researchers are a component.

3.1.3   Vitalist image: For the more-than-representational

Considering the conceptual starting point of existing attention to the practice of subvertising – primarily attending to subvertising as semiotic texts (see for instance Lekakis, 2017) – and of some discussions of advertising power – see Section 2.2.1 – what is of greatest relevance to this thesis is the recognition that lifeworlds, in all their vitality, largely exceed their representational registers and products. That being said, this thesis positions itself less within the bounds of *non*-representational theory (Thrift, 2007) and more in the interstices between the representational and the non-representational, taking from both to develop a *more-than*-representational account of advertising-subvertising imbrications (Lorimer, 2005). As a number of geographers have noted (Nash, 2000), a previously neglected emphasis on the non-discursive should not mean dismissing discourse and signification all-together. Rather, it is about engaging it from an alternative conceptual position, one that considers 'the representational' as itself a processual coming-together and generation of

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Dewsbury and Bissell, 2015; Hynes and Sharpe, 2015; Dewsbury, 2015; Bissell, 2015; Lapworth, 2015; Lea *et al.*, 2015; Latham, 2015).

representational, affective, performative and material arrangements (Massumi, 1995). As Roberts notes in reference to a particular kind of representational form, '[w]ith each viewing or haunting the photograph mutates, transforms, performing as part of an assemblage of signification, material objects, affects, multisensory elements and context.' (Roberts, 2013, p. 397; Massumi, 1995) It may reference experiences and emotions previously lived, and trace out affective territories for going further. Vitalist understandings of 'representations' thus break down lines forced in-between the representational/nonrepresentational (Dewsbury, 2000; Roberts, 2013), signification/intensity (Massumi, 1995), semiotics/materiality (Bissell and Fuller, 2017) and text/body. Starting from subvertising and advertising as vital processes enrolling and bringing about a host of dimensions, then, pushes us beyond a methodological attendance to their worlds as purely textual (in a broad sense) objects of advertising power and advertising resistance. A vitalist methodology calls for methodological assemblages appreciative of the more-than-representational registers of power, practices and practitioners.

It is here that it starts to become clear that the epistemological consequences of this movement towards a vitalist thinking-in-the-event add up to a 'speculative pragmatism' (Manning, 2015). The approach is *pragmatic* in the sense that it positions knowledge as immanent to the always contested, equivocal, situated, excessive and more-than-representational domains of the event. But it is also, as I will now suggest, *speculative* in the sense that it hopes to displace the temporalities of knowledge in the conduct of analyses to give rise to concepts that are as lively as the events they seek to engage.

3.1.4 Vitalist enactment: For a people to come

> '… is not fact stranger than fiction?' (Taussig, 2011, p. 143)

The fourth orientation is concerned with intensifying the enterprise of methodology as the creation of worlds (Law, 2004). Rather than a past-oriented reproduction of content, a vitalist approach is primarily directed towards the production of an affective force, one concerned with what given bodies might become. Here, 'data [is] understood here not as packets of information but as the traces of past events that can be taken up and be prehended to form a new occasion of experience.' (Manning, 2015, p. 61; Vannini, 2015b; 2015c)

One conceptual path towards taking up this capacity is revealed in Deleuze's conception of the 'power of the false'. Put simply, if true narration refers to forms of narrative that unify, represent, control and identify forces, temporalities, characters,

social realities, and so on, then, by contrast, false narration actively opens up towards the irreducible multiplicity of the event for the purpose of fabulating a people to come. As Deleuze notes, following Nietzsche's philosophy, '[t]he false ceases to be a simple appearance or even a lie, in order to achieve that power of becoming which constitutes series or degrees, which crosses limits, carries out metamorphoses, and develops along its whole path an act of legend, or story-telling.' (Deleuze, 2013, p. 283) For Deleuze, fact cannot be separated from fiction, and vice-versa. Rather than taking this as a researcher's ultimate catastrophe, something to bury beneath the clean surfaces of academic 'rigour', an orientation towards the false considers it something to celebrate, something to play out by openly mingling fact and fiction; sometimes to provoke and conduct affective work (Vannini, 2015c, p. 321), other times out of necessity, when speculation offers the only path into an otherwise inaccessible time or space (Rabbiosi and Vanolo, 2017). A vitalist methodology is explicit in refraining from a will to truth and instead, produces its own reality, and its own source of inspiration. In this endeavour, this thesis harbours, at least partially, a criticality toward ongoing tendencies within non-representational theory to favour theoretical density to the detriment of narrative power, fabulative or otherwise. Such attempt at affective exchange can unfold through a kind of 'creative non-fiction', that is, through an attempt

> 'to write theory through stories, or try, through descriptive detours, to pull academic attunements into tricky alignment with the amazing, sometimes eventful, sometimes buoyant, sometimes endured, sometimes so sad, always commonplace labor of becoming sentient to a world's work, bodies, rhythms, and ways of being in noise and light and space.' (Stewart, 2011, p. 445; see also Taussig, 2018, p. 32)

Following Deleuze (2003), this is about conjuring the force of the figural: an act of balancing between figuration (representation and illustration) and non-figuration (absolute deterritorialisation or total abstraction). The movement towards the figural does 'not involve a simple turning away from the figure or from the human, but a kind of stretching or twisting of it,' a conscious turning to forces of falsification in the creation of a fiction of the real (or a reality of fiction) packed with new possibilities, events, temporalities and identities (O'Sullivan, 2006, p. 64).

This thesis, then, unavoidably and consciously offers something different to a neutral description (see Saldanha, 2005), celebrating instead a mode of fabulation 'acting counter to our time and thereby acting on our time and, let us hope, for the benefit of a time to come.' (Nietzsche, cited in Deleuze, 1994, p. xxi) This is a particularly

pertinent endeavour in the prologue, epilogue and interludes of this thesis, with each, as I have already noted, dwelling in the emotional and affective geographies of advertising contestation. From inception, the thesis was guided by a critical consideration and attendance to the power of the advertising industry, one that eventually prompted my flight from Saatchi & Saatchi. But it is also informed by a pragmatist ethics, that is, by an attempt at intervening into and destabilising the complex relations of bodies, affective fields, and subjectivities that make up that industry.

3.1.5   Vitalist ethics: For a politics besides affirmation

At this point it is worth drawing out a particular danger of an unreflexive take-up of a vitalist ontology. As has been noted by a range of geographers, with a focus on 'an ever more rich and wondrous reality' (Braun, 2008, p. 675) vitalism may be conducive to a 'more cheerful way of engaging with the geographies of the world.' (Woodyer and Geoghagen, 2013, p. 196) It would therefore be easy to 'capture and celebrate the vitality and liveliness of the world *for the sake of that liveliness.*' (Blencowe, 2012, p. 7; emphasis added) At this point, a politics of affirmation is taken as the unavoidable companion of a vitalist ontology (see for instance, Braidotti, 2006a; 2006b; 2010).

In many instances, such politics of affirmation commonly, and unfortunately, emerges as the denial (or de-prioritisation) of unbecoming, death, destruction, impotentiality, gloom, or struggle, taking them as symptomatic of a prevalence of negativity that stifles political sensitivity and activity (see Ahmed, 2010, p. 87). Inside atmospheres of joy and positivity, little space is left for condemnation and critique (MacFarlane, 2017). But an affirmationist politics reveals itself as even more troubled when viewed in light of the drives of contemporary capitalism – Google's desire to annex everything, Silicon Valley's obsession with disruptive experimentation (Culp, 2016b), fashion manufacturers' celebration of sexual diversity, the advertiser's embrace of contestation (Chapter 5), and more broadly, an entire 'affective economy which associates joy with good things and pain with bad things.' (Ahmed, 2010, p. 215) As this thesis will go on to discuss, affirmationism has lost its capacity to cut, unwillingly entering into an uncomfortable alignment with what it hopes to overcome (see also Culp and Dekeyser, 2018). The geographer Key MacFarlane puts it bluntly (paraphrasing Marx): affirmationist thinkers 'reproduce the world; they do not seek to change it.' (Macfarlane, 2017, p. 314)

For some, including Macfarlane (2017), these sincere pitfalls of affirmation offer us enough reasons for abandoning a vitalist ontology once and for all. In my view,

however, the vitalism-affirmation correlation is much more slippery. A properly vitalist ethics cannot take affirmation as *a priori* the preferred method of political engagement – it must remain dedicated to the betrayal of any, ethical and otherwise, pre-determined fixings of social and material reality, fixings too often dedicated to the deadening of multiplicity and life. An immanent ethics refuses to fall back on predetermined footings of virtuous subjects and failing subjects, the melancholic life and the good life. To conceive of the world in terms of becoming and relations, should not then, by definition, cast any moral judgement on becomings as such – they variously turn out hostile or amicable, productive or destructive, revolutionary or counter-revolutionary, capitalist or anti-capitalist. Because becoming is not always a positive thing, we must shed it of its moral weight, instead remaining faithful to the particularities of the event. As Sara Ahmed (2010, p. 215) writes: 'We cannot know in advance what different affects will do to the body before we are affected in this or that way.'

Suspicious of the moral policing that seems part and parcel of affirmative politics, this thesis finds its inspiration in an alternative reading of vitalist ethics. Alongside the geographer Paul Harrison, the vitalist orientation of this thesis dares to hesitate 'over the invitation to affirm life, over the nature of this affirmation, over what is being affirmed, and what could be being forgotten therein.' (Harrison, 2015, p. 286) We hesitate to blindly celebrate and affirm life on this planet and may well, at times, condemn it with fierce force. As will become apparent when the thesis darkens its style and tonality (particularly in Part three. The Outside), the political orientation of the thesis will, in fact, grow out of a story at odds with affirmationist imperatives. Here we will encounter, however evasively, a dark figure that dares pull into question the impulse towards joy, productivity, and connectivity.

Having articulated five conceptual orientations towards a vitalist epistemology and methodology, the question of course remains: how to translate it, in more particular terms, into methods-in-practice for an exploration of the contested geographies of advertising? The wonky path I have negotiated in response is discussed in the section that now follows.

3.2 Methodological assemblage

In lieu of a single methodological practice, the thesis ties together a series of diverging research methods that nevertheless inform each other to present some of the complexity and multiplicity of contested geographies of advertising. Yet, the premise of such 'method assemblage' (Law, 2004) abjures the realist line of thought that aligns 'mixed methods' with more accurate representations of social worlds.

Instead, and within this might lie its main potency, the chosen methodological assemblage draws out alternating orientations towards a similar field of experience, charting some of the multiplicity of advertising-subvertising experiences and conjuring different forms of knowledge with varying capacities to 'harbour potential for ever further elaboration.' (Fortun, 2001, p. 22) They do thus not 'add up' to a harmonic whole, they exceed and often challenge one another in their particular situated articulations and searchings. The chosen vitalist methodology brings together deep ethnographic observant participation, qualitative interviewing and audio-visual methods. These are methodological fields of entanglement, with each method, in some cases, appropriated at the same time in the same space, and leading into one another in other cases, as when after an afternoon interview with Bobby we unexpectedly ran into an actual advertising intervention around the corner of the cafe in which we originally met.

3.2.1 When vulnerability prevails: Performing a paranoid (auto)ethnography

I spent the largest proportion of my field work following subvertisers and subvertisements through their assemblages of printed matter, translations work, urban mess, meeting room chatter, poster glue stickiness, climbings onto and over billboards, early morning reccies, European parliament meetings, local workshops, police encounters, ripped posters, squats raided and the clicks of opening bus shelters spaces. The result is a transnational multi-sited ethnography with a double focus on (1) ethnographic encounters with a loosely (at least at the beginning) connected international collection of individual and collective actors; and (2) an active, ongoing involvement in the subvertising collective Brandalism from November 2015 until March 2018.

But why Brandalism as a primary research group? I first reached out to them due to their collaboration with a wide variety of subvertising individuals and collectives. Of these subvertisers, some prefer digitally designed posters and others prefer graffiti scribbles, some work towards policy aims and others towards creating grand media spectacles, some are self-proclaimed artists, others activists. Brandalism thus held the promise of being a significant gateway into the diversity of subvertising communities. Given my broad interest in the various paths along which subvertising might tell us something about advertising power, I sought to keep 'the field' as open as possible, and working with Brandalism would allow me to avoid fixing the complexity of subvertising in one particular articulation, or in one place or time

(Stewart, 1996, p. 25).[25] Again, in line with a vitalist methodology, the assumption was not that this would provide a full 'overview' that would accurately represent subvertising practices, but rather that it would help avoid closing down, in advance, on the varying potentials different formulations of a heterogeneous practice might carry.

It is through Brandalism, and through the method of snowball sampling, that I came to build an international research group of 51 participants. By joining Brandalism during the Paris subvertising intervention that opened the prologue to this thesis, I met Europe-based subvertisers in person (who had also travelled there for the occasion), or was afterwards offered an online introduction to those who couldn't make it. While some were instantly keen to offer insight into their subvertising worlds, many were sceptical towards the presence of a 'researcher' (more on this and access more generally, below). Nonetheless, I pursued contact with an as diverse range of practitioners as possible. The result is a 50-plus participant research group that is primarily based in London, Barcelona, Newcastle, New York, Paris, Amsterdam, Madrid, Berlin, and Brussels, but who often travel between cities for the purpose of subvertising-related activities.

The largest chunk of my ethnographic activity took place in London throughout the course of 28 months with a range of subvertising practitioners from Brandalism and beyond. After London, New York is the site where I spent most of my time, meeting eleven subvertisers during my four-week fieldtrip in the summer of 2016. Beyond London and New York, my fieldwork extended to include Paris, Newcastle and Brussels, where I sporadically spent time (never more than three weeks) during particular subvertising meetings and interventions. During my travels outside of London, I lived with the subvertisers that had become research-participants. Aside

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[25] To this end, I also actively sought to include subvertising practitioners active outside of 'the West'. Sylvie told me she sometimes sells keys that open advertising spaces to subvertising practitioners in Santiago, Tel Aviv, Shanghai, Hangzhou, Macau, Montevideo, and Mexico City. There has, however, been little proof of these keys being put to use. At this moment, it seems to me that either 'subvertising' is currently a largely Western practice, takes place without concern for sharing images or texts online, or appears on online platforms I do not have access to due to language restraints. To counter the latter, I have drawn on Chinese-speaking, Russian-speaking, and Portuguese-speaking individuals in my professional and personal network, but they returned empty-handed. My research-participants shared the same suspicion, knowing only one subvertising group outside of 'the West', one that is active in Argentina. A few other historical instances of subvertising occurring outside of (Western) Europe and the United States are included in the timeline in Appendix I.

from New York, each of the urban research sites were re-visited at various stages throughout the research project.

To maximise the potency of ethnography as an exploration of 'lived experience in all its richness and complexity' (Herbert, 2000, p. 551) and of 'the uncertain and complex lives of objects in a world where there is no closure' (Law, 2004, p. 59; Crang and Cook, 2007), the enrolled ethnographic approach can be understood as an articulation of deep 'observant participation' (Thrift, 2007, p. 265). In tilting over from participant observation, 'observant participation' eschews the possibility of ever being an observer to an event while recognising the more-than-representational and embodied registers of practice and the need to engage and participate in their more-than-oneness as they unfold into deviant spaces, fleeting actions and enchanting objects (Thrift, 2007; Dewsbury, 2010). In this sense, 'observant participation' enables a double movement of *stretching out*, drawing in new fields and relations previously deemed outside of advertising worlds – and of *zooming in*, attending to the details of those relations, including 'the strangeness, the immaterial forces and unsettling aspects of performance' (Morton, 2005, p. 673), that might escape the eye of quantitative methods, interviewing, semiotic analysis, digital research or more 'observation-based' modes of ethnography (Tsing, 2005). In underscoring the capacities of stretching – spatio-temporally – and zooming – going 'deep' – in geographic ethnographies, this thesis troubles ongoing tendencies towards short-term field work and the stubborn holding on to 'researcher positions' in the recent expansion of interest in ethnographical methods (Vannini, 2015c; Söderström, 2010).

Geographer Karen Till draws out a number of different reasons to account for these prioritisations in geographical scholarship. First, geographers 'often construct emotional, spatial, and temporal boundaries between personal and work lives, a here and there, a home and field,' because of a belief in the possibility of an external position, and in the scholarly value attributed to that researcher position (Till, 2001, p. 54). Secondly, and related, '[s]ome geography departments and universities reward the publication of articles rather than books, a practice that supports, however indirectly, short-term projects at the expense of more sustained ones.' (Till, 2001, p. 46) Both of these methodological prioritisations are, I want to suggest, still central in today's landscape of geography.

In experimenting with what lies beyond these prioritisations in geography, this observant participation of the contested geographies of advertising is primarily inspired by the 'experimental ethnographies' of anthropologists Anna Tsing (2005; 2015), Lisa Stevenson (2014), Michael Taussig (1987; 2018), Kathleen Stewart (1996;

2007), João Biehl (2005) and others that remain dedicated to ethnographic practice as 'a constant beginning again – a search, an argument, an unfinished longing' (Stewart, 1996, p. 6) that 'keep[s] the story moving.' (Biehl, 2005, p. 24) These stories are presentations of my own lived experiences blended with the narratives offered by my research-participants. But they are distorted in ways that play with capacities to affect while protecting my research-participants: their genders swapped, their professions generalised, names and locations fictionalised, particular actions staged while others cast in the background, tracing some affective relations and rhythms while losing others, sometimes at the request of research-participants, other times spurting from the author's concerns with ethics, evocation, and narration. The stories emerged through the twists and turns of field notes, email conversations, text messages, Skype calls, video footage, still images, paper-writing, on-the-go during nightly advertising takeovers or in the chaos of a morning preparation. Very often, I was forced to rely on memory, running to my laptop or notebooks whenever I had a moment 'to get away from things' and to scribble down after-thoughts (Taussig, 2011). More often than not, I was left with unavoidable gaps, sometimes telling, often frustrating. But sometimes stories were retold, in different contexts and with different people and emphases, layering together a forever-lacking narrative of 28 months of advertising-subvertising encounters, through which I too was continuously re-imagined through my shifting relationship to the field of study.

This latter transformative aspect often occurred unexpectedly; in this case within 24 hours after my arrival in Paris for my first stint at ethnographic fieldwork:

> 'A fraction of yesterday's subvertising group have re-gathered for a breakfast check-in ritual. As each shares a personal story – of joy or devastation, of excitement or fear, of plans or failures – coffee, porridge and toast are passed around for all to indulge in. One of us tears up. She's envisioning the political effects of the French president's announcement of a state of emergency following the Bataclan theatre attacks. This is an emotional awakening, but one that is wrapped up in a warm and welcoming atmosphere of care. I have been here for less than 24 hours and I am already sharing stories usually kept within the safe boundaries of self or intimate circles. Such is the nature of this communal living and there's no other place I'd like to be right now.' (field notes, Paris, November 2015)

An immersion 'in the field' can often feel uncomfortable for researchers – where standing out amid systems of difference regarding age (Wilson, 2006), gender (Goffman, 2014), race (Saldanha, 2007), intentionality of presence or cultural

knowledge might feel like a reversal of roles, as if 'the researcher's body [is] scrutinized by the population being scrutinized.' (Saldanha, 2007, p. 45) My personal journey from advertising to subvertising milieus, however, experienced through the process of this thesis, was one more akin to a falling in-place; an ever-expanding sense of familiarity that swelled as my participation deepened. But, as philosopher Donna Haraway has noted, ethnographic research is also 'a method of being at risk in the face of the practices and discourses into which one inquires' (Haraway, 1997, p. 39; also see Crang and Cook, 2007, p. 56), with emotional highs sometimes collapsing into anxious breakdowns within a timespan of hours or minutes. This is a riskiness heightened by the unlawfulness of the subvertising practice. There is something about illegality that is all-encompassing, embracing as it does online communication, urban interventions, public meetings and general daily actions with an undercurrent of anxiety, prudence and sometimes outright paranoia. On a personal level, this was shaped by the simplest of realisations: while others could hide behind aliases, I was easy to find and had become an obvious node in a larger network, and therefore, a threat to the anonymity of my research-participants. Reading into a long history of arrested ethnographers being demanded and even forced to foreclose personal data on research-participants involved in illegal practices (Hamm and Ferrell, 1998b), I realised this was more than a paranoid fantasy. The criminologist Rik Scarce, for instance, refused to offer his field research data on actors in a radical environmental activist movement, as it would undo their anonymity, and was subsequently jailed for five months (Monaghan, 2012).

Figure 7 - Paris squat after the police raid. (Paris, November 2015)

The perceived risk of my research reached new heights one night in the winter of 2016. During a subvertising workshop I co-organised, I garnered a deep suspicion that private investigators had infiltrated the event, and were out to garner information about subvertising communities (see 'Interlude: A story of paranoia'). If I had measurements of offline and online encryption in-place before this night, then the next day the standards and techniques by which I operated were heightened to an almost-professional level. I was, indeed, preparing for a nocturnal raid by police. I read up on my rights during a raid and prepared a daily fifteen-minute cleaning ritual – which I would execute close-to-perfectly every night before going to bed until the end of the PhD: sliding notebooks into sofa gaps, running CCleaner to delete all kinds of temporary files that escaped encryption, placing already-encrypted external hard drives inside food packaging, delete any already-encrypted conversations from my smart phone, double-checking my laptop was *fully* turned off (the only way to really log out of encryption software used during the day), and scrawling through any intimate or potentially incriminating details written down in my field notebooks.[26]

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[26] I employed black marker to avoid the different tonalities of ink materials to stand out during investigation techniques of image or language processing employed to reveal hidden words and numbers. My chosen techniques were drawn from a study by computer

Only once these counter-measurements were undertaken could I comfortably call it a night. Before I realised it, I had started living the precarious life of a criminal hiding out and there seemed no easy way out of constant paranoia; something my participants told me was primarily a result of my lack of previous experience with legal authorities. But if I hadn't abandoned my research position temporarily, if I hadn't contributed to the workshop, I would have never felt, in my own bones, the adrenaline, anxiety, and dark electric anticipation of potential police encounters central to subvertising lives. I would have not been able to viscerally trace the unlawfulness of an unlawful practice.

It is worth emphasising in this context that if '[n]egotiating access for ethnographic work is invariably problematic' (Keith, 1992, p. 554; see also Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983), then the interest of this thesis in an *illicit* practice expands these problematics. First, there is a general suspicion towards 'outsiders' within circles occupied with illegal artistic, political or monetary practices. Some countries have a well-known reputation for undertaking undercover investigations into these groups. In the United Kingdom, for instance, the Special Demonstration Squad – a covert policing branch of the London Metropolitan Police active between 1968 and 2008 – is known to have infiltrated and sabotaged a range of protest groups, including collectives of animal rights activists and environmentalist campaigners (Evans, 2015).[27] The wariness of some towards unfamiliar faces is therefore more than understandable. But also, as one research-participant put it with particular regard to past experiences with academic researchers: 'It is so often unclear why they are there in the first place […] let alone what we'll get from speaking to them.' (Emily, August 2016)

Second, if the glue binding these individuals and collectives together is a shared illegal practice, then an incapacity and unwillingness on the part of the researcher to undertake this practice makes for a complicated sustainability of relationships. The promise to 'give voice' is unconvincing to a network of individuals commonly written and spoken about in the New York Times, Le Monde, The Guardian, BBC, Huffington

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scientists Daniel Lopresti and Lawrence Spitz (2005) that recommends a range of counter-measurements to the leaking of governmental documents.

[27] In what is perhaps the best-known case, two undercover police officers of the Special Demonstration Squad went as far as fathering children with the targets under surveillance. The aim was to ramp up their credibility as equal members of activist circles (see Evans and Lewis, 2013).

Post, and a range of other (inter)national media platforms. Ironically, I had to surpass my 'academic self' and delve into my professional past as an advertising agency executive to find (legal) skills valuable to subvertising practitioners: film-making, photo editing, digital communication strategy development, text editing for subvertising publications and public relations.

In my first email to Brandalism, I clearly stated these skills alongside an outline of my research project and biography. A little later, after defining them more clearly in a subsequent first meeting, these skills added up to an invitation to join Brandalism in Paris in November 2015. Once access was gained, subvertisers generously took me into their homes and studios and introduced me to their practices and their partners, parents, and children. They also shared pools of knowledge and intimate stories, some of which are in some shape or form woven into this thesis. Levels of trust peaked early when I was offered access to Brandalism's email inbox after co-writing a number of press releases for the COP21 intervention in November 2015, enabling an unpolished view into the background activity and relations usually concealed behind glossy images and carefully-crafted press releases: the governmental grant writing, the daily student requests, the subvertising infighting, the sometimes tedious organisational work, and even, as we shall see in Chapter 5, unexpected email exchanges with advertisers.

Figure 8 - Inside Fred's studio. (New York, June 2016)

But different levels of participation were required to maintain access and trust. I triggered, co-designed and co-organised a Brandalism-run campaign titled 'Switch Sides' in which 350 personally-addressed 'How to switch sides' pamphlets were hand-delivered to advertising workers in top agencies across the United Kingdom, before inviting them to an 'Advertisers Anonymous' workshop connecting 'past switchers' with present disillusioned advertising workers. I further maintained an active role, by shooting and directing a popular video that was published via Brandalism's website and press releases (see Section 3.2.3); by co-organising subvertising workshops for official institutions (including the EU Green Party) and alongside research-participants; by writing the official exhibition text for a subvertiser displaying work at a gallery in Berlin that was later published in an edited collection; by exhibiting my photos and video at galleries and art centres in Warsaw and Dresden;[28] by presenting policy-level recommendations at a European Union body called Sustainable Development Observatory as a member of 'Subvertisers International'; by writing-up meeting minutes; by editing grant applications and book proposals; by standing-by as lookout, photographer and film-maker during illicit takeovers, carrying ladders, H40 keys and buckets filled with stickiness; by hanging up subvertising posters still wet with ink for drying; and so forth.

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[28] Between June and September 2016, my audio-visual productions developed during COP21 were shown at 'The Poster Remediated' during the International Poster Biennale in Warsaw, Poland. At the end of that same year, the same video was exhibited at Riesa Efau, a gallery and arts centre in Dresden, Germany.

Figure 9 - Switch Sides pamphlets. (London, October 2016)

This level of participation deepens the idea that any mode of ethnographic 'observant participation' pulls out auto-ethnographic manners of thought. Embodied and affective attunement are central to 'the capacity to sense, amplify, and attend to difference.' (Ash and Gallagher, 2015, p. 73; Chang, 2008; Longhurst *et al.*, 2008; Morton, 2005) Auto-ethnographic accounts recur throughout the thesis, emerging in a multitude of different voices, from lucid referencing to my advertising days, to tentative speculations on a present subvertising event and paranoid fabrications of a possible future threat, and many more in-between (Mizzi, 2010). My auto-ethnographic voices are imbricated by the irreducible complexities of the past as they inflect, consciously through memory and subconsciously through bodily accretion, the ethnographic present. In that sense, the 'research' conducted for this thesis started during my teenage years in the Belgian town of Bruges: when my dreams of a wild, youthful and creative life in advertising arose into being, and crystallised in the application for a university degree in advertising management. Over the last decade, as already noted, this was followed by dwelling in and contributing to the worlds of advertising. Simultaneously, I became a curator and performer of illicit creative practices (see Dekeyser and Garrett, 2015). My ethnographic positionality is therefore a double one of outside-insider or inside-outsider, the balance of participating from the 'inside' or from the 'outside' dependent on the particularities of fieldwork encounters.

3.2.1.1 Geography, legality, ethics: Ethnography on the edge[29]

> 'Situate yourselves as close as you can to the perpetrators of crime and
> deviance, to the victims, to the agents of legal control; put yourselves, as best
> as you can and for as long as you can, inside their lives, inside the lived
> moments of deviance and crime. You won't experience it nicely, and if the
> danger and hurt become too much, be glad of it. Because as near as you will
> ever get, you have found your way inside the humanity of crime and deviance.'
> (Hamm and Ferrell, 1998a, p. 270)

In finishing this section, I briefly address the question of ethics that emerged at
multiple times and spaces in response to the centrality of illicit spatial practices
ethnographically engaged with. Namely: is it ethical to undertake direct immersion as
a research method if it means breaking the law, or at least, means dancing along the
fringes of legal worlds? While I was not directly involved in the unlawful act of
physically intervening into advertising, the question still demands consideration.
Producing online video material and contributing to theoretical-practical workshops
on 'how to do subvertising', for instance, could be framed as incitement to criminal
damage, even if this would likely fail to pass the evidence or public interest tests set
out by UK law. Even if my involvement itself is not by definition illegal, I risk 'later
redefinition by crime control agents or others as a criminal accomplice or accessory.'
(Ferrell, 1998, p. 33)

Perhaps more importantly, not preventing an illegal act from taking place whilst
being aware of the illegal nature of that act can, similarly, be in and of itself unlawful.
As such, like the criminologist Craig Ancrum in his ethnography of illicit drug usage,
'I occasionally found myself in a position of committing minor illegal acts.' (Ancrum,
2013, p. 121) As the PhD thesis of my supervisor Bradley Garrett (2014) has shown,
an ethnographic interest in the criminal carries with it a range of major threats.[30]

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[29] Certain elements of this section have re-appeared in my paper with Bradley Garrett (see
Dekeyser and Garrett, 2017). The paper develops, in greater detail, some of the
arguments made in this section.

[30] For his PhD thesis, Bradley Garrett conducted deep ethnographic research with a
community of 'urban explorers' involved in trespassing onto off-limits architecture and
infrastructure. His house was raided and his field data (note books, text messages, audio-
visual material, interview transcriptions) seized for evidence purposes after they
handcuffed him upon his return from fieldwork abroad. The British Transport Police
sought to charge him, together with a number of research-participants, for 'conspiracy to
commit criminal damage', which holds a 10-year maximum jail sentence. The geographer

Chapter 3

Geography has only shown a limited interest in the academic relevance of conducting ethnographic investigations into illicit spatial practices (see Dekeyser and Garrett, 2017 for an exception). What's more, despite a recent embrace of an approach of 'situated ethics', for many geographers, geography departments, funding bodies and professional bodies the law still seems to offer, a priori, a site at which the discipline draws a line, pushing ethnographic work concerned with explicit embodied interaction with what lies beyond legal borders into the realm of taboo. I therefore have to draw from a long-standing scholarly tradition further afield to offer an initial response to the questions posed above. My research builds on an expanding concern with 'edge ethnography' in criminological studies (Hamm and Ferrell, 1998b; Miller and Tewksbury, 2010).

Figure 10 - Steve and John piercing the borders of legality. (London, March 2017)

The criminologist Jeff Ferrell, for instance, was arrested in the 1990s in New York City whilst painting trains with graffiti writers. He argues that ethnography of this sort might reveal 'part of the social world that remains hidden by more traditional techniques.' (Ferrell, 1998, p. 25) Only if we inhabit the 'deviant' geographies of

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was, in the end, offered a 'conditional discharge', preventing him for undertaking any research activity into illicit practices for three years.

subvertising will they come to us as much in 'the pits of our stomachs, in cold sweats and frightened shivers, as in our heads.' (Ferrell, 1998, p. 30) Further, the criminologist Geoff Pearson (2009, p. 246), undertaking ethnographic research with football hooligans, contends 'a refusal to commit crimes on a regular basis would have aroused suspicions and reduced research opportunities' where it is necessary for researchers to follow research subject norms to retain trust and access. If we agree that it is sometimes across the legal boundaries of social reality that the promise of alternative futures lies,[31] and if we consider these futures as embodied, imagined, performative and affective (perhaps never emerging in the public realm) *and* as semiotic and discursive (their public mediations and urban productions), then direct immersion into illicit practices is not only ethically acceptable, it may actually carry high socio-political significance.

Further, when 'in the field', the most ethical action might sometimes be the one that breaks the law. Consider, for instance, the moment when a research-participant announces the plan to trespass as part of a subvertising action. As an ethnographic researcher, aware of the dangers of a solo trespass onto a terrain with many dangers, we might decide it could well be more ethical to participate consciously in the act (if only to look after one another) than to let the research-participant depart on a solo adventure. As Cloke *et al.* (2000, p. 251) note, 'to hide behind ethical standards so as to obscure the real-time dilemmas of research' constitutes an unethical relation to ethnographic work (see also Dyer and Demeritt, 2009, p. 60).

What slips into sight is an alternative understanding of 'ethics' as dynamic, relational, and embodied; as a mode of conduct to move along and towards, rather than as a pre-determined, inflexible and transcendental set of terms to start from. Ethics unfolds in the encounter with human and nonhuman others (Braidotti, 2006c; Simonsen, 2010). Ethics then becomes an ongoing process of critical sensibility aimed at cultivating 'a disposition and an openness to difference, the multiplicity of

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[31] To dismiss the potency of illegal activity would be to disregard the historical role of Mahatma Gandhi's defiance of British colonial laws in accelerating of the expulsion of the British empire; the social significance of Rosa Parks' symbolical refusal to give up her bus seat in times of American racial segregation; and the political capacity of artistic inscriptions into the Berlin Wall to contribute to an anti-wall imaginary at the end of the 1980s. My aim here is not to compare the historical weight of these encounters with those of subvertising acts, nor to shed the mentioned individuals or collectives in a simple light of individual bravery or outstanding genius. Instead, I want to underscore the impossibility of equalising legality with morality and the need for researchers to perform an ongoing critical unpicking of the interconnections between the two fields.

life and, crucially, uncertainty' (Bissell, 2010, p. 85; Popke, 2009); this includes, and this is where I hope to stretch geographers' legal/illegal line-guarding, a willingness to question the equation of the legal and the ethical. If 'the law in part reflects, incorporates, and perpetuates social privilege and social injustice' (Ferrell, 1998, p. 34), then it may, in some cases, debilitate an ethical orientation towards encounters conducive to vitalist perspectives. Being critical about and contributing to the undermining of legal systems as a researcher, as I hope to show in this thesis, can for that reason be an ethical force worthy of ongoing consideration, requiring more than automatic dismissal on the part of the critic.

Refraining a priori from illicit spaces of imagination, through a reliance on the common mantra to 'play it safe' and 'not choose a topic that might lead you to break the law in the process of collecting or analysing data' (Denscombe, 2012, p. 168), therefore, might be more dangerous, more unethical than a careful threading of an ethical sensibility through the messy encounters of illicit performances, embodied selves, spatial situatedness, community ethics, legal systems, research aims, and aims at protecting research-participants (Routledge, 2002). More than a simple holding on to moral standards of self and society, the ethical purport of this thesis is then to perform an ongoing process of (re)consideration of the potential effects of participating in or promoting illicit practices for researcher-participants and the researcher, from the initial drafting of my ethics forms and international risk assessments for the Ethics Committee through to the intensity of subvertising field encounters, where the legal ever-so-swiftly swept into the illegal, and where those early ethics forms suddenly seemed unaccommodating, constraining and even unethical. Rather than enacting a pre-set dismissal of illegal ethnographies, this thesis encourages and follows the development of an immanent evaluation that prefigures and transforms along with the messiness and vitality of fieldwork activity. To task oneself with an unfolding ethics that embraces communication between a multitude of dimensions (of self, participant community, ethics committee, institution, state) can be more tedious or harrowing than a simple equation of the lawful and ethical. Yet, it is perhaps precisely the nonlinear messiness of such a situated, vitalist ethics that is required for dealing with the ethical complexities of the field.

3.2.2 Interviewing and visual elicitation

> 'I have become Brandalism. One of the first responses to the illicit posters put up in bus stops in front of advertising agencies in London, Newcastle and Bristol deeply insulted me. It feels as if I'm closing down on alternative

narratives. This is problematic, not because it stands in the way of objectivity (I feel no urge to make such claims), but because it narrows down the opportunity of engaging with the set of tensions that are so significant in the production and furthering of knowledge. It seems like I need to move away from Brandalism for a while and engage with a range of different topics and opinions. I've gone too deep and have lost track of the heterogeneity of knowledge paths available.' (field notes, London, March 2016)

For the purpose of maintaining some of the multiplicity that makes up the contested geographies of advertising, a dual articulation of interviewing is tied into the chosen methodological assemblage. The first consists of interviews with subvertising practitioners. While snowball sampling had opened the doors into the world of subvertising practitioners, there were still a range of individuals outside of the ethnographic reach allowed by Brandalism because of, amongst other reasons, geographical specificity, hostile relationships amongst certain individuals and collectives, and concerns around anonymity and confidentiality. In these instances, I set up a range of what I term 'foundational interviews': unstructured interviews in informal contexts, aimed more at building trust than at gaining the most poignant research data. While these foundational interviews were unstructured, they were inspired by a long but flexible list of questions (see Appendix II) that can be grouped into eight broad themes: subvertising methods, aesthetic interests, role of geographical location, political motivations, relation to advertisers, role of imagery and online platforms, embodied quality of subvertising, and imagined urban futures.

In total, 14 foundational interviews were undertaken at different stages throughout my 28 months of fieldwork: seven in New York, four in Paris, and three in London. In four occasions, a primary explorative interview with a subvertising practitioner was followed by a second, more informal interview, sometimes even a third, before an invitation for ethnographic work into their subvertising lives was raised. Seven follow-up (non-foundational and semi-structured) interviews were also conducted with subvertisers after long-term fieldwork participation, allowing me to return to them with a particular set of questions that zoom in on peculiar past events, gestures, ideas, or words, that we experienced together. Adding in these two sets of follow-up interviews, a total of 28 interviews were held with subvertising practitioners. Eight of these were held over encrypted online conference calls. The remaining 20 interviews were held at a location of the subvertiser's choice, which always ended up being public but quiet places (cafes, parks, pubs). These places allowed them to speak freely, without potential listeners, and without having to give me their home address. To further ensure anonymity, rather than presenting them with consent forms to

sign, I either sent over a participant information form in advance, or offered a brief summary of the research and the potential research-participant risks and benefits as outlined in my ethics forms, and as agreed upon by the Ethics Committee.

As geographers Sarah Dyer and David Demeritt (2009) suggest, it may feel uncomfortable to challenge the ethical validity of informed consent. Yet, in the case of the foundational interviews with subvertisers, asking them to sign anything would not only have violated the indispensable premise of anonymity upon which they agreed to speak to me (Ancrum, 2013), it would have also further formalised and bureaucratised the interviews in ways that would have dramatically reduced the capacity of unstructured, informal interviewing (Crow *et al.*, 2006, p. 90) whilst potentially nurturing suspicion and thus closing potential knowledge pathways. For the same two concerns, the interviews were not recorded and notes were primarily written down post-interview.

A second range of interviews sent me from banlieue squats in Paris to top-floor skyscraper offices in New York, from crawling beneath barbed wire to lounging in trendy pubs, exchanging my everyday hoodies for suave shirts from my time at Saatchi & Saatchi. These were the semi-structured interviews (see Appendix III) with advertising professionals from outdoor advertising companies and the advertising agencies often developing and designing the posters embedded into urban landscapes. Two interviews were conducted in London, four in New York. All six interviews took place during the first two years of the thesis in a location of their choice: meeting rooms, cafes, pubs, in their homes and, once, on the streets, walking from one billboard to the other. The interviews were preceded by the signing of consent forms during which I asked for permission to record the interviews. The interviews usually took between forty-five minutes and two hours. In these interviews, I explored the complex frictions of advertising-subvertising entanglements from the perspective of advertising professionals that may not present themselves in press releases, responses to subvertising interventions in newspaper articles or personal Twitter profiles, or engagements with powers of police enforcement. The interviewees and the companies they work for have all been anonymised to prevent any direct professional repercussions derived from sharing with me, even confessing, their personal, sometimes affirmative relationship to subvertising or their, more expected, hostile views of particular people involved in the practice. Towards this end, photo/video elicitation was enrolled as a trigger for more elaborate emotional, affective and spoken responses to the performances, objects and politics of subvertising (Pink, 2013). In each instance, a broad variety of subvertising methods, aesthetics, and messages were shown in an attempt to avoid linear or simplistic

responses to a deeply eclectic practice. In three instances, audio-visual material of subvertising interventions into the interviewee's own advertising campaign were employed to facilitate personalised memories and stories that might remain unarticulated in a text-only discussion (Harper, 2002). All the photographs and video productions elicited were taken from my own observant participation and from online publications by subvertisers, newspapers, magazines, and social media users.

Perhaps surprisingly, it proved much harder to develop access to advertising professionals than to subvertising actors. I soon realised that my own transparency regarding my interest and ethnographic involvement in subvertising – in my blog posts, in my research proposal, in my consent form, in my emails – was also my greatest weakness. My unsolicited emails to a randomised selection of advertising professionals were left unanswered. A plethora of personal and corporate concerns seemed to stop professionals from responding to, let alone accepting, my invitations. With this came a necessity to carefully upsize and downsize different aspects of my research and self, avoiding an over-identification with the concerns of subvertising collectives (Crang and Cook, 2007, pp. 41-42; Routledge, 2002).[32] Here I follow the geographer Paul Routledge who argues that hiding and disclosing certain research information may be a necessary *ethical* disposition in certain cases. He suggests: 'It would be naive to expect researchers interacting with those in (relatively) powerful positions to make all of their motives transparent. In all walks of life, for varied reasons, we do not make all things apparent to all people.' (Routledge, 2002, p. 492)

Only when I shifted the emphasis from 'subvertising and advertising contestation' to 'advertising, art and resistance', and started referring to myself as an ex-advertising executive in my emails and participant information sheet to advertisers, did the prospect of being interviewed by me become less daunting or suspicious. This topical zooming out became fruitful also in the sense that it made possible broader insights into understandings of advertising, art and the urban, each of which were in some way implicated with their relations to subvertising. Once my first interview with a well-known (in the industry) director of a large outdoor advertising company in New York was conducted, he became a generous gatekeeper enabling five extra interviews across New York and London. While there is, with a limited amount of six qualitative

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[32] As such, I also emphasised particular components of myself when reaching out to subvertising practitioners, including my past involvement in illicit creative practices (Dekeyser and Garrett, 2015) and my reasons for leaving the advertising industry.

interviews with advertising professionals, admittedly a clear bias towards subvertising practitioners in this thesis, I would like to repeat that my aim is to *move beyond* the advertising industry's self-proclaimed intentions and methodologies, to explore what contestation might bring to discussions of advertising power.

A second interesting occurrence was that the interviews with professionals, once a certain level of trust and rapport was established, were often more personally distressing than those interviews and ethnographic encounters undertaken with subvertising practitioners. This was partly because of my own shifting identities and considerations of advertising, and partly due to the ways subvertising, to some advertising executives at least, is perceived as a threat to their personal beliefs and value-systems, and to the monetary well-being of their firms. Often their stark defensive attitudes bled into heated insults thrown at research-participants who had become my close friends (see Chapter 5). It is, however, in these painful moments that I was able to register most forcefully the *contestation* of contested geographies, subjectivities, and affects of advertising-subvertising worlds. Such gut reactions productively shook me out of the comfortable subvertising envelope I had deeply wrapped myself into throughout the years of ethnographic encounter. As such, it helped to bring the individual people and stories behind advertising back to the fore, and into the lives of my research-participants.

3.2.3   (Participatory) audio-visual production

Drawing on geography's increased interest in engagement with the visual (Garrett, 2011b; Garrett and Hawkins, 2015; Rose, 2003), in this thesis I weave text together with still and moving imagery. It is hoped that the (audio)visual productions do more, however, than offer a mere illustrative supplementation to the text. In 'bear[ing] witness to phenomena that often escape talk and text based methods' (Lorimer, 2010, p. 251), they tell their own equivocal stories of the affective events under consideration, sometimes in close (orderly or disorderly) collaboration with written words, other times more independently (Pink, 2013). To this end, I photographically and videographically engaged – almost obsessively in the beginning – research-participants, their studios, training workshops, the performance and objects of intervening, exploratory walks, the final 'products', the squats in which we slept and prepared interventions, and other fragments of more-than-representational subvertising's everyday becomings.

Figure 11 - Documenting the everyday lives of subvertisers: training workshop in Belgium. (Brussels, February 2016)

Figure 12 - Documenting the everyday lives of subvertisers: mapping and planning COP21 action. (Paris, November 2015)

Over 5,000 photographs were taken throughout the 28 months of conducting field work. These functioned primarily as a convenient memory-device (Latham and

McCormack, 2009), capable of producing glimpses of events withering away as quickly as they emerge, where there was no time or suitable situation for writing-up. These were often moments subvertising practitioners were themselves too occupied with keying an advertising space, brushing glue onto a billboard, or climbing up a ladder, to think of documentation. My images helped produce a collective memory of subvertising adventures, one which research-participants often called on for their own personal archives. As already noted, my photographs also became visual triggers in interview situations with advertising professionals. Yet, perhaps most importantly, they also work, in some cases, less as representations, and more as lively evocations of particular performances, performers and products of subvertising events, attempting to supplement and amplify the thesis' words.

In total, 39 still images are woven into the thesis. These can be split up into three main layers of images, each layer holding its own qualities and aims. A first and largest layer of images (23 images) presents the subvertising 'product'. These images reveal the 'finished' subvertising interventions in urban space: a rich variety of installed posters, graffitied billboards, holes cut in adverts, broken advertising glass, and so forth. Here, we witness the representational registers of advertising-subvertising relations. This layer of images presents the visual and textual stories subvertisers explicitly seek to narrate to the broader world through their subvertisements. In doing so, these images open the thesis up to the vitalist impulse towards *working with,* rather than *on* the research-participants.

A second layer of images (5 images) attends to the subvertising 'performance': the installation or enactment of the subvertisement in urban space. In doing so, in line with the outlined vitalist methodology, this layer of images starts to uncover advertising-subvertising entanglement as more than a representational endeavour. In their closeness to the event of the illegal performance, they aim to evoke something of the embodied, material and affective lives of advertising-subvertising contestation, a liveliness commonly shifting between the thrilling, the daunting and the mundane.

A third, final layer (11 images) pushes further beyond the glossy façade of the image, of the representational, to evoke the everyday lives of subvertising. These revolve around training workshops (Figure 11), practical and strategic meetings (Figure 12), printing high-visibility vests (Figure 17), undertaking press work (Figure 26), organising posters (Figure 28), police threats (Figure 7), and so on. Inevitably, these images are often banal and unimpressive, commonly revealing the everyday situations of labour largely in excess of the aesthetic, spectacular representations found of the practice in stylised subvertisements, mainstream media, or self-

published zines. But they are also sometimes remarkable, as when they reveal the surprisingly intricate entanglement of subvertising with advertising, a professional practice it seemingly opposes (see Figure 23 and Figure 24 in Interlude – a story of allure). In paying attention to subvertising everyday lives, the images in this layer seek to provide a unique insight into what advertising-subvertising relations tell us about advertising power beyond the perhaps more obvious contestation apparent from the subvertisements themselves (first layer of images) and from the illegal performance of subvertising (second layer of images).

At times, as already suggested, the still images presented in the thesis, such as Figure 34, rather than formulating or illustrating 'visual facts' (Edwards, cited in Pink, 2013, p. 172), function as affective evocations of advertising-subvertising relations, speaking to and holding the reader in a register that is not straightforwardly representational (Stevenson, 2014, p. 12). While current movements within geographical methodologies are similarly starting to challenge the use of *still* images as 'representations' (Latham and McCormack, 2009), contemporary cultural geographers show a reluctance to far-going destabilisations of the conventions surrounding *moving* images. Following Vannini, I would argue that within geography scholars are still too frequently drawn to conventional understandings of researching through film, where a static camera 'mounted on a tripod that does not tilt, pan, zoom, or in any way move is assumed to be the most 'scientific' technique and one that is less distorting and more 'truthful' in the recording of 'natural' behaviour than other camera techniques.' (Ruby, cited in Vannini, 2015a, p. 230) Instead of a scientific method, the video camera needs to become 'a fabricator, a trickster, a storyteller' (Vannini, 2015a, p. 233) where we take seriously the expanded realm of possibilities film and film-editing holds.

There is no particular need to tend towards the most technologically-advanced gear for audio and image-recording, since the evocation and potential unsettling of embodied and multi-sensorial experience needs to rely at least as intimately on creative positioning, camera set-up, filming practices and editing as it has to on the most adequate 'representation' of image and sound. Indeed, as it is the case with analogue photography where 'greater chance is afforded to light, chemicals and chance' (Hunt, 2014, p. 158), it was sometimes the less 'accurate' representations (blurry, shaky shots, alongside distorted noise) that animated most vividly the overwhelming flows, the felt components or the imperceptible, oft-conflicting aspects of illicit practices and their related atmospherics. As such, I depart from Gallagher who asserts 'in most cases, leaving audio to take care of itself or hoping for some miraculous post-production quick fix for sloppy sound [...] is likely to be detrimental

to the quality of video research.' (Gallagher, 2015, p. 166) Glitches for example, as short-lived faults in hardware and software, can be effected, in the words of O'Sullivan, '[t]o break a world and to make a world.' (O'Sullivan, 2009, p. 251) Thus, through 'situated experimentalism' (Garrett and Hawkins, 2015, p. 153) with non-linear montage, camera positioning, employing multiple cameras, technological failure, alternative sounds, archival imagery, and so forth, in this thesis I placed an extra emphasis on film-making as evocating (Dewsbury, 2015; Laurier, 2009; Lorimer, 2013) the more-than-human and more-than-visual affects (Garrett and Hawkins, 2015) emerging through or hindered by messy encounters with the multiple contested geographies of advertising.

In this thesis, this proved especially valuable in light of film-making as a participatory undertaking. In November 2015, when I was invited to spend two weeks in Paris with Brandalism, I documented some of the process (including preparations, training workshops and actual interventions) and the ultimate subvertisements 'in-situ'. The aim: to direct a video that enrolled multiple cameras (of different qualities), experimented with a rapid edit synced to an unusual soundtrack, employed creative camera-framing, for the main purpose of affecting a broad audience. The result was a first video – viewed over 180,000 times on Youtube,[33] and embedded onto a range of online and TV news platforms including Le Monde, The Guardian, France 3, Wired and Independent – which ensured that I soon became the in-house filmmaker for Brandalism, collaborating with the collective in terms of story-boarding, directing, filming and editing on two other video projects.[34] The main concern, in each of the three video projects, was something other than observation or representation. Alongside my research-participants, I was involved in creating new embodied and multisensual experiential worlds that we hoped could shatter existing ways of acting, thinking, and feeling, worlds that exhilarate, that make viewers' hearts skip a beat, that makes them laugh, that makes their palms sweat, that makes them, finally, pick up that advertising key from their shelf and put it to good use at the nearest bus shelter. My video content collaborations with Brandalism also turned me into a useful resource for subvertisers more broadly, who would, after seeing the Brandalism projects, happily invite me on a night out, subsequently asking me if they could use the video and still footage in their social media content, in future projects, in

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[33] See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K4WnZAUOIxI

[34] See https://vimeo.com/253307640 and https://vimeo.com/189804362.

exhibitions, in their how-to guides, in documentaries they were co-directing, or if they could pass it on to journalists.

There are a number of clear benefits to participatory video methods, but three were particularly salient in light of this thesis. On a very basic level, my camera (skills) and the participatory video opportunities it helped create, offered a straightforwardly meaningful way for me to 'stick around' and contribute to the work my research-participants were doing; something Marco half-jokingly confirmed when he told me on the day of my departure from New York: 'Look, I've produced more amazing subvertising stuff in the last few weeks than during entire last year - I want you around all the time. I know you don't have funds to come back any time soon, but what if I paid for your plane tickets?' (Marco, July 2016) But participatory video is more than just productive for research-participants; it is an experiment with knowledge production. Since participatory video is 'a process involving a group or community in shaping and creating their own films according to their own sense of what is important and how they want to be represented' (Mistry and Berardi, 2012, p. 110), the collaborative process helped to accentuate along unique paths the stories subvertisers want to tell about themselves, their objects, and their performances (Laurier, 2009; Parr, 2007). This process also belied the power relations between researcher and researcher 'which in the final analysis will always give the academic author the final word.' (Keith, 1992, p. 554; Kindon, 2003) However, it is worth noting, while this process is as participatory as possible, it is practically impossible to fully horizontalise it due to differing skills, time-capacities, sometimes very large communities, and shifting absences and presences. Maintaining the emancipatory capacity of this mode of employing video is an ongoing negotiation towards maximum collaboration. Participation was therefore unavoidably articulated into different modes of engagement: from pre-drawing storyboards and brainstorm sessions, to 'acting' in videos, selecting footage for editing and offering final advice before 'rendering' and exporting the video.

Even if the collaborative capacity of film-making should not be underestimated, there is in the case of this thesis' concern with the illicit an unavoidable risk. If the act of 'documentation' initially appeared as a neutral endeavour, taking place on the fringes of subvertising event, it soon took on a weighted, more dangerous dimension when taken onto the streets. While the presence of a camera might help legitimise certain uncommon practices deemed inappropriate in public space, as when an urban explorer films the process to construct an appearance of lawfulness (Garrett, 2012, p. 194, pp. 271-272), then that same camera can also, reversely, render a common urban practice such as the replacement of an advertising poster uncommon. One

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Sunday early summer morning in central Manhattan, New York, as Marco was finishing off his six-to-six-meter billboard takeover, a police vehicle rolled four meters beneath us into the corner of my eye. 'Cops,' I whispered, shaking on this thin, wobbly billboard structure. 'Just keep going,' he responded quietly, 'and don't look down.' As the police car finally drove off after a minute or two, he continued to paint with a relieved smile on his face. 'The posters on this billboard get replaced every few weeks by people wearing the same outfits, undertaking similar actions. God damnit.' (Marco, June 2016) I was angry with myself. I somehow felt that it was my camera that had drawn suspicion towards an otherwise unremarkable situation; it had slung a non-event into an event.

Figure 13 - 'Ignore the police. What we're doing is legitimate – just keep filming.' (New York, June 2016)

As I continued to document subvertising performances over the following years, I sought to establish a careful urban sensibility aimed at registering whether the scene being documented would be considered dubious to urban audience or police officers, with and without a camera in hand. This in-situ sensitivity would then affect if and how the camera would be used: in obvious sight or from beneath a bucket, from a distance or in the intensity of the action, each depending on which side of the common/uncommon line the current situation fell.

3.3   Setting the scene for contestation

So far, I have offered an initial conceptual gesture towards a geography of advertising constituted by and constitutive of active contestation, one that brings into view the manifold entanglements between advertising power and the actions, dreams, and objects at odds with it. I have suggested vitalism as a fertile epistemological guide for our exploration of these entanglements. A vitalist epistemological-methodological orientation conceives of 'research object' and 'research output' as unavoidably excessive, immanent, contested, excessive, more-than-representational, and affective. For vitalists, any attempt at pinning social reality in advance, twisting and turning and slipping away as it does from whatever signalling device you're holding onto, is bound to fail (Dewsbury, 2003; Taussig, 2011). However, this is only deemed a deficiency in light of social science's remaining post-Enlightenment claim towards transcendental universals of Scientism; a claim expressed most often by colleagues working in carefully-controlled situations. By contrast, what I am hoping to construct in this thesis is an assemblage of stories. Like the disruptive canon of some advertising-subvertising entanglements, these stories often engulf, contradict and destabilise one another. Together, they point towards the capacity to pull into question the exercise of power's authority in the name of the real. A methodological assemblage that knots observant participation, (participatory) audio-visual performances, and interviews with advertising-subvertising practitioners into productive tension has been set out to accelerate this capacity, bringing forth correspondences and encounters that transverse the limits of the words and images in this thesis.

However, it needs to be noted that throughout my years of ethnographic involvement with subvertising practitioners and interviews with advertising professionals, the particularities of what I hoped to find on this journey, and how I would tell its stories, were fundamentally reconsidered at multiple instants. As geographer Mike Crang contends, 'our materials speak back to us; they may resist our analyses; they may push us in new directions.' (Crang, 2003, p. 143) This was a process of opening-up to my research-participants, allowing them to nurture the stories *they* wanted to tell with me. They ceased to be 'research-participants', and became friends *with* whom and, indeed, *for* whom I tell the following tales.

In the chapters that follow then, I hope to bring you an 'embodied sense of the world' of subvertising-advertising contestation (Stewart, 2007, p. 6). Tracing this contestation inexorably leads us from subvertising communities and the streets, to practical workshops, art studios and newspaper spectacles, and into the corporate

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board rooms of advertising agencies. We will start, however, on a rooftop in Brooklyn, New York.

Part two. Geographies of subvertising

Figure 14 - 'Chaos leads our orders': Derelict billboard painted by Rimbaud. (New York, July 2016)

4 Profaning the advertising city: Chaos and the regime of order

'I say to you: you still have chaos in you.' (Nietzsche, 2006, p. 9)

'The profanation of the unprofanable is the political task of the coming generation.' (Agamben, 2007, p. 92)

4.1 Scandal of chaos

'So, what *exactly* is the plan then for tonight?' I ask. My question is met with silence. Marco, too subsumed by whatever he's looking at on his laptop, is paying little attention. I look out over West Brooklyn, the distant skyscrapers of Manhattan glinting in the warm light of the setting sun, and then peek four floors down from the warehouse rooftop on which we are sat. Despite the desolate look of its architecture, the area thunders with life. Bar life spills onto pavements as a car speeds past, thick beats pumping through its speakers. A welcome breeze re-animates the city, cooling it down after a day of clear blue skies and an unforgiving sun. *Still no response.*

Suddenly Marco stands up and grabs me a beer from the fridge, seemingly uninterested in whether I want another one or not. Upon plunging back into his beach chair, he says, 'I am cutting into a billboard.' His voice is thrilling with excitement. I look at him, for a second, and ask: 'What do you mean *cutting*?' His laughter reveals I failed to hide my confusion. 'I want to cut a circle in the middle of the billboard. We'll need a drill, a knife and a piece of rope.'

I follow him inside, knowing that there's little point to asking any more questions. An hour later, we're standing opposite the billboard and Marco is putting on a high visibility vest. 'Just act as if we are supposed to be doing this, it'll be fine,' he assures me, before walking across the street. How I do this, I am not told. By the time I hear the drill for the first time, I am so nervous I can't help but look the other way, away from Marco's unlawful gestures, away from other people's eyes, which might, upon seeing mine, sense that the present is, temporarily, out-of-joint.

The protagonist in Friedrich Nietzsche's novel 'Thus Spoke Zarathustra' (2006, p. 9) proclaims that 'one must still have chaos in oneself in order to give birth to a dancing star.' But, he is quick to add, 'Beware! The time approaches when human beings will no longer give birth to a dancing star.' (Nietzsche, 2006, p. 9) With this statement,

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Nietzsche predicts an obsession with fixity and order in which much is lost and forgotten, in which chaos, as a pre-condition of (self-)transformation,[35] is smoothed out to the point of depletion.

In this chapter, I unpack the *urban* interplay between advertising and subvertising to explore one expression of Nietzsche's prediction. I will detail how urban subvertising-advertising contestation makes apparent advertising power as an often concealed but normalised arrangement of particular performative, material, legal, and social forces cohering to enable an 'orderly' spatial organisation. This 'regime of order', I will go on to suggest, constitutes processes inhibiting not just contestation, but also, and perhaps more importantly, foreclosing the emergence of other imaginative forms of spatiality and spatial engagement, ones that take seriously the affective charge of a disorderly city of excess, surprise, contestation and expanded social expressiveness. This chapter thus presents a first formation of advertising's powers to exhaust, sketching an image of advertising as a *negative* form that prevents, represses, inhibits, annuls, eliminates. To articulate this argument, I will bring into relation ethnographic tales set in New York, interviews with advertisers, and Giorgio Agamben's concept of 'profanation'.

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[35] Elizabeth Grosz makes a similar argument about the temporal priority of chaos. In her work, chaos precedes the production of the new. Essential to the coming-into-being of art, she notes, are 'efforts, networks, fields, territories that temporarily and provisionally slow down chaos enough to extract from it something not so much useful as intensifying, a performance, a refrain, an organization of color or movement that eventually, transformed, enables and induces art.' (Grosz, 2008, p. 3) In other words: no invention without surrender to the lure of the chaotic, of indeterminacy.

Figure 15 - Marco's billboard hole. (New York, June 2016)

4.2   Consecration

Two weeks after meeting Marco on his roof, Bobby and I were crossing Brooklyn on foot. We were talking about my past in advertising, about the ways the area is changing, favourite musicians and life in New York. The streets were filled only with distant, barely discernible sirens, leaving me with a strange sense of tranquillity as we walked on and on and moved from topic to topic. Bobby's movements were calm, even as she reached into her bag and lifted out a spray can. As she graffitied over a phone booth advertisement, she told me 'it almost doesn't matter what I write on them.' (Bobby, July 2017) This struck a chord: here is someone writing for the sake of leaving a mark, without worrying about giving shapes or meanings to this mark. What counts is that something is written, where it is written, not what is written. A few hours later, a long trail of graffitied advertising spaces behind us, she returned to the same topic. 'I want to attack the idea that these spaces are sacred by writing on them.' (Bobby, July 2017) *Advertising as sacred.* The 'sacred' is a term overburdened with religious connotations, commonly referring to a divine affinity with a higher power. But how is the sacred evoked in secular terms? It was only months later, having returned to London, that it became apparent that to speak of advertising in terms of the sacred, as Bobby had, might be to move alongside Walter Benjamin and his text 'Capitalism as Religion' (1996, pp. 288-291), and even more closely

alongside an avid reader of that text, Giorgio Agamben. In his book 'Profanations', the latter tells us:

> 'Religion can be defined as that which removes things, places, animals, or people from common use and transfers them to a separate sphere. Not only is there no religion without separation, but every separation also contains or preserves within itself a genuinely religious core.' (Agamben, 2007, p. 74)

It appeared to me that this is perhaps the sense of the sacred that Bobby intended. Outdoor advertising involves separation: it bulwarks itself against the flux of urban life to guarantee 'an impossibility of using, of dwelling, of experiencing.' (Agamben, 2007, p. 84) Adverts are ordered and separated into a sacred realm, away from common use. To return to Bobby's suggestion, advertising is sacred in that it emerges through a separation that is to be retained and respected, part of that urban world that is not to be profaned. But how, exactly, does it enact and police such powers of consecration? In response, I will show how material, legal, performative and social processes of consecration fuel the maintenance of what I term the city's *regime of order*.

4.3   Regime of order

As Lefebvre wrote, as perhaps one of the first, the city is increasingly swayed by 'a rage for measurement and calculation' (Lefebvre, 2003, p. 122), an obsession with taming the disorderly in order to make space for manageable grids of property, function, profit, and aesthetic.[36] Subvertisers develop an unusual spatial knowledge of the manifestation of this obsession, turning them, perhaps ironically, into a collective body paying more attention to advertising than anyone else. To follow them around town is to bear witness to this obsession's peculiar materialisation: spikey anti-climbing cages enclose ladders towering up to billboards (Zukin, 2017); vandal-proof glass fortifies bus shelter adverts against spray paint, bricks, baseball bats, out-of-control cars, and any other destructive (non)human impulses (Iveson, 2012; LG-MRI,

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[36] This is not to suggest that the desire for an orderly spatial arrangement of cities arose with modernism. As Matthew Gandy (2018) has suggested, such desire was already abundant in Renaissance ideals of the city, which, in turn, drew inspiration from the designs of Hippodamus – who, Aristotle argued, 'invented the art of city planning' (Aristotle, cited in Burns, 1976, p. 416) – Vitruvius, and other Greek thinkers dedicated to symmetrical and orderly urban arrangements.

2018); key locks prevent simple removal of posters; billboard CCTV cameras trace any possibly illicit movement or gesture for later use in court rooms; automated mixtures of anti-hacking coding, software, and hardware keep unauthorised texts and images from being displayed on digital billboards (see Dekeyser, 2018). The history of outdoor advertising (see Section 2.1) is one of expanding consecration efforts: a growing list of ever more technologically-advanced and secure bulwarks against disorder.[37]

Each of these material manifestations offer a glimpse of the regime of order: advertising's refusal to 'return to common use' expression in the city, defending monopolistic hold over it through consecration. This 'regime of order', as I use it here, is the collective effort of a range of actors (institutional and non-institutional, legal and social, material and discursive, corporate and non-corporate) to rule out material, social, semiotic and sensual disorder in urban space through attempts at separating the sacred from the profane, the untouchable from the touchable. The regime of order promotes and performs a way of engaging urban space that arrests space in a particular order, ascribe value to it, and to police that order and value. This regime of order performs its power daily through the production of order and the management of disorder and entropy, requiring 'never-ending activities of maintenance and repair' (Graham and Thrift, 2007, pp. 7-8) as much as various legal constructs (see Young, 2014 on the 'Legislated City'). Its hope is to promote 'a view of space as innocent, as free of traps or secret places' (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 28; Jones and Popke, 2010), a view of urban space 'as characterized by perfect order, completeness, immanence and internal homogeneity rather than leaky, partial and heterogeneous entities,' (Graham and Thrift, 2007, p. 10) as already worked out and performed, uninviting to spatial exploration, creative experimentation or intimate encounter. Through its various enactments, the regime banishes disorder into the realm of taboo, and thus negates and condemns it.

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[37] The search for and implementation of anti-subvertising methodologies is now, with material-technological advancement, becoming a central concern of financial investment in the outdoor advertising industry, as noted by national trade body organisations (OAAA, 2016), individual outdoor advertising companies (Signkick, 2017; Times OOH Media, 2016) and individual outdoor advertising professionals (Ripp, 2016). For instance, one of the world's largest outdoor advertising screen providers, LG-MRI, praises itself on developing costly patented technologies capable of 'prevent[ing] tampering or 'hackers' from sending unauthorized video/images to the display.' (Dunn *et al.*, 2013, p. 5)

Chapter 4

Subvertising is an embodied experiment in cracking open the regime of order. Through embodied, material and often playful engagement, they circumvent, exploit or dismantle the material points between the sacred and the profane. The subvertiser Rimbaud for instance, infamous for his Pixação-styled[38] poetry on the derelict billboards looming above the Brooklyn-Queens-Expressway (see Figure 14), is skilled in thwarting one particular security method. He considers himself a master of the grappling hook:

> 'All of these abandoned billboards have ladders that, because they have been sawn off to keep people like me away, now float sometimes 15 feet above the ground. So on the night of my planned painting action, I go to the billboard I want to hit, take out my grappling hook with a knotted climbing rope fixed to it, and hurl it at the bottom of the ladder. It often takes ages before I get it right but, damn, that moment when I manage, and I get going, swinging and slowly rising up the rope to that beauty above me… the city of Manhattan appears on the horizon and you realise, absolutely buzzing with adrenaline, that damn, this is magical […] and damn, this is addictive.' (Rimbaud, July 2016)

Grappling hooks slot in alongside advertising keys, paint brushes, spray paint, buckets with glue, high-visibility vests, printed posters; all these add up to a wide-ranging toolbox for slicing open the city's regime of order. Most of the tools are, even if they require some further adjustments, readily and legally accessible from DIY-stores and print shops. In many instances, the material barrier to subvertising is low, requiring as little, as in Marco's case, as a common drill, rope, and ladder. As Donna always half-jokingly repeated at the beginning of subvertising workshops: 'Let me start by saying: you don't actually need to be here. Subvertising is dead easy.' (Donna, March 2017) In fact, the force of the regime of order is held up perhaps less by material processes of consecration (e.g. installation of locking mechanisms and anti-hacking features), than by social ones.

To pierce the sacred/profane border, to reach out to the untouchable, is to risk being shamed into an immoral subject. The ex-advertising director Denise told me, in

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[38] Pixação is a form of graffiti emerging from South-American metropolises recognisable by its straight lines, black paint and often hard-to-reach locations (Larruscahim, 2014).

reflection upon the actions of the subvertiser Sylvie, that she should, in her eyes, have become a legal artist:

> 'Sylvie really had the opportunity to have made great things. [...] Sometimes it just doesn't make sense to burn the house down without any plan. All she ever wanted to do was burn the house down. That's kind of the problem I had with her is that she just never created beauty. She just created trouble. [...] her mission is just to destroy, not to build anything.' (Denise, June 2016)

The regime of order takes moral ownership over the urban landscape. Sylvie's actions were deemed unruly, the material of disorder and chaos – a fierce threat to moral order. Those existing and acting in a fashion at odds with the regime of order, including the subvertiser, are readily dismissed as irrelevant, irrational, as an anomaly, or even as a plague; they 'become dirt – they are in the wrong place.' (Cresswell, 1996, pp. 38-39) Subvertising interventions are different to the point of departure, where they can no longer be made sense of from within the logics of the regime. The good urban citizen is the citizen collaborating in the regime of order.

Here we might draw a connection to Tim Cresswell's (1996) and Kurt Iveson's (2010) important work on the wars against graffiti. In their work, the fight against graffiti is a social warfare separating the civilised subject from the uncivilised subject. Kurt Iveson tells the story of how one American anti-graffiti organisation, called Graffiti Hurts, wages war against the threat of disorder around 'notions of cleanliness, safety and care' which reaffirm 'ideas of an order society where everything is in its place and valued accordingly.' (Moreau and Alderman, 2013, p, 113, p. 114) The organisation promotes 'every effort to keep the appearance of neighborhood clean and neat' (Graffiti Hurts, cited in Moreau and Alderman, 2013, p. 118), asking citizens, media organisations, governments, and businesses to report and name graffiti tags, to avoid the media promotion of graffiti and graffiti writers, and to refute the term graffiti 'artist'. In New Zealand, one jurisdiction turned to the promise of public shaming, forcing convicted graffiti writers to wear a recognisable pink vest whilst removing graffiti in the hope that the 'terror of humiliation' would become a buttress against others' future graffiti writing (Iveson, 2010, p. 124).

When I spoke to the CEO of an outdoor advertising company, he told me his firm actively works with local councils in Los Angeles to promote the appeal of a graffiti-free city. Benny's company sponsors an educational program at 350 primary schools on the topic of 'graffiti awareness'. 'The goal of the program,' the website of the program writes, 'is to educate young people on vandalism laws, the importance of respecting other people's property, ways to make our communities beautiful and

alternatives for artistic expression.' (Graffiti Education Assemblies, 2008, n.p.) The implicit aesthetic dismissal of graffiti is not coincidental. Benny, throughout the interview, separated graffiti (tags) from graffiti art (legal and often figurative urban paintings) – the former 'in place', the latter 'out of place' (Cresswell, 1996). His educational program is an ongoing accentuation of this border, separating out the orderly from the disorderly, the aesthetic from the dirty. The regime of order thus fares by social consecration. On the one hand, we have the social production of the 'other' from which the regime can separate itself in order to re-establish itself – an 'other' conceived as dirt, untamed, animalistic, uncivilised (Cresswell, 1996, p. 40). On the other hand, the regime of order co-enacts a reproduction of the orderly, rational civil subject.

Figure 16 - Marco and Sylvie, in the hope of blending in. (New York, July 2016)

It is this latter that allows the regime to become more than itself, to become a pervasive atmosphere reproduced through and via the bodies, words, and activities of urban communities. Bobby told me that when she undertakes her subvertising graffiti interventions, she commonly encounters deeply hostile subjects, who scream at her: 'You are using someone else's property! You have absolutely no right to it.' (Bobby, July 2016) Across the Atlantic, members of the public echo this behaviour when shouting 'You want arresting!' – a threat the subvertiser Donna once received in London, one which she habitually mimics, finger in the air, before bursting out laughing. Like urban explorers using 'stealth tactics' (Garrett, 2012, p. 187), to avoid

uncomfortable encounters with members of the public and the police, subvertisers undertake an embodied performance of 'hiding in plain sight.' (see Brandalism, 2018b, pp. 20-29) Tobias, another subvertiser active in New York, told me: 'Ironically, once you put on a high-vis vest, everyone ignores you. You just blend in. […] And when you get going, if you just stay calm, take your time, maybe even smoke a ciggie if you have to, then no one will bother you. That's what the official guys do too.' (Tobias, June 2016) Honing camouflage skills into perfection, blending seamlessly into the 'the rhythm of the city, the metabolism of urban space' (Brandalism, 2018c, p. 23) is a passionate desire shared by most subvertisers I encountered. For instance, Tobias crafted an international host of screen-printed high visibility vests, each sporting a different corporate logo (Clear Channel, JCDecaux, Primesight, etc.), allowing him to pass as an official worker for a range of outdoor advertising companies.

Figure 17 - Subvertising production lines: mass-producing the tools of the trade. (Paris, November 2015)

But things still slip: a nervy gesture, unprofessional boots, a sloppy print job, a camera gets too close; anything can be become a sensory anomaly shattering the engineered atmospheres of everyday bodily normativity. At once, the environment turns against the subvertiser, making her/him stand-out amidst everyday urbanity. Each subvertiser has her/his own stories of such sudden public hostility. They have told me tales of being verbally abused, chased, followed, filmed, photographed, and

even physically attacked by members of the public. These are moments 'when the very bodies police themselves', sometimes 'even in absence of obvious legal norms.' (Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos, 2016, p. 11) The result of (self-)policing bodies is an atmosphere antagonistic to the actions of subvertisers, one that renders the assault on the sacred space of advertising sinful and, thus, worthy of condemnation.

So far, I have described how particular material and social processes of consecration come to produce advertising as sacred space. However, this is not a flawless or singular process executed by a homogeneous constellation of individuals. It is much more fragmented, fragile, and, indeed, sometimes even contradictory. When I asked one senior executive at a New York advertising agency about his *personal* relation to subvertising, I expected a tone of hostility in his voice. Instead, he spoke in a hesitant, supportive tenor:

> 'Part of me, is like, fuck 'm a bit, you know like, people trying to take back public space, I'm generally quite in favour of. […] I'm like, owning the space that people live in feels bad to me. In a way I see outdoor advertising as within the world. And so part of me, even though I work in an agency, I don't feel like people should be punished so badly for that… I can't comment on the law, I sympathise with their aims in a big way. Because it's taking back control, isn't it, you have no control over the messages […] we've paid to put this message into your eyes. And you should have some sort of response to that. You can turn off, you can have adblockers online. The analogue equivalent is like… you can't walk around it; it's like subtly changing your behaviour. You should be able to respond to that. Feels natural. I can totally understand that response.' (Frank, July 2016)

In 1963, echoing the same sentiment, David Ogilvy, the founder of one of the world's largest advertising agency networks, wrote one of the most provocative statements of popular writing on advertising I am yet to come across. As an advertising graduate, expected to read his book 'Confessions of an advertising man', I could make little sense of his words. 'When I retire from Madison Avenue,' he famously fantasised, 'I am going to start a secret society of masked vigilantes who will travel around the world on silent motor bikes, chopping down posters at the dark of the moon.' (Ogilvy, 2004, p. 156) The regime of order is marked by peculiar shifting relations between the sympathy or personal fascination some advertisers express and the anonymity of the regime they help maintain. And yet, while it is clear that the regime of order is likely to contain inconsistencies and is diffuse to the point of not being reducible to the individuals making up the advertising industry, to urban planners,

police force or property developers, there remains a collective tendency towards attempts that perform strict separations between the 'good' collaborating urban citizen and the 'bad', disobedient one. The regime subsumes, in a bureaucratic fashion (Weber, 1968; Stevenson, 2014), the networks of advertising companies, screen designers, local councils, maintenance workers, educational programs, and so forth into an anonymised constellation of policies, affects, programs, corporate procedures, patented software features, and vandalism-proof materialities, aimed at *enabling* and, importantly, *maintaining* the consecration, the separation from common use, of advertising. As I will now show, as a practice that temporarily 'profanes' advertising, subvertising reveals the regime of order's often concealed processes of consecration, on the one hand, and exposes the promising cities of common use prohibited and exhausted through those processes, on the other.

4.4 Profanation

I want to return to Bobby's articulation of advertising as sacred space. If to separate from common use into a sacred sphere is to consecrate, then to wrench the sacred/profane border is to conduct a form of 'profanation' (Agamben, 2007). As Agamben suggests, profanation exposes the hidden work undertaken to mark an object, space, idea, or practice as sacred. As such, as a form of profanation, subvertising reveals the 'sacred interior' of advertising space, that is, its reliance on processes of consecration (Taussig, 1997, p. 37). In this sense, profanation is a form of 'transgression', literally a 'crossing of boundaries' (Cresswell, 1996, p. 30), which might 'caus[e] a questioning of that which was previously considered 'natural,' 'assumed,' and 'taken for granted.'' (Creswell, 1996, p. 26) As a transgressive practice, subvertising echoes those spatial practices that, in defying them, make apparent social, material or legal borders, including graffiti (Cresswell, 1996), skateboarding (Nolan, 2003), punk (Bonnett, 1989), and urban exploration (Garrett, 2011a).

As an act of transgression, Bobby's writing onto bus shelter advertising spaces makes material the material processes of the regime of order that make up the normalised inaccessibility of communicative space and the seemingly immaterial processes that maintain it. The blatantly illicit nature of her scrawl forces into view the legal enforcement and material management making possible the advertisement's untouchability. Likewise, when a subvertiser installs her/his own poster, it stands out as that which is most commonly *not there*: a yearning not to buy, a call for solidarity, a reminder of exploitation, a poetic assault on borders. An unexpected encounter

with the subvertisement begs the question: which forces enable the normalised spatial management of expression?

Figure 18 – Robert Montgomery's poetry. (London, March 2017)

We might draw a connection here to scholarly work on the geographies of infrastructure. Stephen Graham writes that infrastructural failure performs an unintentional process of 'unblackboxing', where those urban systems and technologies 'which are normally kept within a black box that is only penetrated by specialist engineers and policy makers, are suddenly clearly revealed.' (Graham, 2010, p. 18; Graham and Marvin, 2001) The unexpected absence of electricity during a blackout, for instance, suddenly makes apparent its usual, normalised omnipresence (Bennett, 2005). We might think of the subvertiser's pull towards profanation as forcing the acceleration of infrastructural entropy or collapse, uncovering along the way advertising as a carefully managed affective-material infrastructure co-constituting everyday urban space-time. In becoming materially defaced, dysfunctional (from the advertiser's perspective), the advertisement infrastructure's givenness, its 'natural' appearance and default social, material and legal inaccessibility, might come to stand out as 'other'. As Heidegger tells us with regard to broken tools, it is only when a space or object ceases to fulfil its intended functionality that it becomes heavy and apparent, that it makes 'a break in those referential contexts which circumspection discovers.' (Heidegger, 1962, p. 105) The infrastructure of the sacred suddenly bears down as sacred, or rather, as a *produced*

sacred, in the moment of transgression. From this perspective, profanation does not undo the enforced sacred/profane border as such, it emphasises it and brings it into greater relief, moving it 'from an excess of invisibility to an excess of visibility.' (Taussig, 1999, p. 52) Subvertisers animate the advert and the regime of order it is constructed through. As Taussig writes:

> 'The energy emerging from defacement is an energy flowing from an active and activated object of critique and not from a corpse on the dissecting table. Indeed, no matter how crude, defacement and sacrilege thrive on bringing dead and apparently insignificant matter to life.' (Taussig, 1999, p. 43)

When I asked Becky, a subvertiser active in Paris, why she does not, unlike most other subvertisers I encountered during my fieldwork, make use of the camouflage offered by official outdoor advertising garment, she told me: 'For us, the point is really not to try and avoid being arrested, like, we actually want to get arrested publically. […] So we go out, dress up as clowns, we hit drums, play trumpets as loudly as we can, and paint over billboards.' When I responded in surprise, she laughed, and added: 'There is nothing that shows the absurdity of advertising laws and private property better than, well, you know, happy clowns getting handcuffed for spray painting some innocent words.' (Becky, November 2015) Subvertisers each find their own paths into bringing to life the commonly withdrawn processes of separation enabling sacred advertising space.

It is helpful returning to Cronin here. That advertising is overlooked by most, as she correctly tells us, is an unavoidable failure of the industry to fully grasp and overcome the embodied, more-than-human complexity of urban life (Cronin, 2010). As the advertising planner Martin Weigel (2013, n.p.) acknowledges, the encounter with advertising is most commonly wrapped up in a 'general indifference'. A central driver at play in advertiser's incapacity is bodies' selective orientation in space and time, where bodies 'suppress certain parts of objects that do not interest them by allowing to pass through them those external influences to which they are indifferent' (Cronin, 2010, p. 98) so as to leave open possibilities for other engagements, action and agency (Cronin, 2010, p. 99). As Frank, an advertising planner at a prominent advertising agency in New York, told me, the key to disrupt bodies' 'non-responsive disposition' (Cronin, 2010, p. 82) is, simply, 'to try and cut through.' (Frank, June 2016) Cutting through indifference takes myriad forms: from personalised advertising and animated content, to surprising locations and shocking imagery. But more often than not, Frank added echoing Martin Weigel, advertising fails to loom out, fails to truly pull bodies away from their habituated present. For Cronin (2010),

advertising's general invisibility is a sure sign of advertising's affective limitation. But is advertising's mostly-invisible presence perhaps not also its most poignant and perilous quality, that which protects its legitimate status as an infrastructure that is ought to be there, part of the urban common-sense, removing it from the possibility of contestation? In other words, is advertising as sacred yet benign not its most dangerous affective form?

Figure 19 – Intervention by unknown subvertiser. (New York, July 2016)

If subvertising seeks to reveal, then the advertising industry and its regime of order often engage in the business of concealment: the hiding of the processes of their maintenance. A few hours before meeting Marco on his roof, I was standing in front of one of the Central Manhattan skyscrapers that would later linger in the background of our rooftop conversations. Entering the large reception hall of Benny's company, I was struck by a strange sense of familiarity that slung me back three years in time: the bright smiling woman sitting against a wooden backdrop, the large screens showcasing advertising productions, the glass tables topped with glossy fashion and design magazines, all smiles and laughter and youthfulness. The CEO of the outdoor advertising company met me with a strong handshake. Having run the company for decades, he stated clearly that subvertising had become part of the everyday life and history of the company. When I asked Benny about some particular subvertising actions addressed at his business, he lifted one eyebrow and smiled. He told me it is graffiti, and a thing of the past. He further clarified:

> 'How you discourage it is by removing it, by making it non-visible [...] And once you remove it, and they come back and hit it again, you remove it again. They come back, remove it again. And again and again. The idea is they want to put it somewhere where it is going to remain up.' (Benny, July 2017)

The contracted maintenance crews, armed with graffiti remover aerosol and adhesive remover sprays, attend to defaced advertising so rapidly that Marco, he told me a few weeks later after having pasted a poster onto one of Benny's billboards, never touched the company's advertising spaces again, because the poster was removed the same day. This is the performative life of advertising consecration, striking after material, social and legal consecration have failed at their task of prevention. The calculation sheets of advertising companies now anticipate subvertising by setting aside annually a portion of money for subvertising's management, removal and prevention. In other words, the regime of order expects chaos and anticipates its unavoidable presence. Benny is not concerned with why inscriptions, markings and expressions appear, or what complex lives, stories and bodies yield them. To Benny, an urban expression can only be one of two things: graffiti (tags, subvertising) or non-graffiti (legal art, advertising); the first to be eliminated, the second to be cherished. Messy bodies, complex motivations and individualised thoughts that might unsettle bureaucratic reason are not allowed to enter the debate and must therefore be made non-existent. The prevention and removal is instead anonymous: what matters to Benny is that graffiti is there, that it is disorderly, that it must, at all cost, leave the urban stage.

In one sense, the goal of maintenance is clear: Benny hopes to keep up the commercial value of his advertising spaces. As he told me: 'You want them looking good because that's what an advertiser wants to be on, an advertiser doesn't want to be on a bus shelter that's all graffitied.' (Benny, July 2017) But in another sense, is the material maintenance not also removing the contestation of the sacred/profane border, offering it a sense of being an accepted, seamless and natural demarcation of urban space? The givenness of outdoor advertising, its presentation as a fact rather than an arte-fact, distances advertising from its emergence, production and configuration, and is therefore central to its legitimacy, continuation and proliferation. Its protection, therefore, takes up a central role in the commercial practice of the industry, allowing advertising to hold its 'nowhere tangible, all-pervasive, ghostly presence.' (Benjamin, cited in Taussig, 1997, p. 121) Here Benny's emphasis on 'making it non-visible' strikes at the heart of what is at stake in advertising-subvertising contestation. What should be clear is that advertising is not simply about making advertising visible, nor is subvertising simply dismantling and

making invisible that infrastructure – both practices negotiate presence and absence within a constantly shifting social, material and political urban landscape.

It is then here, in 'the play of revelation and concealment' (Taussig, 1999, p. 68), that subvertising plays out its game against and alongside advertisers. If, as the geographer Oli Mould observes, urban governance is invested in 'mediating constantly to us how a particular object should be seen, used or consumed' (Mould, 2015, p. 117), then subvertising is involved in revealing the hidden qualities of this mediation. Bobby's spray paint marks and Marco's billboard cut take as a source of inspiration Foucault's powerful insight that power's 'success is proportional to its ability to hide its own mechanisms.' (Foucault, 1978, p. 86) In the act of surfacing mechanisms indispensable to operations of advertising power, these defacements attack advertising's production, more than its materiality. It elicits 'the exposure of facticity's hidden dependence on illusion' (Taussig, 1999, p. 54), that is, advertising power's reliance on, as I have shown, very particular legal, material, performative and social systems of consecration.

In this section I have illustrated how subvertising reveals that which advertising power seeks to hide (its manufactured sacredness) and hides that which advertising power hopes to reveal (its promotional material). But is there not a second register of profanation at play in subvertising? Agamben tells us that to profane is also to actively 'return to common use that which has been removed to the sphere of the sacred.' (Agamben, 2007, p. 82) Sergei Prozorov clarifies, following Agamben:

> 'The profanation of the sacred object removes it from a separate sphere, in which its use was proscribed or regulated, and renders it available for free use in a myriad of non-canonical ways, making the object in question a 'pure means', whose being is divorced from end and is wholly manifested in its sheer potentiality for whatever use.' (Prozorov, 2011, pp. 77-78)[39]

In articulating 'a new dimension of use' (Agamben, 2007, p. 76), does subvertising transgression not also reveal the desire to belong to a different urban space, and the desire to belong differently to urban space, beyond the regime of order? I therefore

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[39] In this sense, profanation explicitly refers to the act of making non-sacred in the sense of returning to common use. It is only from a religious perspective that the term comes to trigger connotations such as 'defiling', 'polluting', or 'cursing', connotations which, I believe, only conceal the political promise of profanation.

now ask: what is the embodied toll of urban dwellers collaborating with a regime of order and its fear of chaos? And what types of city, what modes of belonging to the city, are exhausted and negated in the actualisation of this toll?

4.5 Chaos, the space of subvertising

When I returned to Marco's studio two days after the billboard cut, he was editing the video footage I had produced. I told him I had walked past the cut on my way to his studio. I recounted how different it appeared in day light, how the edges seemed sharper, making the circle stand out in a way that it surely hadn't at night. When I asked him about his feelings about the intervention, he pointed at the playing video: 'Look, what I like about it is that it's hard to make sense of.' (Marco, June 2016) I looked closely: the performance showed the struggle, the unevenness of the cut, the falling paper, the becoming sense-less of words and images as they are distorted. Less was said than unsaid. It was not so much about what it signified as it was about what it destabilised – a normative urban order. That same night, Marco invited me to a second billboard cut. No one looked up as he installed his ladder, drilled a nail with attached rope into the centre of the poster, and started slicing an almost perfect circle. A semiotic monstrosity slowly came to life. With each movement, an advertising palimpsest of bygone posters, matter and time further revealed itself, in fractures and ruptures, until, with a final and loud rip, the billboard became an entirely incomprehensible whole.

Figure 20 - Marco performing billboard hole 2.0 (New York, June 2016)

Subvertising such as Marco's challenges us to picture a mode of urban life that is less about the imagined maintenance of order and control, and more attuned to the potential of the chaotic, of open encounter and a city whose surfaces and textures become more varied sites of expressive circulation. Towards this end, it begs the questions: what is lost within the regime of order co-constituted by advertising power? What are the communicative markings and inscriptions on walls, artefacts, texts and images that are kept sacred in the regime of order, and which ones slip into oblivion or are discarded? What stories are we given access to and which ones are we denied? What do we leave behind on the way? As Sylvie, wrote on her blog, '[w]hen we privilege one type of communication over another we are making a collective decision about our priorities and ultimately our desires for our future selves.' (Sylvie, November 2016) A few months later, she clarified what she believes the effects are of ordering the communicative capacity of the city along a strictly commercial imperative:

> 'To homogenize the messages we are subjected to is to condemn us to their whims and neuter our ability to weigh one idea against the next to create complex beliefs that are based on analysis instead of circumstance.' (Sylvie, personal communication, June 2017)

But Sylvie's emphasis on 'analysis' could easily be read as a Habermasian understanding of publicness and public debate as rational deliberation amongst citizens (Habermas, 1991). As Cronin remarks, central to the logic of publicness that Habermas construes is the understanding of 'reading and models of textuality as primary modes of creating publics.' (Cronin, 2010, p. 184) And yet, it seems premature to reduce subvertising gestures to a *textual* proliferation beyond regimes of order. Bobby's sprawls onto phone booths, for instance, are concerned more with the act of writing than with what has been written. Likewise, Marco's actions refuse to take clarity as their primary concern. While having a beer on the train home in celebration of the second billboard cut, he distinguished between what he understands as messages and that which he calls anti-messages, 'messages that do not speak' (Marco, June 2016), that give people's eyes a point of rest without the requirement for active, rational interpretation. They are attempts at undermining, dissolving, stopping signification in its tracks and contesting its possibility in the first place. His are more-than-textual, more-than-representational concerns (Lorimer, 2005) that speak to economic signification, surely, but importantly, and more deeply, to signification as such. Profanation returns to common use as to allow different use (Agamben, 2007) of language, signification, and urban space, refusing to give priority to one form over the other.

Figure 21 - Anti-message in Manhattan: a billboard subvertisement by Marco. (New York, July 2016)

In further differentiating expression in urban space, what Marco's idea of the anti-message gestures towards is a way of engaging the urban irreducible to the regime of order. But what emerges is also more than public space as a utopian space for making demands freely, constructing meaning or seeking recognition (Zukin, 1995), more than public space as 'a vital locus for moulding public opinion and asserting claims' or a 'shared symbolic space.' (Goheen, 1998, p. 484, p. 494)[40] Marco's productions and destructions take urban space to constitute an affective, embodied site of circulation excessive of rational debate, where words, images, inscriptions, gesture and expressions travel or fail, dissolve or strengthen meaning, institute or disturb relations. The act of expression spilling over from the regime of order simultaneously includes and flees signification, with messages and anti-messages dwelling alongside one another, often in tension but without the institutionalised attempt at resolving difference. The regime of order's project of reducing difference to Lefebvre's 'induced difference' (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 382),[41] to the difference that might emerge from within the narrow and pre-established bounds of a corporate-controlled and state-backed functional and aesthetic logic, is the abandonment of cities as sites boiling with the potential of surprise. The regime of order disavows the potential for being overwhelmed by and pushed beyond static conceptual boundaries of the self through interaction with the not-yet-known of an expanded sociality.

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[40] The distinction I make here between the alternative utopian urban space in the literature of Zukin (and Habermas) and those enacted in the subvertising acts of Bobby, Marco and Sylvie is drawn from Michel Foucault's distinction between 'utopia' and 'heterotopia'. In 'The Order of Things', and reflecting on the work of Jorge Luis Borges, he writes: 'Utopias afford consolation: although they have no real locality there is nevertheless a fantastic, untroubled region in which they are able to unfold; they open up cities with vast avenues, superbly planted gardens, countries where life is easy, even though the road to them is chimerical. Heterotopias are disturbing, probably because they secretly undermine language, because they make it impossible to name this and that, because they shatter or tangle common names, because they destroy 'syntax' in advance, and not only the syntax with which we construct sentences but also that less apparent syntax which causes words and things (next to and also opposite one another) to 'hold together'.' (Foucault, 2002, p. xix)

[41] Lefebvre distinguishes 'induced difference' – as 'differences internal to a whole and brought into being by that whole as a system aiming to establish itself and then to close' – from what he terms 'produced differences, which escape the system's rule,' and from 'reduced differences,' which are 'forced back into the system by constraint and violence.' (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 382)

Figure 22 - LOVE ME. (New York, July 2016)

The glimmer of a profaned city surged one afternoon nearing the end of my stay in New York. I spent the afternoon venturing the path cut by the Brooklyn-Queens-Expressway, an interstate highway crawling through and connecting areas of Brooklyn, Williamsburg and Queens. My aim for the day was to photograph the skeleton infrastructures side-lining the highway, the lonely decaying shrines to advertising's golden age laid out along the push and pull of New York's 'mobile populations' (Gudis, 2004). Left abandoned by intensifying legal regulation, their capitalist use-life had run out and was picked up by subvertisers for whom the infrastructure's life and history was further animated with the legal bans. Subvertisers

portray an 'appreciation for the life of an architectural feature or system that continues after abandonment' in ways intimately connected to the relation urban explorers, illegal ravers and squatters hold with abandoned buildings (Garrett, 2011a, p. 1050). As Rimbaud told me, the highway billboards carry opportunity for interventions 'which will probably stay up for years to come until they decide the billboards should be taken down completely.' (Rimbaud, July 2016) It was in search of his poetic writings (see Figure 14) that I wandered towards the first hefty pillar alongside the highway. But, glancing up from the base of the first structure, I found something different.

> 'The billboard towering above me reads LOVE ME. A dire cry for affection, sent across the landscape by an anonymous voice, which I suspect has been written in the gloomy depths of the night. Whose love is this lost soul looking for? Everyone's? A past lover's? One self's? I can not help but wonder if, at some point, a driver or passenger on the BQE thought 'I will', 'I do', or 'I should', in response not to the anonymous poet, but to whoever the statement reminds one of. Could it be that it brought people back together? Or equally, did it infuriate, sling someone back into the horrors of a past life?' (field notes, July 2016)[42]

Like the situationists and surrealists, subvertising is concerned with accelerating and celebrating 'coincidences, mysterious connections and encounters.' (Pinder, 2005b, p. 156; see also Pinder, 2000; 2013) To live meaningfully in the city, in Pinder's account, requires risking the possibility of being disrupted or disturbed, of not knowing, of moving beyond the anticipated and beyond induced differences. It involves imagining urban expressions as strung together only by their collective capacities to affect bodies, rather than by any abstract principles of belonging enacted through a homogeneous appearance or programmed cause. What occurs in the moment of the surprising encounter is important because it hints at the potential of what Richard Sennett, in his book 'The use of disorder', calls 'disorderly cities' sensitive to chance encounters (Sennett, 1970, p. 169).

To encounter difference is more than a semiotic or semantic process; it is thoroughly embodied because it draws upon the past multisensual enactments that make up a certain body's milieu, whilst affecting the body's future potential: its terrains of

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[42] The words, I found out later that day, were illicitly painted by the artist Curtis Kulig.

action, emotion, thought and anticipation (Grosz, 2013; see also Lapworth, 2015). I encountered the 'LOVE ME' billboard on my very own terms, as a body tangled up in particular romantic pasts and presents, an affective blend of jealousy, loathing, care, despise, and desire; and moved out from the event 'following [my] own singular trajectories, riding the waves in [my] own inimitable way.' (Massumi, 2015a, p. 115) The encounter with difference is therefore the creative fuel of becoming, that which constitutes bodies, rather than just being that which occurs *between* extant bodies (Cockayne *et al.*, 2017). What is at stake in the disorderly city, in other words, is embodied existence of the city itself, an existence which does not skate over the cladding of the city but rather ruptures it through alternative ideas or persuasions which complicate, multiply and compound.

As I have already suggested, what arises in the act of subvertising 'is not rhetorical persuasion about what must be done. Nor is it the framing of a collective body. It is a multiplication of connections and disconnections that reframe the relation between bodies, the world they live in and the way in which they are 'equipped' to adapt to it.' (Rancière, 2009, p. 72) Following the geographer Mark Purcell, we might say subvertising involves 'a struggle to 'de-alienate' urban space, to reintegrate it into the web of social connections.' (Purcell, 2013, p. 149) Similarly, Richard Sennett tells us 'a dense, disorganized city could encourage men [sic] to become more sensitive to each other', making them 'more aware of each other' (Sennett, 1970, p. 189, p. 198); as opposed to the orderly city whose organizations, for Sennett, are suffocating people in the tendency towards closure. The type of city predicated through subvertising is not concerned with advertiser-consumer identities or essences and instead acknowledges the complex presence of the other, or more precisely, the presence of the other's desire for making-present oneself. It is to allow to the city to think its communicative charge anew, to give agency to individual dwellers beyond that offered by a commercial logic, bringing them together into affective relations in the process. As Sylvie told me, 'opening public spaces up to radically individual usage creates increased opportunities for these types of interactions to knit together a city more tightly by creating personal relationships across larger groups.' (Sylvie, personal communication, June 2017) Because encounters with difference are part of a 'collective unfolding' (Massumi, 2003, p. 10) between the city and a range of bodies, it may sharpen awareness of the other and establish more-than-economic relationality, thereby contributing to a 'nonsovereign relationality as the foundational quality of being in common' (Berlant, 2016, p. 394) where more-than-representational expressions and texts co-exist in a productive tension, together 'embodying an ethos of generosity towards difference, multiplicity and becoming' (Newman, 2011, p. 354)

– what Fred Moten and Stephano Harney have called a 'general antagonism', that is, 'the riotous production of difference.' (Harney and Moten, 2013, p. 109)

Beyond the comfort of the modernist city which takes contestation and confrontation as that which must be avoided at all costs, subvertisers contend that an overly ordered city, void of contestation, is not a city worth living in. Instead, what I want to suggest is at stake in subvertising, following Lauren Berlant, are acts against 'politics as the resolution of ambivalence.' (Berlant, 2016, p. 395) Not the resolution of contestation or incompatibility, nor merely its toleration, but its active celebration and acceleration. The chaotic is no longer the unruly, the offensive, that to be ruled out or contained by pacts and codes carefully folded into regimes of order, and instead becomes something more inspirational or generative, the flaming force that fuels an enriched urban existence. Chaos constitutes, in the words of Brian Massumi, 'a surplus of undefined potential' (Massumi, 2003, p. 9) that exceeds obsessions with the economic and representational. Chaos is then taken not as absolute disorder or as failure, but as a richness with which to dwell, a liveliness unrestricted by pre-established demarcation, signification and assigned functionalities. It offers a fertile path into the untapped richness of urban life. As such, subvertisers reverse the logic of the regime of order, giving primacy to the chaotic, to surprising encounter and to experiencing difference in their pursuit of an expanded urban existence. In a sense, subvertising provides a way into imagining life in the situationist philosopher Raoul Vaneigem's fictional city Oarystis. In his text 'City of Desire', Vaneigem writes:

> 'The blind walls are the blank pages on which each has the right to draw, write or engrave. Poems, individual notes, calligraphy and dreamlike evocations replace the old advertising billboards. Everything responds to the pleasure of inhabiting, decorating, flowering and making the city into a work of art in which colours and sounds emanate from the interior landscapes that haunt the sensibility of the human being.' (Vaneigem, 2002, n.p.; translation mine)

But this work of art carries no coherent message or image produced from consensus. Instead, it flourishes out of the rich contestation of urban expression and dwells with its power to unsettle and enact difference. This distinguishes subvertising from a straightforward call for mute cities.[43] As a subvertiser emphasised on a walk through

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[43] This is however not to suggest that there are no subvertising individuals and collectives involved in campaigning for the banning of advertising in certain cities. Indeed, in the United Kingdom, a group called Ad Block Bristol, for instance, arose out of a subvertising

Manhattan, '[i]t's the fact that it is uncurated that makes it so much fun.' (Tobias, July 2016) In their acts, subvertisers are not concerned with establishing a new regime of order, a new pact carefully defended by legal-material management that considers the 'stories' of subvertisers more 'truthful' than those of advertisers. To argue for this would do little more than re-asserting the violent sacred-profane distinction central to the regime of order, albeit according to another set of value-systems. Instead, profanation remains forever unfinished; there is no utopian, profaned space at the end of subvertising journeys which would settle, once and for all, the spatial organisation of urban life. In this light the issue with advertising is less its existence as a communicative form, but the narrowness of what is communicated. 'Why not create advertising for the people?' the New York subvertiser Brian asked me rhetorically (Brian, July 2016). As Sylvie wrote with regards to her subvertising workshops, '[m]y hope is that this appetite will grow and that instead of demanding advertising's removal, over time the citizens of Clermont Ferrand will simply demand more and more access to their public space.' (Sylvie, personal communication, July 2017) In short, subvertisers do not seek to attenuate the communicative charge of the city, but to increase the potential for accelerating the spontaneous proliferation of expressions in our cities, beyond the monopoly of affective encounters with commercial advertising, and in doing so, unleashing the deep expressive wildness of the city and the expanded potential for being affected by it.

4.6 Exhaustion

In this chapter I have examined advertising-subvertising relations as they play out in the urban. These relations take on different forms and shapes, but seem to coalesce around what I have termed a regime of order. This regime, as subvertisers make apparent, operates through the carefully maintained but often naturalised separation of urban space into the sacred and the profane, the inaccessible and the accessible, the untouchable and touchable, to enable an orderly spatial management.

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collective and still enrols subvertising tactics towards the aim of legally banning advertising in its city. Further, subvertising has been known to contribute to the mayor of Grenoble's decision in 2015 to put a halt to the French city's commercial contracts with JCDecaux. What I want to suggest, however, is that the majority of contemporary subvertising practitioners I engaged with, even where they showed an interest in advertising-free cities, were largely concerned with contributing to a city holding a high level of rational and emotional exchange deeply exceeding the economic.

Chapter 4

As I have shown, the regime of order does more than simply sustain the commercial validity of advertising space, more than just cleaning up and ensuring the ideal conditions for displaying promotional material. In supporting the material, social, performative and legal logics of this regime, advertising power further reveals itself as an intervention into the potential of alterity. It regulates what enters the textual and affective landscape of cities, thus narrowing the possibilities for difference to emerge. But what is at stake here is not only the prevention of visual-textual heterogeneity. Advertising strikes deeper, weakening and exhausting the emergence of radically divergent socio-political worlds. Engaging in a play of (in)visibility, advertising renders visible those images and texts that are productive of a capitalist imagination, sociality and behaviour, and invisible those that are indifferent to or destructive of those intentions. In this sense, advertising does not only accelerate capitalist ways of life; it undertakes a second, darker and much more concealed movement: intentionally or unintentionally slowing down and stanching the flows of those ways of life that might exceed it, preventing and exhausting along its path future radical, post-capitalist (urban) imaginations from emerging and garnering collective intensity and appeal. This posits contemporary advertising power as thoroughly entangled with social realities beyond its production of commercial time-space (see Section 2.1) or consuming bodies (see Section 2.2). Advertising power has a destructive and preventive life: it drains the conditions for being otherwise, for a different belonging to the city, and ultimately, for a spatial imagination that might tempt others to join in, collectively, breaking open the capitalist hold on the present.

In the chapter that follows, to further expand my conception of advertising power and to avoid falsely assigning the powers to exhaust one particular register of engagement, I switch from advertising power's negative to its affirmative life, where it celebrates, embraces and facilitates the subjects, value-systems and illicit gestures at least partially at odds with itself. Through an examination of this affirmative engagement, we will encounter, beyond the regime of order, a second refrain of advertising's powers to exhaust. First, however, to pave the path for affirmation: a subvertising tale of allure.

Interlude: A story of allure

Allure: *1. (n) The quality of being powerfully and mysteriously attractive or fascinating. 2. (v) Powerfully attract or charm; tempt.*[44]

Scenes of humiliation, ripped posters, severed words, and wounded advertising models.[45] To meditate on subvertising is to enter into a world of contestation. Subvertisers are overwhelmed by a sentiment of disgust launching them into their own ways of either distancing or enacting a brute antagonism. But the stories they tell are also ones of delight, appreciation, and enchantment. These are the moments when advertising worlds attain a sense of allure. At this point, advertising and its powers to exhaust slip beyond their own intentions. To pull you into the forces of allure, I trace one advertising object from the regime of order into the hands of subvertisers.

The first advertising key I ever saw came through the post in a small white box. I took it out and held it out in front of me. I was not impressed. If anything, the key brought back memories of my time at Saatchi & Saatchi: long office hours, hurdled together with colleagues over creative briefings, nerve-wracking meetings in the clients' head offices, a whole lot of advertising campaign development; in short, the muddled fragments of the reasons of my departure. I placed the key back in its box and shelved it alongside other subvertising trivialities.

And so, when I first walked into Sylvie's studio in New York a few months later, I was puzzled when I found myself immediately surrounded by advertising keys in myriad variations: crooked, straight, glossy, matte, massive, tiny, scratched, untouched. In fact, I was engulfed by an entire collection of carefully displayed advertising objects: images of advertising spaces, subvertising installations and locking mechanisms were framed on walls alongside plastic advertising company logos stolen from phone

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[44] Definition retrieved from Oxford English Dictionary. Available at: https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/allure

[45] One subvertiser, The Decapitator, is known to 'behead'. He carefully pastes severed, bloody throats over the heads of advertising models (see Wortham, 2008). In a similar vein, Zevs sprays dripping red graffiti in between the eyes of models, giving them the eerie look of having been shot (see Sharkweek, 2011).

booths. The keys, however, held a special place in the room. Some were pinned to the walls in handcrafted frames, others arranged symmetrically behind protective glass. These were not just tools enrolled towards the functional end of advertising takeovers. In leaving advertising's regime of order and entering Sylvie's studio, they had become collectables. Sylvie's acquisition and crafting of advertising keys started over ten years ago when she became intrigued by the idea of figuring out how to access locked bus shelters. Since then, she told me, her subvertising project 'has become [her] life's work, in the same way that somebody dedicates their life to god.' (Sylvie, June 2016) The perhaps incidental crucifix-shape of her hand-crafted black matte keys had not gone unnoticed to an observant advertising worker entering Sylvie's studio years earlier. He, like myself, was overwhelmed by how Sylvie is wrapped in the allure of those objects central to the regime that troubles her.

Figure 23 - Hand-crafted advertising key framed in Sylvie's studio. (New York, June 2016)

On a very basic level, allure is a field of attraction that generates enchantment (Thrift, 2008). It strikes us in many ways: it guides us, draws us in, begs us to incorporate

something into our own lifeworlds, to arrange something in a particular way and place. It emerges out of the indeterminacy of objects, humans, animals, ideas, images, when it temporarily separates them from their specific list of qualities (Harman, 2005), launching us into the mysterious depths that lie beyond (McCormack, 2015). Despite allure often becoming part of a calculated project in advertising (and elsewhere),[46] it remains slippery, hardly ever capable of containment, and often emerging onto objects irrespective of designer intent.

In his short story 'The Zahir', poet and novelist Jorge Luis Borges draws us into a tale of mundane obsession. The protagonist, a fictionalised Borges, receives an Argentinian 20 centavo coin, the zahir, after paying for a brandy and orange juice. 'I looked at it – there was nothing particularly distinctive about it, except those scratches.' (Borges, 1999, p. 245) Still, he pondered the glory of infamous coins: stories of kings' palaces, golden treasures and heroic adventures. Is it not striking, he wondered, how in any coin one might read these undertones of exclusivity and extravagance? The coin's mundane material qualities and its monetary weight slowly ceased to matter to Borges, and with it also dropped his appetite for sleep or, in fact, for anything that did not come to him via the zahir. In the end, the coin rose as an 'idée fixe' held up only by the 'terrible power to be unforgettable.' (Borges, 1999, p. 246) The zahir's lifeworld took over Borges' own. At the climax of the story, Borges' object of allure takes over entirely: 'I will no longer perceive the universe, I will perceive the Zahir.' (Borges, 1999, p. 248) A story taken to extremes, surely, but also a reminder that any object carries the potential to slip into the realm of allure, even those objects which one should, in principle, be disgusted by in accordance with a set of beliefs and ideals.

Where does the allure of keys, an object so central to advertising operations, come from? Subvertisers tell me there's a thrill to intervening into the functional logic of the keys. In the hands of subvertisers, they become symbols of illicit access to the city. This is the powerful promise of the future life of the advertising object: the possibility of un-rooting keys from their advertising essence, rearranging them

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[46] As discussed in Section 2.2.2, operating within the 'economies of affect' (Ahmed, 2004; Jenkins, 2006), advertising sets out to enable affective engagements with (potential) consumers by severing a product, service, event or brand from its material-social constraints, entangling it instead with alluring brand promises and brand worlds.

towards new futures. Allure emerges out of the unique ways subvertisers incorporate advertising keys into their own worlds. Walter Benjamin, in his celebration of the book collector, tells us that the collector's deepest desire stems less from a relation to the official histories of an object and more from its capacities to be renewed, to become something other when 'the final thrill, the thrill of acquisition, passes over them.' (Benjamin, 2007, p. 487) In collecting advertising keys, then, subvertisers gather not just keys, but 'a panoply of possible futures.' (Borges, 1999, p. 244)

Figure 24 – Immanuel's key collection. (Amsterdam, October 2017) Image by Immanuel.

Allure is not just a site of future abstract possibility. It is shaped by the weight of particular pasts. One layer of stories emerges with the object's acquisition. An Amsterdam-based subvertiser named Immanuel told me about how he obtained one of his favourite keys. A few years ago he saw an advertising worker driving up to a bus shelter. The man jumped out of his van and walked towards the bus shelter holding two advertising posters. Immanuel quietly made his way to the van, eying the worker with every step he made. He was fully concentrated on getting his task done, and held back until the perfect moment. He quietly slid the backdoor open and grabbed the first key he could find: a massive 60cm T-shaped steel key. His body fizzling with adrenaline, he fled to his studio around the corner. That the key has never actually been used since he stole it does not prevent it from being pinned to a wall alongside other keys in his collection. The memories of excitement suffice. Such stories of acquisition are strong enough to imbue a key with allure. Without such

personal stories, without the charge of a unique 'object biography',[47] Immanuel relays, the allure of keys fades. The key bought from an online DIY store for a few pounds somehow fails to garner the power of allure. It requires another layer of stories: those of usage. Upon seeing his used keys, the subvertiser Brian shares joyful stories of past adventures across the United States. One key in particular brings tales of sleepless, boisterous nights installing images of burning guns across Miami's bus shelters. Soon after, these stories bleed into fragmented recollections of a troubled past seeking asylum in that same country. I let him move on. Each key is packed with its own memory fragments and glimmers of future potential.

Despite its felt power, the emergence of allure as a site entangling memory and possibility can never be fully qualified by way of analysis. I kept pressing Immanuel to explain why he keeps growing his key collection. After a while, he told me, 'it's a fetish. I don't know what so say. [...] All I can tell you is that I'd cry if I lost one of my favourite keys.' (Immanuel, October 2017) Language knows its limits here. Immanuel's obsession had only become apparent to him the moment a stranger on an online dating website asked him why he was constantly talking about this seemingly random tool he owned. He had been lost for words. This does not keep Immanuel away from his self-proclaimed, secular fetish. Immanuel currently needs only two more keys to have fully unlocked Amsterdam's outdoor advertising landscape. But there's always another key to be slotted into the collection, and part of the allure of collecting lies in the impossibility of completion. As Slavoj Žižek tells us, '[t]he object of desire itself coincides with the force that prevents its attainment.' (Žižek, 2005, p. 96) Allure relies on its irresolvability. Allure vitalises one force that keeps subvertisers coming back to advertising.

Subvertisers perform a mode of contestation, but one without the distinctness of rational antagonism. Allure offers one way of tangling together the contested worlds

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[47] 'Object biography' is the term employed by archaeological theorists to refer to the accumulated stories of an object as it is shaped and re-shaped by human and non-human forces, practices, and histories (Gosden and Marshall, 2010; Olsen, 2010). How was an advertising key acquired? Who crafted it and where was this done? Which tools and materials were involved? How rare is this particular object? And what historical stories have advertisers and subvertisers told about this key? All of these questions matter. Cut off from its socio-material biography, an object loses its charge and allure; subvertisers lose their interest.

of advertising and subvertising. Subvertisers develop an appreciation of advertising, not through the allure of the advertising image or the product sold, but through that of its advertising objects. Allure folds out of the indeterminacy of these objects, and the ways they might intentionally or unintentionally withdraw from their existing material and social narratives. This is when advertising's powers to exhaust turn against themselves, its objects latching on to forms of allure conducive to illicit intervention. It is perhaps *because of*, rather than *despite of*, the presence of allure that subvertisers find enduring paths into its promises of alterity. It is hard to tell whether subvertisers would remain occupied with advertising if it weren't for the pull of allure, if it weren't for the dream of obtaining one more missing key, of framing it, of cherishing it.

Figure 25 - Exposing corporate lies as part of Brandalism's COP21 subvertising campaign. (Paris, November 2015)

5 The affirmative life of power: Amicability and recuperation

'Yo, check the Brandalism inbox,' John texts. It is January 2016. The sky is an uninviting, solid grey. I decided to stay at home and enjoy a quiet day of reading. It is only a few weeks after the COP21 subvertising actions in Paris, when John was plunked on the ground by riot police in the squat. Like other members of Brandalism, John is still catching-up on interview inquiries, image requests, exhibition proposals, and thanking the eighty-plus contributing artists. Each contributor to the project is in their own home again, sometimes thousands of miles away from others, but still held together by the intense high of the intervention and its overwhelming media attention. 'You're going to love this,' he texts one minute later. I open Brandalism's inbox:

Hey

I work for Black Gulls Breweries. We subvert conventional media and take risks to expose Corporations.

We'd be very interested in hooking up with you guys to cause some international mayhem. Let me know if this is a project you might be interested in.

Cheers,
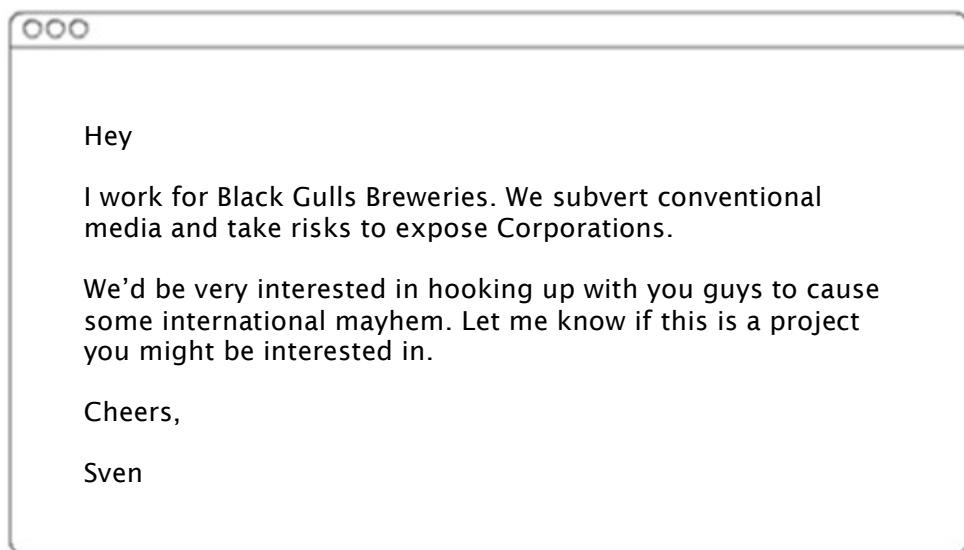
Sven

I read it about six times. 'Who is this Sven? What could he possibly want?' A quick online search leads me to the author's LinkedIn page: Sven is the marketing director of Black Gulls Breweries, a global manufacturer of alcoholic beverages with headquarters in the United Kingdom. I can't help but be reminded of the six hundred posters critical of the COP21 climate talks intervention, and their many catchy verses: *They profit, we drown. Carbon addiction is killing us. Give more – consume less. System change, not climate change.* These words are cast alongside visceral, sometimes painful imagery of polluted rivers, ridiculed politicians, piles of rubbish, choking children, drowning ice bears. Brandalism is, indeed, a self-proclaimed anti-consumerist collective working against 'the intersectional social & environmental

Chapter 5

justice issues that capitalism creates.' (Brandalism, 2018a, n.p.) Its COP21 interventions, in particular, sought to reveal 'the devastating links between advertising, consumerism and climate change.' (Brandalism, 2017, n.p.) And yet, here is Sven, his email, his global corporation. I write back to John: 'What are you going to respond?' I am too late; he already has:

○○○

Hi Sven

Thanks for your email and your interest in the Brandalism project.

Can you give us a bit more information please. What do you have in mind?

All the best,

John // Brandalism
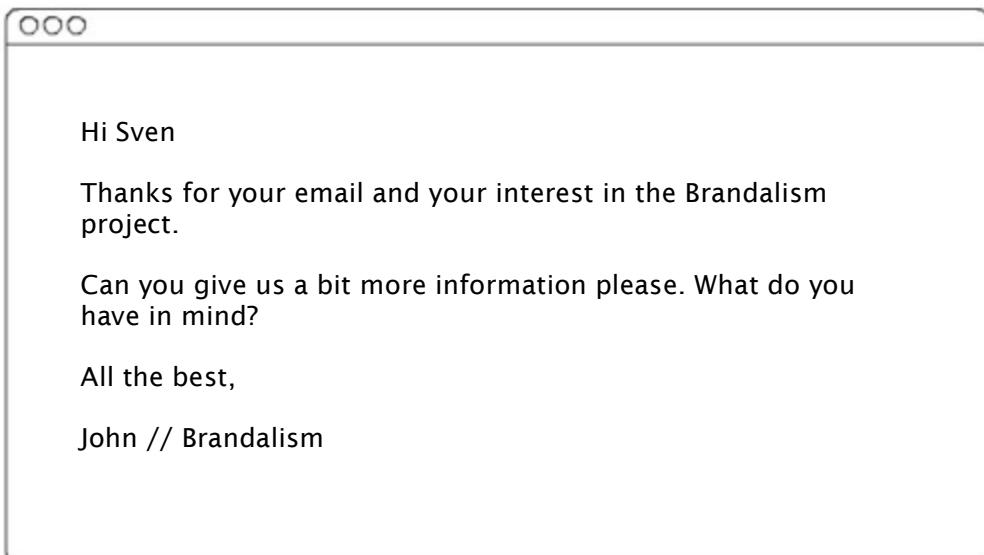
Later that same day, Sven responds:

○○○

Hey John

Thanks so much for getting back to me. Firstly, I want to say how much we get a kick out of what you do. Like all great concepts, a simple idea beautifully executed. You won't find us online. I head up The Faction within Black Gulls Breweries. Keeping our Punk flame burning and creating things that are on the edge and that get us into trouble, even within our own customer base. Where we recently got fined a Kings ransom for a stunt/concept.

I really wanted to know if, in principle, you would help us to subvert conventional advertising. We feel it is a dead, exploitative and intrusive medium, and we want to undermine, ridicule and lampoon it.

I haven't spent time creating a subversive campaign if you guys weren't interested in helping us realise it. It would be awesome to do a collaboration, a Brandalism interpretation of our concepts. We're really open on this one.

Be super pumped to talk this through some more.

John does not reply.

In this chapter, I hone in on this email exchange, alongside other field encounters and interview material, to examine the interpersonal, human-to-human relationships between advertisers and subvertisers. While I hope to reveal a wide, muddled mixture of advertising-subvertising entanglements, my focus will lie with those marked by perhaps the most surprising but commonly recurring attribute: that of affirmation. Zooming in on the instances when interpersonal advertising-subvertising relations are largely affirmative, when advertisers instigate and negotiate 'amicable atmospheres', I will show, offers insight into a central question: how does contestation become valuable within a capitalist scheme? Advertising's affirmative outreach to subvertising, thus, as I will explain at the end of this chapter, presents insight into a second register, after the regime of order, of advertising's contemporary powers to intervene into and exhaust radical imaginaries. To guide us there, I would first like to return to the above email exchange.

5.1 (Dis)entanglement

Rather than taking Brandalism as an assault on the corporate world, Sven opens up the potential of affirming contestation, producing an amicable atmosphere in the process. Thinking of the email exchange in light of engineered atmospheres pushes us to consider it as a collective unfolding that involves and resides between objects, affects, humans, intensities, texts, presences and absences (Anderson, 2009; Stewart, 2011). Calling the emails atmospheric opens a path along which to explore these attempts simultaneously more fully (as not restricted by a limited set of methods) and modestly (as unstable and unfinished). The geographer Pete Adey (2014, p. 837) tells us 'locating atmospheres is particularly difficult in the sense of tying them down to a single body or an object.' But atmospheres' evasiveness, volatility and relative autonomy does not fundamentally tie them to the indeterminacy of coincidental, everyday happenings. Their potential is repeatedly harnessed, or 'engineered', towards politically specific purposes via politically specific manners.[48] In the

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[48] Sites where the atmospheric is commonly engineered, as plentiful scholarship points out, include airports (Adey, 2008), train stations (Adey *et al.*, 2013), schools (Den Besten *et al.*, 2011), scientific experiments (McCormack, 2008), prisons (van Hoven and Sibley, 2008) and shopping malls (Miller, 2014). Each instance is materially, socially and politically singular, arranging its own unique compositions towards its own unique horizons.

engineering of atmospheres, multiple phenomena, objects and bodies are distributed in a particular arrangement, hoping to give a specific direction to affective, perceptual and behavioural responses (Adey, 2014; McCormack, 2008; Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos, 2016). Isn't Sven, in his emails to Brandalism, relying on a similar project, one that seeks to produce a particular affective atmosphere?

In the email exchange, Sven seems to affirm an atmosphere in which Black Gulls Breweries is encountered not on hostile terms but as a friend or ally. Atmospheres of amicability are here concerned with attuning contesting worlds, blurring the lines between legality and illegality, corporate and non-corporate. Such atmosphere of amicability appears reliant upon the insistence of entanglement. Like Brandalism, Sven implies, Black Gulls Breweries 'subvert conventional media and take risks to expose Corporations.' A glance at their website shows (apparently not *so* hard to find online), for instance, their launch of a pink product that, they claim, ironically reveals the stupidity of other brands' sexist advertising. Black Gulls Breweries, again like Brandalism through their international media exposure for their COP21 subvertising, believe in the necessity of unleashing 'international mayhem'. They, again like Brandalism, 'creat[e] things that are on the edge and that get [them] into trouble,' even in their own customer base, feeling that conventional advertising 'is a dead, exploitative and intrusive medium,' something 'to undermine, ridicule and lampoon.' At no point does Sven explicitly correlate Black Gulls Breweries with Brandalism, and yet, through a subversive, playful tonality and selective rendering of the company, he seems to sketch out an implicit image of intricately connected worlds. What matters, in this atmosphere, is the supposed concordance of desires, intentions, and activities.

In one sense, Sven is right in identifying overlapping worlds between advertising and subvertising. The COP21 intervention in Paris offers a case in point, shedding light on at least four refrains of entanglement. First, advertising and subvertising are, at least partially, guided by a common set of practices. It is not coincidental that my skills learned throughout my advertising education and professional life were central to my acceptance to Brandalism's COP21 intervention; where contributing artists enrolled their graphic design skills with software packages such as Adobe Photoshop and Adobe Illustrator; where 'press teams' drew on textual, verbal and audio-visual skills in developing press releases, producing video content, taking images of installed posters, doing radio interviews, and writing blog posts; and where the collective, as a whole, used strategic marketing skills when conceptualising what advertisers call 'media strategies' and 'audience strategies', ensuring the delivery of a coherent message and audio-visual aesthetic across different media channels and audiences, at the perfect time.

Figure 26 - Press team in the COP21 subvertising 'offices'. (Paris, December 2016)

Second, while Brandalism did not buy a time and place in media channels or paid its many contributors in the way advertisers would, it still required financial support for travel to Paris, maintaining the printer, hosting the website, buying paper and ink, and so forth. Brandalism was therefore dependent on external funding, gaining money from an arts organisation and an NGO, and thus tapping into state-capitalist financial flows in ways not entirely dissimilar from advertisers. Third, the posters installed as part of the COP21 intervention mimic the aesthetic concerns of advertisers to the point that many can hardly be separated from official advertising posters. Like 'street artists' (see Borghini *et al.*, 2013; Droney, 2010), subvertisers draw on and play with the aesthetics of corporate texts and images. Their posters are highly stylised, often artfully merging impressive digital drawings, with colour-edited imagery and gorgeous text designs. Donna, one of the eighty artist contributors to the intervention, clarified her reasons for why, exactly, she spent so much time and effort creating 'posters [for COP21] that look at least as good as those official ones that were there before.' (Donna, February 2018) She added:

> 'Of course making the posters look professional, like actual adverts, creates a moment of surprise, you know, so it takes a while before someone seeing the poster realises that this poster is, actually, not really supposed to be there. By that time you've already got their attention, and I think it makes them remember the message better, much better than when it is just, let's say,

some quick graffiti or paint on a white sheet. Don't you think? […] That element of surprise is definitely important, but maybe even more important is that, in a sense, the posters are supposed to point at something beautiful after capitalism, you know, and obviously, we want it to look like something people would actually want to be part of. […] Who wants to be part of a future visualised by a blurry picture, sloppy print quality, and bad colour combos? I definitely don't and good luck convincing anyone else.' (Donna, February 2018)

In other words, like the advertiser, Donna draws on aesthetic sensibilities and skills in her desire for crafting particular affective relations between a passer-by and the enticing world presented by the poster.

Figure 27 - Subvert mimicking official COP21 visual identity. (Paris, November 2015)

Fourth, and finally, subvertising follows advertising in its desire for developing content and a recognisable 'brand' – with a recurring alias (Brandalism) and professional aesthetic (of posters, a coherent online identity, logo) – that will not just be heard and seen, but that actually operates on the level of contagion, that will 'go viral' in the words of the advertiser (see Koch and Benlian, 2015), travelling around and across social media and news platforms, getting passed on by 'consumers', without the need for paid-for advertising such as TV commercials, Facebook adverts, website banners, targeted Google advertising or sponsored newspaper articles. As

media theorist Tony Sampson writes, viral advertisements 'seep into the collective consciousness of social media networks like YouTube and from there spread, person to person, like a memetic [sic] thought contagion.' (Sampson, 2012, p. 65) Virality is therefore the advertiser's gold dust: low cost, huge reach, authentic feel.[49] Achieving viral content is what instantly leverages you, as a professional in an advertising agency, from being just any advertising worker to the ranks of the creative elite of the industry. You'll walk home with a sought-after industry award, and land a job in your favourite creative agency; New York, Tokyo, London, Paris, Buenos Aires – you name it.

Given the lure of viral advertising, there were few meetings during my time at Saatchi & Saatchi where the advertiser, briefing us on a new campaign we were expected to develop, did not, usually towards the end, add that 'oh, and the campaign should have viral potential.' When I shifted contexts, entering the building squatted for the COP21 Brandalism intervention, I witnessed the same passion; a passion which they were remarkably successful in materialising, achieving free press coverage most advertising can only dream of, even to the point where the advertising industry started looking to them as a source of inspiration from which they might learn how to sharpen their marketing strategies, how to carve out more shareable media objects. Thus, as the media theorist Jussi Parikka (2007) has noted, it should be apparent that virality is a desirable force of organisation and propagation of both power and resistance. This entanglement became particularly apparent when the following email by a journalist landed in Brandalism's inbox just a few days after the COP21 subvertising action and its sudden flare of international fame:

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[49] Viral content is considered 'authentic' because it hides its source, working its way across affective refrains from consumer to consumer, taking hold and spreading further, without the need for an advertiser to push it out. The advertiser seemingly takes a backseat here. But as is well-known amongst what Jussi Parikka calls 'Viral Business Machines' (Parikka, 2007, p. 300), such as advertisers and social media firms, what seems like 'authentic content', arising out of nowhere and 'naturally' flowing along 'the invisible currents that run between and among consumers', as the marketing guru Seth Godin would have it (Godin, cited in Sampson, 2012, p. 65), is more often than not launched, if not coordinated, strategically through the use of Youtube 'influencers' or sponsored social media posts as part of a carefully crafted media strategy.

```
┌─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│ ○○○                                                      │
├─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┤
│                                                          │
│     Hi,                                                  │
│                                                          │
│     I'm writing for [an advertising magazine] about successful viral │
│     marketing and wondered if I'd be able to get some comment from │
│     Brandalism – as your recent ad takeover was obviously hugely │
│     successful in this respect.                          │
│                                                          │
│     Would you be able to answer a couple of questions for me? │
│                                                          │
│     My deadline is next Wednesday.                       │
│                                                          │
│     Best,                                                │
│                                                          │
│     Debby                                                │
│                                                          │
└─────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┘
```
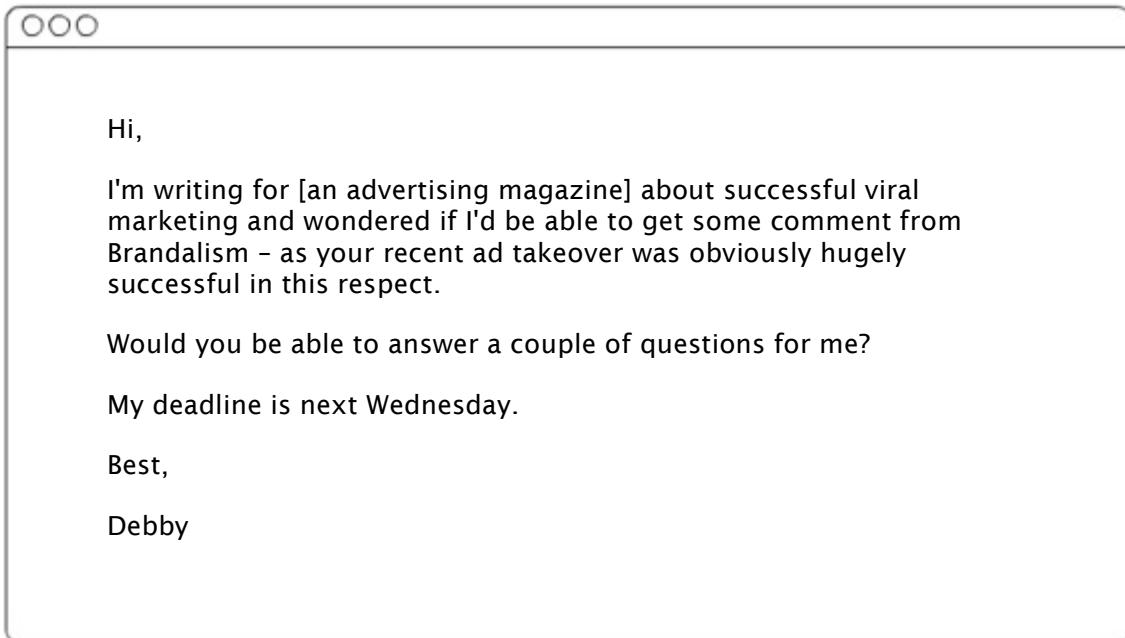
The subvertiser, then, is no pure subject, somehow thinking, acting and feeling in a sphere entirely exterior to capitalism. It consciously or unwillingly fails to occupy a position of resolute disentanglement. What is clear is that it is bound up in intimate entanglements with advertising. I will dig more deeply into a number of these advertising-subvertising commonalities in Chapter 6.[50] What is important, for now, is that Sven cherishes and underscores entanglement to the point where it ultimately disqualifies those ways of thinking, acting and feeling that *do* present a sharp discordance and that are often apparent from Brandalism's own multi-layered biographies, from its illegality, its narratives of intent, its ways of organising.

> 'We mobilise artists around the world to take creative action against ads as together we imagine a world beyond consumerism. Why advertising? Alongside corporate lobbying, it is one arm of multinational corporate power fuelling the distractive and destructive forces of consumerism.' (Brandalism, 2016b, n.p.)

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[50] See particularly Section 6.5, where I discuss the distinction between symmetrical and asymmetrical antagonism, in light of the former's particular vulnerabilities.

Chapter 5

Even the briefest glimpse at any of Brandalism's online publications, its manifestos, and its multiple installations in the street, reveals a dedication to meaning-making processes explicitly at odds with capitalist ideology.

> 'This is our battle-cry, our semiotic war,
>
> our rage against consumer mis-philosophy,
>
> and the machines of predatory corporatism,
>
> that block out the sun
>
> burn our atmosphere
>
> […]
>
> Instead of the facile dreams of consumer products and
>
> the shadow festival
>
> of fake-estate lifestyle choice,
>
> pacifying with wealth those who remember,
>
> smart-drugging the next generation of revolutionary minds.'
>
> (Brandalism, 2018b, n.p.)
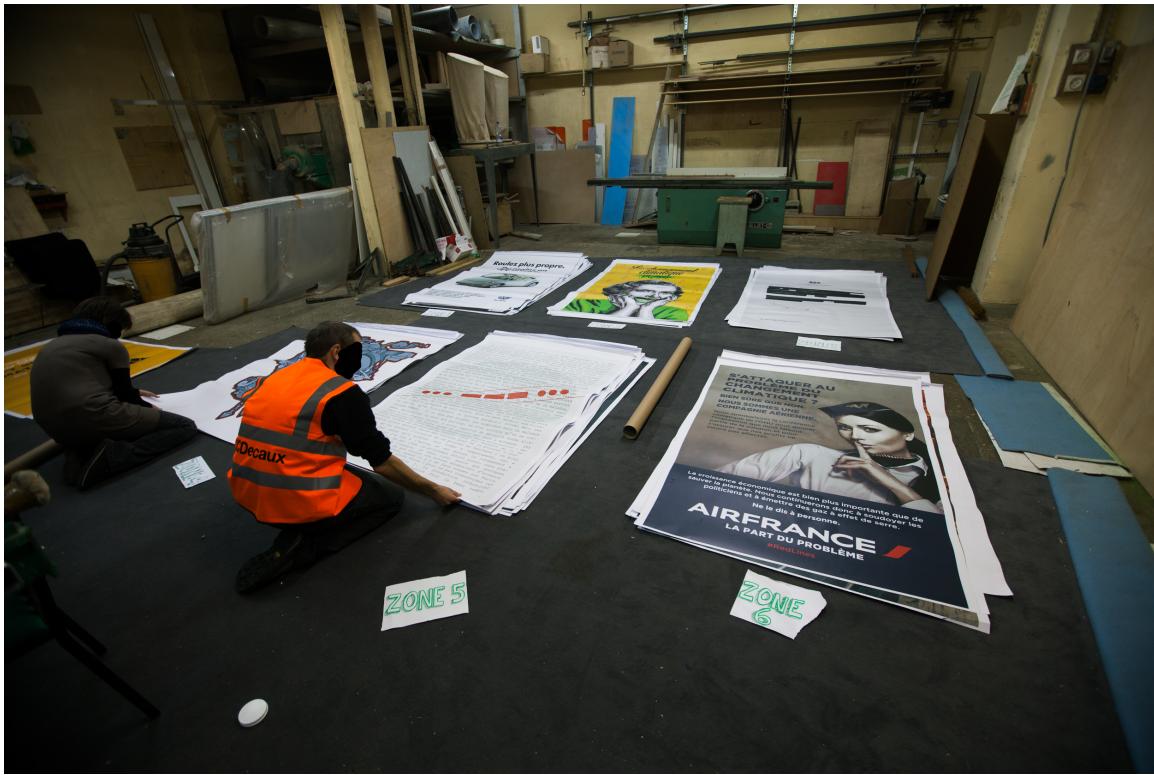
Figure 28 - Steve and Lorette organising posters according to geographical zone in the subvertising squat. (Paris, November 2015)

But Brandalism's separation from advertising exceeds the representational terrain of ideology, of 'semiotic war' (Brandalism, 2018b). As opposed to advertisers such as Sven, whose profession as a marketing director is dedicated entirely to establishing and tightening relationships with existing and potential customers of Black Gulls Breweries, Brandalism produces and intervenes in a fashion, at least partially,[51] detached from the immediate control of any corporation. Productive in excess of the bounds of corporate control, it hopes to pursue capacities to affect the world in a way that is liberated from the directly monetary interests of a corporate brand.

But more than this, what became apparent in November 2015 in Paris, the pull towards autonomy also allowed Brandalism to organise in ways that are firmly different to those of corporate entities. When I had just arrived in Paris, only having

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[51] Corporations have, indeed, in the past funded subvertising collectives. While there was never a direct control over the output subvertisers produced with the corporate funding, it would be naïve to suggest that, in those instances, they are in any fashion operating entirely *outside of* corporate control. What has become apparent, however, is that subvertisers only respond to calls for corporate applications as an ultimately final resort.

met a handful of people, I was instantly asked to take part in a 'meeting' to which all contributors, from those designing the posters to those installing them, were invited. In turn, each of the 80-plus posters designed for the intervention were shown on a projection screen. If anyone felt uncomfortable with one of the designs, for reasons more serious than simple aesthetic preference, they would raise their hand, explain themselves, and collectively it would then be decided whether the poster should be installed on the streets in a few days' time. Despite having just arrived and having had no previous engagement with the project, the weight of my opinion was equal to that of John or Steve, Brandalism's founders. While, as in any social context, there are might still be some who feel marginalised within a large group, perhaps not daring to speak up against a particular design, the immediate aim of this set-up was to severely reduce the possibility of exclusion, instead experimenting with ways of maximising the possibility of collective decisions. As John told me right after the meeting: 'I really believe that this project is as much about the posters and ideas we put out there, as it is about how we get there. If anyone contributing to the project does not feel empowered by it, then honestly, I think we've failed.' (John, November 2015)

This was one of the moments when I realised just how differently subvertisers organise vis-à-vis advertising. At first, I did not quite dare to engage, remembering that, in advertising, being allowed to join meetings with senior directors, board members, or CEO's, let alone having one's voice truly heard, is a source of stature, something I should deeply aspire to within the vertical imaginations of the corporate organisation. Once I did shed my initial doubts, everyone listened and engaged with my ideas. The result: the collective agreed and one of the posters, which I believed was inappropriate in light of the terror attacks that happened a few weeks before in the same city, was pulled out of potential circulation. I never became enwrapped by a project so rapidly, so intensely, as I did at that particular moment. I instantly felt warm, cared for even, something, I realise now reflecting upon this moment, that I lacked so severely when working as an advertising strategist, always feeling somehow unappreciated, negligible, disposable, lost.

To summarise, ideology, autonomy, and organisation are some of the significant points at which the advertising-subvertising composite commonly fractures, where its coherence falls apart. Like the discussed levels of commonality, these points are unstable and fissured, their unfolding affected by the particularity of a spatial, temporal and affective context and the particular advertisers and subvertisers involved. We might ask however: are advertisers such as Black Gulls Breweries not, to a certain degree, indifferent to these emergences of difference when they enact amicable atmospheres? Are they not, in solely underscoring commonalities, offering a

deflection from the realities of difference which might unsettle corporate reason and collaboration?

5.2 Amicability

To construct an atmosphere of amicability, advertisers necessarily start from an assumed shared life and tend towards the diffusion of difference. During the email exchange, Brandalism is charged with accepting the way Sven sets out his own positionality: as an ally in the struggle against 'conventional advertising'. In another email to Brandalism a month after the COP21 actions, the director of an organisation celebrating advertising creativity through awards equally proclaims an assumed shared aim, this time around an aesthetic concern:

> Hi Brandalism,
>
> A little bit about me before I get to my question.
>
> My job is to go to all agencies of the world and make them realise that the garbage that most of them are creating is insulting to consumers. [...] So I go to them to try and tell them to bring the level of craft in advertising to the same levels as fine art. If brands used that money to create beauty and not ugly stupid messaging it would not just look better outside, it would also be better for brands.
>
> So I was wondering [...]
>
> All the best,
>
> Franco

Black Gulls Breweries' emails, I soon realised, were more than a rarity amidst overwhelmingly contesting worlds. Many of advertisers' encounters with subvertisers are inflected with personal gestures towards an affirmative atmosphere of amicability that underscores entanglement.

One day, when still in New York, I joined Sylvie in a meeting with a large digital outdoor advertising company in Central Manhattan. We had been invited by Susan, the company's director of innovation. Walking to their offices, Sylvie told me the story of how she came to know Susan. Unlike John, whose communication with Black Gulls Breweries ended with the third email, Sylvie accepted Susan's invitation for a coffee after a flurry of emails back and forth. 'It soon became clear that they seemed

interested in feeling me out,' she told me – 'Was I going to launch a campaign against them?' Since this meeting, Susan has repeatedly shown admiration for Sylvie's subvertising work; even visiting Sylvie's studio with her kids and buying copies of Sylvie's self-published magazine. They grew closer with every (free) lunch meeting, with each sharing of online content, with every playful text message. The advertiser-subvertiser tension sunk into the background of their rapport.

Knowing all this did not reassure me. I remained worried: this is the company whose advertising spaces were coming under attack from the subvertising practitioners I met in New York. Sylvie herself had explicitly written, in no tender words, of the company's deeply problematic relation to data privacy. As we sat down in the reception hall, it dawned on me: I am sitting alongside a subvertiser who was described as 'an asshole' by another New York advertising director (see Section 5.3). Suddenly, Sylvie whispered 'there she is.' Within seconds, I was calmed by the gentle kindness with which we were welcomed. After being generously offered a drink, we followed Susan through the office and finally sat down in comfortable seats in the middle of an open-plan office space. There was something strangely comical about these two figures, seemingly impossible companions, sitting alongside one another, as if each other's opposite: Sylvie in her characteristic full, deep-black attire, Susan sporting a flowery dress with matching nail polish and huge, swirly earrings.

After introducing herself to me, Susan went on to talk to Sylvie. 'As you know, we love what you do.' 'A lot of the work you do aligns with our ethos,' she continued. 'I therefore appreciate everything you do.' The opposites tangled into a warm air of oneness, amicable and contagious. I too became enwrapped by it, quickly and generously sharing smiles, nods and camaraderie. I almost forgot that I was sitting in the sleek furniture of one of New York's fastest growing advertising businesses, alongside a subvertiser who, over and over again, proclaims that 'advertising does harm to each and all of us by repeating the commands of capitalism and fundamentally focusing our attention inwards, […] us[ing] our collective attention to aggregate wealth for a few.' (Sylvie, personal communication, September 2017) What does it mean to be engulfed in the affirmative atmospheres invoked by advertisers' kind words, bodily gestures, material generosity?

Months after the meeting with Susan in New York, I invited Sylvie to an online video conversation to further investigate her seemingly amicable relation to an advertiser. I was keen to ask if the joy of free lunches, text messages, and studio visits complicates her, at times, vehement condemnation of Susan's advertising business. Did entering into an amicable relationship destabilise her desire for contestation? She

responded in stutters. It seemed hard to disentangle the complex layerings that had come to make up their relationship over the years, slipping as it did beyond formal interactions. Then, she reached a moment of clarity: 'Well, in some way, I guess it made it harder for me to hate her.' (Sylvie, November 2017) She laughed, and then continued:

> 'I will be fully honest with you. She's done a good job of continuing to be very friendly, to my ideas, of working with me. It has kept me at bay. [...] if I don't think she's an asshole then I'm probably not going to fuck with her, you know what I mean? Upon realising that I wasn't a vandal, she probably realised that the longer she maintained this mutually beneficial relationship, the longer I would hold off vocalising against [Susan's employer].' (Sylvie, November 2017)

With each novel amicable encounter, what once existed in the abstract turned more intimate. The individual faces lurking behind corporate images and polished texts became increasingly apparent, familiar even. What was once a possible assault on a faceless corporation, became a question of personal matters. The affirmative atmospheres of amicability enveloped Sylvie and Susan, functioning as a binding feature, a form of 'social glue' (Spencer and Pahl, 2006, p. 211), that stitches those who contest intimately and personally into their object of critique. But what brings Sylvie closer to Susan in one way, distances her in another. Affirmation, ironically, established a renewed separation: it became hard (if not impossible) to approach the advertiser in a negative register. Sylvie's affirmative disposition introduced a distance – *It kept her at bay.* Susan did not explicitly request a ceasefire. And yet, had Susan's endeavours not, intentionally or unintentionally, stripped Sylvie of her antagonistic edge, her desire to negatively effect Susan's business interests? In other words, to follow the political philosopher Carl Schmitt's combative terminology, do amicable atmospheres trouble the subvertiser's capacity 'to judge whether the adversary intends to negate his opponent's way of life and therefore must be repulsed or fought in order to preserve one's own form of existence' (Schmitt, 1996, p. 27)? Without the labour of praise and celebration, contestation is more likely to be soaked through with antagonistic vigour.

The amicable atmospheres set out in the described advertising-subvertising encounters are far removed from what philosopher Luce Irigaray refers to as 'non-appropriative' relationships. Appropriative relationships, perhaps like those unfolding in the atmospheres of amicability Susan and Sven are concerned with, start from 'I comprehend you, I know you, so I do not need to listen to you and I can even plan a future for you.' (Irigaray, 1996, p. 117) To borrow a phrase from the philosopher

Emmanuel Levinas, this belief in knowing in advance the other's paths of desire rejects 'the gratuitousness of the *for-the-other*,' (Levinas, 1987, p. 106; emphasis in original) an empathic moment unconcerned with reciprocity. With advertisers' atmospheres of amicability, we enter the territory of what Jean-Luc Nancy referred to as 'slick tributes' in his homage to Jacques Derrida's life:

> '*Salut*! How could I refrain from bidding you *salut*, now you have gone? How could I fail to respond to the *salut* that you bade us, a '*salut* without salvation, an unpresentable *salut*,' as you put it? How could I fail to do this, and what else is there to do? As always, the time of mourning is not a time for analysis or discussion. All the same, it doesn't have to be a time for slick tributes. It can be - it has to be - a time to hail you: *salut*! Goodbye!' (Nancy, 2005, p. 313; emphasis in original)

The praise of 'slick tributes' offers a means towards aiding the giver of praise rather than the recipient. Differing from what both Jean-Luc Nancy and Jacques Derrida simply refer to as a 'salut', a gesture of praise refusing future response (Derrida, 2005), the praise of advertisers is here guided by a pointed desire: the actualisation of, in Sven's case, 'a collaboration, a Brandalism interpretation of our concepts', or, in Susan's instance, Sylvie's distancing from antagonism. They push subvertisers to either initiate or cease a particular kind of activity. In this sense, neither Sven nor Susan can affirm subvertisers' modes of existence to the point of acceptance. Instead, they show a peculiar future-orientedness which indicates an unwillingness or incapacity to see subvertising as a political endeavour that departs from advertising lifeworlds in terms of ideological tendencies and (in)dependence on corporations. They start from the insufficiency of Brandalism's and Sylvie's presence and point towards how they should become other, how they should start acting in accordance with the corporate logic of advertisers.

This distinguishes Sven and Susan from a range of other advertising professionals who reached out to subvertisers, taking up an alternative register of affirmation. When Brandalism installed a series of subvertising posters in front of advertising agencies in three cities in the United Kingdom in March 2016, it received an overwhelming response by over sixty advertising executives from across the world.

Figure 29 - Brandalism poster next to global ad agency James Walter Thompson referencing its British Army advertising campaign. (London, October 2016)

These emails were packed with sincere doubts about the advertising industry, with personal confessions of their role within it, and with affectionate cries for a way out.[52] One copywriter from Canada opened his email with these words: 'I just came across your movement […]. Honestly, it made me want to cry. I could not relate to it more.' (Blake, Brandalism inbox, March 2016) Or take the words of Mike (Brandalism inbox, April 2016), an advertising strategist for a digital advertising agency in Newcastle:

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[52] While the large majority of responses were sympathetic and affirmative, one Tweet was openly hostile however: 'Some attention seeking students have put a 6 sheet up outside of [our agency]. Literally no one gives a shit. #brandalism #nonsense'

> Hello there,
>
> I'm writing this email because I want more. I want more not just for myself but out of this life and this world we live in. I'm working for an advertising agency that supports high profile, multi million dollar clients; helping them become even more powerful than they already are.
>
> I got into this business thinking advertising was this necessary evil that was also able to take the power and reputation of well known brands and use that power to help the greater good. Now being in the industry and actually seeing the inner workings of an agency I quickly lost hope in this greedy and competitive environment.
>
> Any advice Brandalists :) ?

A wide array of emails like Mike's and Blake's entered Brandalism's inbox, coming from junior art directors to strategic directors and board members. What holds them together was, on the one hand, an appreciation and confirmation of the disparity between advertising and subvertising, and on the other hand, a refusal to push Brandalism away from itself, instead celebrating Brandalism for what it already is. These are expressions much closer to a desire for Irigary's 'non-appropriative relationships', than to Nancy's 'slick tributes' (Nancy, 2005). The email by Stephanie, an art director at a large London advertising agency, is exemplary here:

Hello there,

I just came across your posters.

I think you are tapping into something very important that I greatly respect you for - not just in the way you are challenging corporatocracy and the way brand marketing is now driving cultural hegemony in the public sphere but importantly how this has become a trap for talented people in the creative industries.

[…]

Anyway, just wanted to reach out and say thanks for all the great entertaining counterculture you've created.

All the best, Stephanie

Stephanie, as she went on to discuss after praising Brandalism, wanted to become part of the collective, as an individual rather than a corporation, hoping to contribute in a way that makes the collective even better at fulfilling its self-proclaimed intentions: 'I don't know how I can help, but if I can I'd love to talk.' (Stephanie, Brandalism inbox, March 2016) By contrast, Susan's celebration of Sylvie's practice carries with it an exchange that desires the dissolution of that practice. At stake with Susan and Sven is a mode of friendship with its own internal logics. Put simply, friends desire the continuation of your way of life, whilst enemies pull you away from it (see Schmitt, 1996). For Susan, becoming friends with Sylvie involves being content with the elimination and exhaustion of those subvertising ideals, practices and imaginations in friction with capital, by encouraging her implicitly to embrace an orientation that matches corporate ideals. Affirmation, as it emerges in advertisers' 'slick tributes', accelerates the willingness to shed one's hostile disposition and to align oneself with a corporate imagination.

This is Marx's moment of 'alienation' (Marx, 2007). For an arrangement (human and non-human)[53] to become meaningful in a capitalist refrain, its social ties and

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[53] Marx's original conception of alienation suggests workers are removed from what they produce, allowing the produced objects to be sold without reference to those who produce it. More recently, a series of scholars have argued for the significance of expanding the concept to include animal alienation (Painter, 2016) and ecological alienation (Foster, 2000).

historical trajectories must be shed. Sven's desire for 'a Brandalism interpretation of our concepts' (Sven, Brandalism inbox, January 2015) is possible only without Brandalism's anti-capitalist edge, without its dedication to challenging and undoing the 'destructive and distractive forces of consumerism,' (Brandalism, 2016a, n.p.) without its desire to operate as autonomously as possible from corporate brands. Only as an 'alienated' object, idea, aesthetic, practice, can subvertising become a mobile asset freed from its antagonistic narratives, its legal dangers, its autonomy, its non-hierarchical ways of organising and its non-corporate performances, that can be slotted into wider schemes of economic assets. The work of affirmation, in which Susan celebrates shared dreams whilst remaining blind to those subvertising histories, narratives and socialities incompatible with capitalist logics, is what it takes to make the alienation of subvertising possible. By drawing subvertisers closer whilst distancing those value forms central to subvertising that are incompatible with capital, affirmative atmospheres offer a sense of advertising-subvertising discrepancies as either absent or irrelevant, thus possibly blunting subvertisers' antagonistic edge. In doing so, they tend to shape an image of subvertising as compatible with capitalist value forms. Thus, affirmation negates. It alienates contestation from itself. Once subvertising is no longer corporate contestation, affirmative atmospheres have done their work – contestation is exhausted.

And yet I remain cautious about overemphasising the exhaustive capacities of affirmative atmospheres. Indeterminacy commands my attention. What of those moments when these same atmospheres are negated by subvertisers? What might appear as smooth sailing is not always so undisturbed. The engineering of an affirmative atmosphere is no magical process; it is not guided by a set of abstract tricks by an all-encompassing unity. It is hard work and it is ragged; producing more (and less) than advertisers like Susan or Sven could possibly imagine. We are thus charged with paying attention to the instances when affirmative atmospheres of amicability fail to prepare subvertising for corporate labour, when those who contest remain nothing (or become nothing) but 'assholes' to the contested.

5.3   I would prefer not to

I met Denise, an advertising consultant and ex-director of an outdoor advertising company, in her Central-Manhattan flat. The flat's walls, tables, chairs, sofas, lamp holders, flower pots – everything was white, even the tiny, barking Maltese poodle. At the time of visiting, the unnervingly white flat also functioned as an office for a new start-up company experimenting with innovative forms of online advertising. Six workers sat around a table, laptops and iPads abound, loudly discussing some Google

Chapter 5

Search graph projected onto the wall. I sat down in the sofa and took a long, deep breath, readying myself to speak to Denise about the idea of art in advertising spaces.

Before I even had the chance to ask her if she was comfortable with me recording the conversation, she instantly offered a personal story of her experiences with subvertising. When Denise still had her own outdoor advertising business, Sylvie was one of those subvertisers sometimes intervening into her advertising spaces. It hadn't bothered Denise much. But then these actions attained a higher frequency – an inconvenience turned into a threat. Denise had to intervene. She kindly offered 'Sylvie and her friends' free access to a number of advertising spaces. In turn, they would be expected to cease their interventions. Already having heard Sylvie's own side of the story but keen to hear Denise's, I asked: 'And how did Sylvie respond?'

> 'She refused. She didn't want any advertising [space]. At first she accepted it but then it became a little conflicting for her because she was sleeping with the enemy, as it were. She didn't want me to have any success whatsoever.' (Denise, June 2016)

Denise's attempt to collaborate with Sylvie requires her to stretch across the difference materialised in Sylvie's assault on advertising space. The attempt at engineering an amicable relationship is therefore made up of a series of unstable and unequal encounters. Differing from, for instance, the conditions of the collective decision-making process in Paris, which rapidly co-constituted possibilities for relations amongst subvertisers, Denise's reaching out to Sylvie is much less smooth and, in effect, much more contested. Here, affirmation offers a regulatory mechanism for bringing-together what are often distant worlds. But it is an imperfect one. Affirmation requires ongoing investment in a relation (as in Susan's case), because, as geographers have written, friendship requires sustained negotiation, where 'affecting and being affected is indeed emotional labour, requiring the production and reproduction, for example, of mutual trust, reciprocal care and fondness.' (Bunnell *et al.*, 2012, p. 499) Sometimes, advertisers give up, and move on, reaching out to other fields of potential (as, presumably, in Sven's instance). Sylvie's refusal did not stop Denise. She told me she found other artists much more open to collaboration, artists who had not previously attacked her spaces, artists, in other words, requiring less affirmative work. At this point in her story, she again returned to her engagements with Sylvie. Now, Denise's tonality shifted registers, becoming less calculated, more prickly. I was at the edge of my seat.

> 'So I personally think Sylvie is an asshole. And Sylvie knows that, I think she's a total asshole. She is, I think at the end of the day [...] I don't think she accomplishes anything. I don't think she accomplishes better art and I don't think she accomplishes a better environment. [...] she was just such a pain in the ass to deal with and she wasn't in a compromising state. She would rather be a poor struggling artist for the rest of her life and as far as I'm concerned that's like a boring place to be.' (Denise, June 2016)

Denise's initial amicability (when she invited Sylvie to cooperate) slipped into spitefulness. Because affirmation relied on the presence of a potential for future collaboration, it has clear limits. It is not wedded to the appreciation of a past activity. Denise confessed never having really been a fan of Sylvie's art practice in the first place: 'She makes ugly art. You could never beautify public space with that.' (Denise, June 2016) What matters more is the possibility for future commercial engagement. Denise cares for Sylvie, in part, because it is her job. It is this mode of affirmation that makes it possible for Denise, when the promise of a collaboration shrunk, to call Sylvie an asshole, indeed, 'a *total* asshole.' (Denise, June 2016)

The anthropologist Lisa Stevenson tells us that to insult someone means 'to assign a social essence, to see someone as a problem.' (Stevenson, 2014, p. 161) If, as Judith Butler (1997) also reminds us, the logic of the insult is to tie someone up into a 'problematic' subject-position through language, then we need to ask what, exactly, is problematic about Sylvie's refusal. It is not just shocking to Denise that Sylvie refuses her invitation, but more broadly, that she does not collaborate in the mutual task of being productive: 'I think at the end of the day [...] I don't think she accomplishes anything.' Later, Denise continued: 'Her mission is just to destroy, not to build anything.' (Denise, June 2016) Something must be deeply wrong with Sylvie; she does not know how to build. She epitomises the shame of unproductivity, or more correctly, the shame of being unproductive on the terms set out by Denise. Failing to cooperate in the duty to desire what Denise desires, to desire an aesthetic object, a valuable object, Sylvie falls beyond the grids of economic intelligibility, beyond what is definable by capital.

Figure 30 - The 'unproductive' logic of subvertising: poster by unknown subvertiser. (London, March 2017)

I have come to think of Sylvie's refusal as aligned with the orientation exemplified in the protagonist of Herman Melville's short story 'Bartleby, The Scrivener'. To any of his boss' requests, always expressed kindly, however grant or minuscule, Bartleby responds in a mild, but firm voice: 'I would prefer not to.' At first his boss ponders: surely, Bartleby must have merely misunderstood my question? But after repeated withdrawals to participate on the part of Bartleby, having finally recognised the dark depths of Bartleby's refusal, the boss became deeply troubled. '[S]uch perverseness – such unreasonableness,' (Melville, 1990, p. 15) he exclaimed, portrayed by such 'lean, penniless wight' (Melville, 1990, p. 14)! What is there to do? At one point, overwhelmed by Bartleby's unforgiving passivity, he snaps: 'Now one of two things must take place. Either you must do something, or something must be done to you.' (Melville, 1990, p. 29) Both Bartleby and Sylvie, in their own ways, can only be cared for if they care to dispense with what is central to their ways of being: their economic pointlessness, their autonomy from a corporate brand. The way that Bartleby's boss cannot possibly grasp Bartleby's outright and 'unreasonable' passivity, the way that Denise negates Sylvie's reluctance to cooperate in the duty to 'produce'; each gestures towards what cannot be encompassed in the engineering of affirmative atmospheres that I have been documenting in this chapter. For contestation to work for advertising, contestation needs to be alienated from itself, from what sits at its heart: its illegal practice, its affects, its socialities, its dreams, and ultimately, its

commitment to an anti-capitalist ontology. Herein lies the difficulty of affirmation, to emerge carefully, step-by-step, negotiating at each point the possibility of encountering the subvertiser as a figure of unforgiving hostility, preferring the cutting and piercing of the linchpin of the advertiser's business – its capacity to advertise – over becoming a corporate worker amicable to the advertiser and her desire to sell.

5.4 Advertisers as insiders

So far, I have sought to trace the interpersonal relations between advertisers and subvertisers, arguing that a series of advertisers are seemingly concerned with engineering affirmative, amicable atmospheres that hope to exhaust and work away what sets subvertising apart from advertising. But it would be erroneous to conceive of these attempts as unique to my fieldwork or the practice of subvertising as such. We might do well 'zooming out' here for a moment.

How, precisely, to become 'friends' with those who contest is a looming concern for advertisers more broadly. Scott Goodson, director of the advertising agency Strawberry Frog, offers a telling example. His book, a business bestseller titled 'Uprising: How to Build a Brand — and Change the World – By Sparking Cultural Movements', starts in Zuccotti Park. Tens-of-thousands are gathered here under the slogan 'We are the 99%' during the Occupy Wall Street protests. Looking around, he asks himself: as a business person, '*[h]ow can I be part of something like that?*' (Goodson, 2012b, p. ix; emphasis in original) In response, the book presents us with a grammar for thinking the monetary virtues of political movements and revolutionary moments. In a related article for Harvard Business Review, he articulates the central question that drives the book: 'So how does a smart business respond in a time of heightened passions and greater activism?' (Goodson, 2012a, n.p.) Become part of the political, Goodson responds. Do otherwise, he asserts, and '[y]our company could end up looking like a 'status quo' brand in a revolutionary world.' (Goodson, 2012a, n.p.) An acquisitive relation to this 'revolutionary world' is a necessity, not solely a possibility. To establish this connection, marketers need to explore paths that turn movements into 'the medium, serving as the ideal channel to carry and spread a message that is authentic and compelling.' (Goodson, 2012b, p. 14) Emphasising the necessity of a careful orientation sensitive to the impending effects of being seen as a corporate 'infiltrator', he writes:

> '[M]arketers should know that movements are about 'insiders' and 'outsiders,'
> and if you're an outsider trying to cozy up to a movement, you may be seen as
> the worst kind of outsider: a possible infiltrator.' (Goodson, 2012b, p. 14)

The tension between being an insider (friend) and outsider (enemy) structures attempts at what I have been referring to as the engineering of affirmative atmospheres. In their affirmative work with subvertising practitioners, advertisers desire to be accepted as 'insiders' in communities of contestation. The secret to becoming an authentic 'insider', to becoming 'a trusted and valued member of the community' (Goodson, 2012b, p. 14), Goodson tells us, is by 'honour[ing] the true goals and values of the movement.' (Goodson, 2012b, p. 56) I have come to think of Scott Goodson's use of the verb 'honouring' as invoking the double sense of the term: as 'showing respect to' *and* as 'giving praise to' an individual or collective. The desire to honour 'movements' speaks to Susan's and Sven's attempts at engaging contestation affirmatively. In Goodson's world, without becoming an ally, without resolving antagonism, the commercial potential of contestation remains buried, the attempts at collaboration doomed to failure. In an attempt to uncover it, a corporate approach of actively keeping a distance or working against contestation is substituted by one that blurs insider/outsider lines. It is advertising's operation in this realm of the affirmative that invokes shared worlds, or, following Goodson's own terminology, invokes 'commons' (2012b, p. 24) constituted by shared ideas, media platforms, resources, information, and more.

But, at the same time, advertisers cannot fully become insiders. They cannot fully become friends; at least not if we understand friendship, following Luce Irigaray's general definition (1996), as a mode of relationality uninterested in orienting the other towards a particular gain. Or, to bring it back to the advertiser's context, they cannot entirely become friends unless they shed their desire to re-direct those who contest away from contestation, as some of the above-mentioned advertising workers reaching out to Brandalism after the installation of posters in front of advertising agencies possibly did. Conversely, Goodson wants professionals to honour Occupy Wall Street, to become their 'friend', but only to the point where it can be sheared from its disgust with financial capitalism, with corporate hierarchies, with wealth acquisition, with labour exploitation.

I am drawn back to Sven's emails and realise that Sven's position as the director of 'The Faction', Black Gulls Breweries' marketing department, is perhaps not coincidental. I sometimes like to imagine, for a moment, the director of finance or accounting at Black Gulls Breweries writing that same e-mail. What might it look, feel

and sound like? As already noted in Section 2.2.2, advertising lies at the core of what Sara Ahmed (2004; see also Jenkins, 2006) terms 'affective economics': an economic mode of operation concerned less with pursuing rational persuasion, and more pertaining to the force of affective tonalities, brand promises, the lure of images, emotional brand attachment, and embodied customer experiences. In that sense, the affective relations with contestation worked towards by some advertisers are compatible with advertising's attempts at engaging (potential) consumers on grounds that exceed argumentation. What's more, a number of the subvertisers I encountered are either currently working in, or used to work in, the advertising industry. The imaginaries of corporate rebellion are what pull many, including my past self, into a professional life in advertising. Advertisers therefore seem happy to position themselves in the in-between; where the commercial and creative, scientific and artistic, corporate and rebellious collide. Their daily tasks demand this. Frank, the advertising planner I interviewed in New York, told me:

> 'You also want to create something which is spikey and not controversial maybe... but in a world of endless media you need to try and cut through. And so being provocative, [...] you need to provoke. And you need to push against something. We talk a lot about having tension in the work, what are you pushing against? [...] You are definitely starting from the risk that you are doing something which is designed to be provocative.' (Frank, June 2016)

Provocation creates enemies, surely, but more importantly, Frank further told me, it creates fans who will fiercely stick their neck out for you in the public realm. Passionate brand fans: every advertiser's dream (Roberts, 2005, p. 176). Like Frank, the creative director of the advertising agency McCann-Erickson already spoke of the need to be 'unexpected' five decades earlier in the industry magazine Advertising Age:

> 'I believe that our biggest risk in advertising is the risk of being expected [...] I believe that effective advertising must be incompatible with an indifferent opinion of a product [...] that it must be interruptive, disquieting, challenging, surprising and unsettling.' (Posey, cited in Frank, 1997, p. 94)

The pull towards provocation might be one extra force holding together advertising and subvertising, placing it alongside the other shared worlds described above (see Section 5.1). And so Sven can proudly mirror Brandalism's COP21 narrative: at Black Gulls Breweries, we are 'creating things that are on the edge and that get us into trouble, even within our own customer base.' He writes in expressions and wordings compatible with Brandalism's own. Can we think of any field of economics more

suited to the role of affirmative translator than advertising? If we follow Stefano Harney and Fred Moten (2013, p. 80) when they argue that 'capital can not know directly the affect, thought, sociality, and imagination' that bring forth contestation (what they call 'the undercommons'), then we might add that advertising presents a unique site where capitalism might meet contestation on its most knowledgeable terms. It realigns possibilities for commercially favourable engagement. It seems unsurprising then that Scott Goodson (2012a; 2012b) directly addresses 'marketers' and 'advertisers' in his manifesto for a 'revolutionary marketing'. Similarly, we should not be surprised that Sven works in the marketing department of Black Gulls Breweries. Without the required 'soft skills' (intuition, vision, sensibilities, etc.; see Thrift, 1997, p. 46), the finance director might produce atmospheres of amicability contaminated with fissures of failure. Advertisers sit at the steering wheel of the intricate labour that is the enabling of amicable atmospheres.

As I have argued so far, advertisers take up a central role in engineering affirmative atmospheres within fields of contestation. At this point I need to make clear, however, that I believe Sven's, Susan's, Goodson's or any advertising professional's affirmative orientations towards contestation are not born of some deep malevolence, or any sinister personal attempt at numbing political formations. And yet, as I have shown, there appears to be a *professional* desire for affirmatively engaging what appears to challenge, materially and linguistically, the industry and its urban spaces. What, I have wondered, explains this desire? Why, exactly, do advertisers keep coming back to contestation? Or, perhaps more precisely, how might we understand the thirst for contestation as a valuable resource?

5.5   Thirst for recuperation

In a 1966 essay entitled 'Conform with the Non-Conformists', advertising agency executive Beverley Corbin announced advertising has to 'do what everyone else isn't doing.' (Corbin, cited in Frank, 1997, p. 95) If in the preceding decades advertisers were expected to blend in, to resist the portrayal of individuality, then in the 1960s, Corbin announced the advertising mantra that would come to define its era: 'Try to stand out like a healthy thumb amidst a bunch of sore fingers.' (Corbin, cited in Frank, 1997, p. 95) The 1960s, of course, also marked the emergence of hippie (counter)cultures across Europe, North America and Latin America. According to the historian Thomas Frank (1997), the 1960s marks a foundational moment in American business' attitude towards rebellion and contestation. Hippie culture became the first of 'countercultures' to become so thoroughly and candidly enrolled into the strategies and aesthetics of advertising culture (see also Wu, 2016, pp. 151-169).

This marked the psychedelic turn of the advertising industry, trading as it did its dull corporate offices for hubs of play and experimentation (drug-related and otherwise), its 'gray flannel suits'[54] for loudly patterned attire and eccentric hair styles, and its business-inspired productions for delirious visuals and typographies (Frank, 1997; Wu, 2016).

Tim Wu, in his book 'The Attention Merchants', explains one of the first expressions of this shift was a Pepsi television commercial which aired in 1969. We see a woman dancing through nocturnal New York, her smooth movements interrupted by abrupt flashes of sound and light, seemingly resembling an LSD-trip (Wu, 2016, pp. 157-158). The commercial is overwhelmingly multi-sensual, an ode to countercultural aesthetics and lifestyles, leaving little space for showing the product, let alone for articulating functional reasons for buying it. And thus, what would have been cast a cultural radicalism in a preceding era, a potential threat to the status-quo lives of business, was slung around as a delightful appearance, a source of possibility to product developers and marketers, something to be tapped into for corporate triumph. '[P]rovided it stayed on its toes and embraced the mass society critique,' from the 1960s onwards, the advertising industry 'could ride the waves of unrest to new heights of prosperity.' (Frank, 1997, p. 118)

In a sense, this attention to and drawing on the countercultural is unsurprising. Many scholars, across disciplines, have noted how capitalist economies are guided by the desire or necessity to 'purify' (Tsing, 2013), 'extract' (Hardt and Negri, 2017; Mezzadra and Neilson, 2017), 'translate' (Tsing, 2015), 'accrete' (Daskalaki and Mould, 2013) or 'commodify' (Castree, 2003; Thrift, 2006) all manners of human and non-human arrangement that might, at first, not appear as within direct reach of capitalist value-production. This includes the atmosphere (Thornes and Randalls, 2007; Pollard *et al.*, 2008), Aboriginal culture (Jackson, 1999a), bodily genes (Parry and Gere, 2006), 'ethnic' aesthetics (Dwyer and Jackson, 2003; hooks, 1992), intimacy (Constable, 2009), diseases (Mallett and Runswick-Cole, 2012) indigenous knowledges (Shiva, 1999), and childbirth (Voigt and Laing, 2010); making them work in the service of capital by enrolling various economic, legal, social, material and

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[54] We see this portrayed very clearly in the Mad Men television series which follows the lives of advertising agency workers on Madison Avenue in the 1950s. Men wear dark, stylish suits with tie, while women are dressed in sequined but soft-toned, knee-length dresses. This attire offers the advertising agency and its employees an air of rationality, tidiness, and reputability.

affective techniques towards turning them into objects of exchange. As a result, capitalist economies are concerned with 'squeez[ing] every last drop of value out of the system,' as Thrift (2006, p. 281) describes. And thus, the philosopher Isabelle Stengers is able to write, capitalism 'is incapable of hesitating, it can't do anything other than define every situation as a source of profit' (Stengers, 2015, pp. 8-9): the mundane, the omnipresent, the catastrophic, the historical, and, indeed, the resistant. We only need to recall Sven's take on Brandalism's COP21 intervention: the welcome revelation of a commercial collaboration. But what, precisely, is the profitable work contestation conducts in service of capital? How does the will to destroy a commodity – the rentable advertising space and the commodities displayed therein – end up serving commodity capitalism?

In a first movement, through its operations of critique, contestation lays bare those historical, social and affective stutters impeding, delaying or diverting the smooth flows and expansion of market operations. In working the edges of capitalist economies, contestation makes them apparent. In the 1960s, for instance, hippie cultures brought to light some of the weaknesses of mid-20th century capitalism: mass-produced conformity, tight social rules, moral puritanism and the tyranny of economic dominance (Frank, 1997, p. 229). While this sentiment may have already presented a series of limitations to capital for an undeterminable time, it is with the forceful articulations of a counterculture that they begin to take shape. It is at this point that they slip beyond the terrain of underground affects and achieve a form sensible to mainstream society and, thus, to capitalist practices. They become recognisable, speakable, and expressible. Contestation is valuable to advertisers even before they seek direct engagement with or even approval from those who contest.

The story of Robert Montgomery shows us what might be at stake in this process. The poet is known for his illicit billboard interventions. His words, capitalised in white across a black backdrop, read like a (post-)situationist manifesto for the abolition of the spectacle:

> 'BECAUSE YOU HAD TO GIVE NAMES TO EVERYTHING YOU FOUND, AND MAKE LOGOS FOR BAD IDEAS, AND CHANGE YOUR CAR EVERY TWO YEARS AND WAKE UP EARLY FOR CONFERENCE CALLS, AND IT TURNED OUT TO BE NO PROGRESS AT ALL /JUST A SHADOW FESTIVAL/ BECAUSE OF THAT YOU WILL HAVE TO LEARN TO LOOK AT THE SKY AGAIN, YOU WILL HAVE TO LEARN TO EAT FOOD THAT GROWS WHERE YOU LIVE AGAIN, YOU WILL HAVE TO LEARN TO TOUCH WHAT YOU MAKE' (Billboard Poem, Robert Montgomery, London, date unknown)

'IT TURNED OUT THIS WAY COS YOU DREAMED IT THIS WAY, COS ALL YOU COULD DREAM IS WHAT YOU SAW IN MAGAZINES AND THIS IS HOW IT FEELS TO WIN, AND HAVE EVERYTHING, ALL THE LUXURY AND POWER YOU EVER WANTED AND STILL FEEL DISGUSTED. RONALD REAGAN BLUES/ A MILLION DOLLAR HOUSE IN L.A./ 5-FUCKING WHITE ANAEMIC STARS MY DARLING AND ALL THE BLOOD AND DUST OF THE WORLD ON YOUR HANDS' (Billboard Poem, Robert Montgomery, London, date unknown)

In March 2016, I walked beneath a bridge in East London and witnessed similar words appear on the same billboards with the same black/white aesthetic. It put a smile on my face: I thought the subvertiser had given up on illicit practices all-together to pursue his contemporary art practice full-time; and yet, here were the same beautiful, striking billboards that had fuelled my interest in the practice years ago.
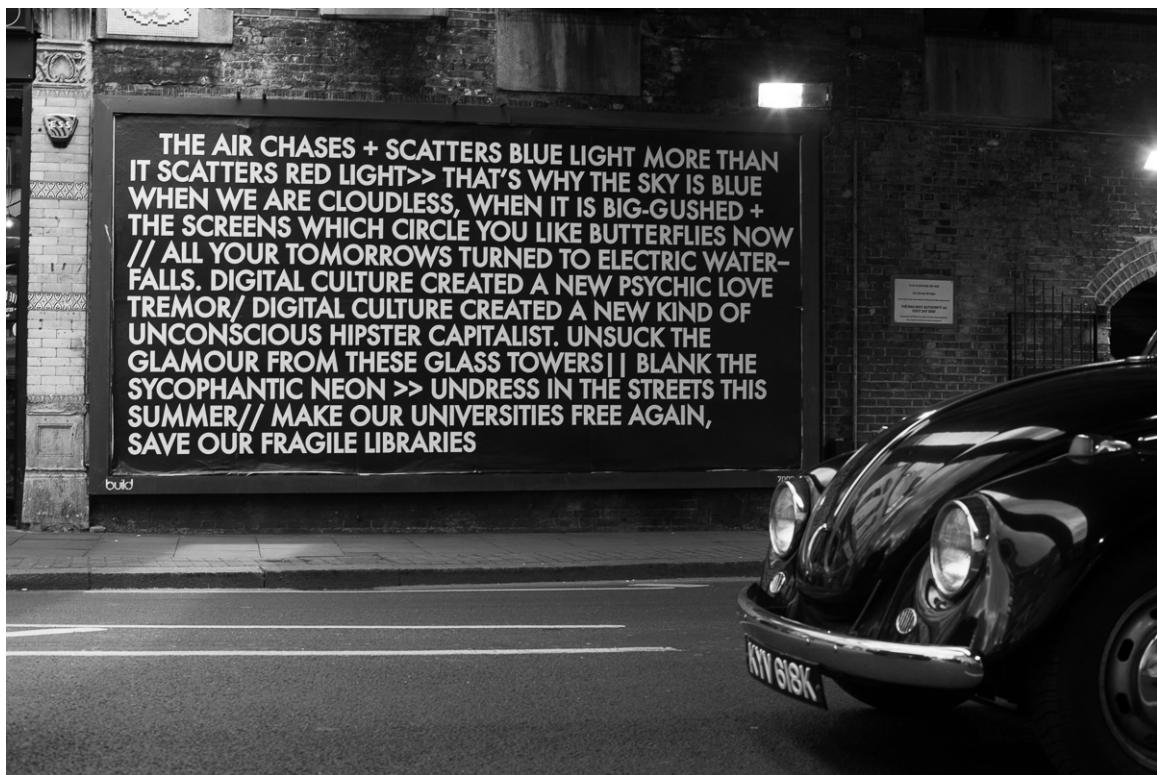
Figure 31 - Robert Montgomery collaboration with Jack Agency. (London, March 2016)

Digging a little deeper that same evening, I was disappointed to find out that the spaces had been legally offered to the artist, effectively stripping the subvertisement of its illicit skin. Refraining from taking legal action, 'a creative out-of-home [advertising] agency' named Jack Agency had invited the subvertiser to contribute to their 'Your Space Or Mine project' – 'an ongoing art initiative that exists to fuel individuality, imagination and open dialogue to provide a powerful platform for artists on the street.' (Jack Agency, 2017, n.p.) In Robert Montgomery's billboards

and their apparent popularity,[55] the outdoor advertising company found an important resource: an insight into where its business falls short. Robert Montgomery, alongside a swath of other subvertisers, makes apparent what the advertising industry has come to call 'advertising fatigue' (Papsadore, 2017): the disillusionment with advertising omnipresence, inauthenticity and tediousness, leading to limited success-rates amongst advertisers. But in Robert Montgomery's illegal billboard poems, the company identified not only its own pitfalls. The artist's subvertisements traced a path beyond them.

In a blog post discussing Robert Montgomery's billboard interventions, JCDecaux (2016, n.p.) writes that outdoor advertising 'is by nature the ideal medium for showcasing art on a large-scale and insert[ing] it in the urban landscape.' Rather than condemning his numerous illicit interventions into their advertising spaces – which they did in Paris during the COP21 Brandalism intervention only a few months before the blog post, when they removed his poster within 24 hours – they discuss the value of a temporary 'outdoor museum' that seems to hold the promise of animating those 'fatigued' with advertising and its incessant impulse to sell. But, 'by turning outdoor into 'artdoor'' (JCDecaux, 2017, n.p.), JCDecaux raises the appeal of its spaces not only amongst passers-by, but equally, and subsequently, amongst advertisers and investors who want these spaces to hold a transgressive, creative edge, something that cuts and tears rather than merely blend into the mundane flux of everyday life. Like graffiti and street art then (Zukin and Braslow, 2011; McAullife, 2012), subvertising here ends up exciting, rather than repelling, existing and potential investors, and others who value the mass appeal and commercial value of JCDecaux's outdoor advertising landscape. What created friction becomes the means by which to circumvent friction, the guarantee of not just the endurance but, in fact, the expansion of market operations beyond its past potential. This is the paradoxical, often unintentional capacity of contestation to enrich the life of corporations, to usher in the re-birth, rather than the death, of capitalist practice.

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[55] His billboard subvertisements have garnered attention from a range of major news platforms (e.g. Battersby, 2012) and arts magazines (e.g. Senn, 2014). During a talk at an arts conference in London, he told us, displaying the popularity of his work, that many people are now actually getting tattoos of his poetry.

Figure 32 - Robert Montgomery's subvertisement as part of Brandalism COP21 intervention. (Paris, November 2015)

By offering money and an artistic medium to the subvertiser Robert Montgomery, and by affirming his illicit contestation, Jack Agency not only responds to the appeal of art in advertising space, it actively positions itself outside of the artist's critique, rendering itself untouchable on the way. The outdoor advertiser, here, displaces itself to become more like the subvertiser and to step away from being the subvertiser's object of critique. Affirming and incorporating contestation, then, makes it more resistant to (future) contestation. And so, in making apparent the limits of capitalism, contestation conducts more than operations of revelation. It carves out sites for intervening into and re-organising stutters within capitalist flows. This we might view as the second movement of contestation. In contestation we find both the revelation of capitalism's limitations, and a promising source of inspiration for overcoming them. Contestation becomes capitalism's vehicle for displacing its own borders. This speculation hinges on what the Situationist International, and later the philosopher Brian Massumi, have conceptualised as 'recuperation' or 'self-recuperation'. Massumi writes:

> '[The] operations of capture 'displace the limit' of capitalism. Every time capitalism approaches its limit and is on the point of crashing once and for all, it finds a new way to capture the inventive, affective- volitional energies ('desires') that have begun to escape from it, and to use them to fuel its own

passage across a threshold of consistency to a new phase of its own process, systematized in a new configuration of its axiomatic. This self-recuperative mechanism is one of the constitutive tendencies of capitalism.' (Massumi, 2015b, p. 120)

In other words, (self-)recuperation speaks to capitalism's faculty to identify contestation and accumulate it to dislodge its own limitations (see also Eagles, 2012), to maintain 'a hold on the perpetual present.' (Culp, 2016a, p. 170) This allows Boltanski and Chiapello to note, '[critique] indirectly serves capitalism and is one of the instruments of its ability to endure.' (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2005, p. 490) This recuperation, this revelation and subsequent overcoming of limitations, offers an uncomfortable site where contestation falls in line with capital, where it accelerates rather than bottlenecks capital.

In helping to tear down traditional branding paradigms, contestation fuels smarter iterations of advertising culture (Holt, 2002; see also Mould, 2015), including 'pre-defaced' adverts that have a false appearance of being subvertised, advertising campaigns circumventing ecological critique (see Parguel *et al.*, 2015 on 'greenwashing' campaigns), and, as with Robert Montgomery, more 'artistic' advertising landscapes. By extension, contestation ignites capitalist cultures more apt to guaranteeing the ongoing expansion of markets. Following these ideas, we might ask: could we say that, perhaps provocatively, capitalist economies depend on arrangements contesting capital? Capital might find in contestation not just a terrain of possibility but the necessary vehicle for the ongoing displacement of its limitations, for the securing of its hunger for expansion, for its self-recuperation. What contests recuperative capitalism, perhaps disturbingly, co-constitutes it.

Figure 33 - Pre-defaced billboard by financial service provider Go Compare. (London, June 2016)
Image by Jonny Hall.

'Recuperative capitalism', as I use it here, offers an extension to 'informational capitalism' (Arvidsson and Colleoni, 2012; Castells, 2010; Fuchs, 2010), 'affective capitalism' (Ahmed, 2004) and 'cognitive capitalism' (Morini, 2007; Moulier-Boutang, 2011), which each depend on particular ways of attending to contemporary economies of value-production. According to these, largely post-Marxist, theories of capitalist economy, the locus of production is no longer (just) situated on agricultural fields, in industrial complexes or in the hands of manual labourers, but is instead diffused throughout the whole of society. The result: a 'factory without walls.' (Negri, 1989, p. 105) The passage beyond the factory arrives with an alternation in the quality and nature of labouring processes: the entry of information, communication, cooperation, social relationships, knowledge, emotion and affect into the life of capitalist labour. But most commonly, these theorisations of capitalist production implicitly draw a line at the 'productive' affective capacities of bodies. But what of negative affective labour? What about the capacity to humiliate, to disfigure, to overthrow, to turn a global convention of world leaders into an embarrassing spectacle?

Recuperative capitalism taps into a broader economy of desire, one which involves both positive and negative passions, as is made clear from the above case studies. It integrates powers to act and powers to destroy into a renewed governance of affects. Further, it is on the level of this affective governance, as I have shown in this chapter, that advertising acts as a primary facilitator of recuperation. It undertakes the labour

of identifying the money-making capacities of forms of contestation and, subsequently, of developing productive paths into them through the engineering of amicable atmospheres. Thus, in recuperative capitalism, advertising's position surpasses the role most post-Marxist descriptions and analyses assign to it as a component in 'the interface that negotiates the relationship between production and consumption.' (Lazzarato, 1996, p. 142; see also Section 2.2) Instead, advertising power emerges as a central affective force intervening into and making profitable the relationship between production, consumption *and* contestation. Advertising makes contestation work for capitalism.

In this chapter I have brought into view human-to-human advertising-subvertising relationships. In particular, I have examined the amicable atmospheres many of these relations are engulfed by. Here, rather than negating forms of contestation, as in Chapter 4, advertising power enrols practices of affirmation – including affirmative gestures, personal amicability, material generosity, and financial rewards – that fold contestation into capitalist schemes, whilst depleting its antagonist heart: its radical ideological framing, meaning-making processes, call for autonomy, and modes of organising. Advertising's closeness to forms of contestation, in terms of its drive towards provocation and its aesthetic and affective sensibilities, what I will call its 'symmetrical' relation to subvertising (see Chapter 6), places it at the core of what I have termed 'recuperative capitalism', offering a site where capital is most comfortable with and capable of making-valuable contestation.

So far, then, the thesis has discussed the need for a conceptualisation of contemporary advertising power as affecting and co-producing social realities beyond its production of consuming bodies and space-times. As I have shown in the present and previous chapter, contestation has becoming part and parcel of contemporary advertising's field of intervention. Through various powers to exhaust, including negative expressions (such as those found in the regime of order) and recuperative engagements (such as the capacity for engineering amicable atmospheres), advertising undermines and wears out the conditions necessary for the endurance of counter-imaginaries and their capacities to push everyday life beyond capitalist functionings, subjectivities, and value-systems.

But we need to remain wary of any overarching narratives of advertising's powers to exhaust, and ask: what mode of advertising-subvertising contestation, if any, outlive the exhaustive, recuperative drive of capitalism and one of its central facilitators, advertising? In the next chapter, I investigate this question. I start from those

subvertising forms indifferent to the promise of recognition, always-already reluctant to engage advertising in the affirmative, deserting the advertising-subvertising entanglements described at the beginning of this chapter. They, too, inhabit the richness of subvertising. Remaining in the shadows, they become apparent only with a simple material trace: a shattered screen, an anonymous puddle of paint, a glitched LED display. No names, no aliases, no recognition, no aesthetic desire, no media fame. Their practitioners have turned Bartleby's 'I would prefer not to', which we already witnessed briefly in this chapter, into a much deeper politics of refusal – a stubborn disengagement from the social, a total and fierce negation of affirmation. Paying close attention to the figure of the Vandal offers a glimpse of what lies behind a practice celebrated by media channels and advertisers alike, of what lies behind 'affirmative politics' (e.g. Braidotti, 2002; Moss, 2014) or 'affirmative experimentation' (e.g. McCormack, 2010; 2012); a glimpse of an *outside* to advertising-subvertising relations. Before entering the Vandal's worlds of anonymity, sabotage, and withdrawal, I narrate a short story about a third, and final, refrain of the powers to exhaust, where advertisers cease to engage contestation in an affirmative register, where camaraderie and smiles wither, making space for an affective underworld that is much more hostile, much darker, sinister even.

Interlude: A story of paranoia

Paranoia: *1. (n) Any unjustified or excessive sense of fear. 2. (n) (medicine) A delirium, dementia, or other disorder affecting the function of the mind.*[56]

Without the affirmation of celebratory emails or free lunches, the atmosphere darkens. These are moments when atmospheres of amicability are overshadowed, shattered even, by those of animosity. Here, advertisers care for nothing but absolute exhaustion: the downfall of subvertising. While advertisers' hostility is sometimes exclaimed publicly in newspaper articles or social media outbursts, often it takes up a life so hidden, so subtle, its very existence is questioned. But, at times, the concealed quality of a hostile arrangement, the uncertainty of its existence, renders it all the more daunting and sinister. At their sharpest edge, such atmospheres induce a paranoid relation to worlds of advertising and beyond, one under which I too succumbed so devastatingly one late night in the early summer of 2018.

I recall the night all too vividly. It was just past 10 p.m. when I walked up to my local off-license shop to buy some forgotten groceries. I recognised it from 100 feet away: that same white van that had been parked below my window was stood there, engine running, its headlights beaming in my direction. So many nights that month, it had blasted music so loud it severely broke up my sleep. And now here it was again. Still inside his van, the driver looked up from his phone, eying at me as I entered the shop. Just as I walked out, assuring myself that, surely, him being there *again* was merely coincidental, he drove off gently. I walked away rapidly, and just as I had decided that there was nothing to worry about, that he was just some guy who happens to visit the same places, he drove up slowly behind me. I didn't dare look up but I could sense that his eyes were, again, turned in my direction. I shivered. The doubt of the previous moment vanished: I was *actually* being followed. I broke into a run, through the grass, over the car park, dashed up the flights of stairs (how endless they seemed!), finally slamming the door behind me. Slowly, head in hands, I settled back against the door, sagging lower and lower until, eventually, I sat down, the room

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[56] Definition retrieved from Oxford English Dictionary. Available at: http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/137550?redirectedFrom=paranoia#eid

vibrating with each heartbeat pulsating gravely in my throat. *I swear I could hear someone standing on the other side of the door.* He had actually followed me.

I didn't dare raise myself to glance through the door viewer. 'Go awaaaay,' I muttered between my teeth. Was he really there? It was too late to double-lock the door now, he would hear it, and all I wanted was to remain dead, dead still. On hands and knees I crawled to the bedroom. 'Ok,' I told myself, stalking around the room, 'ok, this is actually happening.' What do I do? No one could help me. I didn't dare call anyone because they'd say what they always say when I tell them something deeply unsettling is taking place. I have been listening to these words for months now. They'd say I am confusing the real with the imagined, genuine threats with psychotic fabrications.[57] They'd say I'm hallucinating. They'd say I'm obsessed with the painful fantasy of self-importance. 'No, your body is not the epicentre of an expensive, secret, and elaborate plot, mounted carefully against the subvertising community. No, no one is tapping your phone; no one is following you, no one is tracking your movements, don't you see, Thomas, these are just people living their normal, everyday lives.' Either way, they'd retreat into a careful pause, and then say: 'I think you're getting paranoid.'

I would sneer at them: 'I am tormented, yes, deeply so, but please, don't even for a second think I desire your pity. In fact, what you call paranoia, I call consistency – the greatest of all analytic skills. What you degradingly call a detachment from the here and now, I can only describe, like the supposedly paranoid protagonist of Edgar Allan Poe's 'The Tell-Tale Heart' did, as the reverse: a way of relating to the real that 'sharpened my senses—not destroyed—not dulled them' (1978, p. 792), sharpened, perhaps, beyond the possibility of narrow perception, so that it finally became sensitive to the manifold details that make up social worlds.' And so I would repeat, with great pleasure and pride, the words of William Burroughs: 'The paranoid is the person in possession of all the facts.' (Burroughs, cited in Harper, 2008, p. 1) Unashamed, I'd go on, whether they'd want to hear it or not, and exclaim that the great philosophers have shown us, over and over again, how the world is as precarious as it is unpredictable. How are they so firmly certain, then, of their own

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[57] As Kathleen Stewart tells us, the paranoid world 'hums with the possibility that the uncanny is real.' (Stewart, 1999, p. 16) Thus, paranoia bursts the division between the real and the imagined: what is imagined becomes what it sensed, and what is sensed what is imagined (Paradis, 2007).

narrowly-conceived image of the world, so bounded by a preconception always already deciding what is possible and what isn't? How stubbornly they hold on to their modernist monomania with reason, with 'the (pure) idea.' (Stewart, 1999, p. 19) How easily they entrap themselves.

That night, I was left to my own devices. Hyper-alert (the rustle of leaves or the man's movements in front of my door?) and feeling feverish, I tried to recall how all this had even started. There was of course, first, that evening in December 2016. It had kicked off as a night like many Donna and I had seen before. The community centre was packed for our subvertising workshop, as it always was; people were engaged, as they usually were. And then, mid-way my talk on the theory informing subvertising practice, two men arrived late. They slotted in the background and kept to themselves, didn't mingle with any other participants. I didn't think much of it until later, when during the practical part of the workshop, they spoke for the first time. 'Are you thinking of doing any digital billboard takeovers?' Slightly uncomfortable, Donna responded after a moment of silence: 'No, no, these are legally a wholly different thing. What we're doing is closer to criminal damage…' As people gathered after the workshop, the two same men – perhaps ten to twenty years older than the average crowd – approached us with a certain sense of urgency. 'Can we have your full name?' Donna, by now severely suspicious, responded: 'Erm, no, I don't see why you'd want that.'

Back at home, not knowing what to do, I rang a friend and talked her through the details: the layout of the evening, the men's looks, their not-so-subtle questioning, how they had wrenched as much information as possible, and how they had this peculiar determinacy and sharp arrogance in their voices. 'Private investigators,' she responded curtly, and added, before I had taken in what that actually meant, 'prepare for a raid.' In bed afterwards, I was terrified to the point of sickness, helplessly burying myself beneath my blankets, aware that the night might well end with a 3 a.m. knock on the door that would change everything. I imagined thunderous shouting, echoing through the building: *'Police! Open up…'* The mere thought chilled my blood.

But that's not all. There was also the night when Oliver, during one of his subvertising adventures, was followed and beaten up brutally by two anonymous men who

screamed: 'Stay the hell away from our spaces!'[58] Or the instance when, a few months later, Donna hadn't even finished installing her first poster when, as if out of thin air, a JCDecaux maintenance worker emerged and chased us down the road; a sign, surely, of their tracking of our movements and their tapping of our phones, the surveillance methods enrolled daily by contemporary governments and corporations alike.[59] I went on and flipped through the many more memories troubling me at present, finally uttering to myself, in hushed tones, the old maxim by which I am forever haunted: 'Just because you're paranoid doesn't mean they aren't out to get you.'

When I finally fell asleep that night, I dreamt deliriously, slipping in and out of wakefulness. I was dazzled by nightmarish images of empty parking lots, where death dwelled, me running amongst terrible shapes, to the sound of disembodied voices of friends morphing into alien, mesmerising rhythms of electronic beats. I woke up twice, struck by a wave of nausea, certain I could hear music blasting from below again. Hardly able to stand, I peeked through the curtain. There was no one in sight. As if the van had never been there.

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[58] This event was recounted to me in person by Oliver, a subvertiser in Paris, at an arts exhibition in March 2017.

[59] Monitoring mobile phone usage (including text messages and phone calls) is a known surveillance tactic employed by states, criminal organisations, and corporations (see Samatas, 2007).

Interlude

Figure 34 - View from window. (London, July 2018)

Unlike ordinary fear, paranoia has no object whose removal would dissolve discomfort (Garrett, forthcoming). Paranoia is a deeply embodied manifestation of fear infiltrating the body, latching onto it, shifting the central impulse away from a particular object, subject, event, and onto the thinking and sensing body itself. In paranoid worlds, the imaginative body performs the primary labour, becoming both the subjugator and subjugated of anxiety. For some, this is the dreadfulness of paranoia: it self-replicates by being perpetually and unavoidably swept up by the endless possible connections to be drawn between all the phenomena that make up one's social, material and mental world. For others, this is exactly its exhilarating appeal. The perpetrator of a paranoid atmosphere has no need to remain present in order to guarantee its capacity to affect. These are the moments when paranoia finds ways of emerging as part of a calculated endeavour, becoming the embodied and psychic toll of corporate infiltration and intimidation.

In the case of direct intimidation, one might find solace in the limitations set by a recognisable form. When Brandalism received a 'cease and desist letter'[60] from a large

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[60] The legal term 'cease and desist letter' refers to a document delivered to an institution, business or individual to refrain from purportedly illegal activity and from restarting it.

outdoor advertising company, it knew (with the guidance of legal advisors) within days what, exactly, the legal threat entailed, the legal grounds both parties stood on, the probability of future legal action, and how best to respond. By contrast, when set out to produce paranoid bodies, the advertiser operates precisely on the premise of confused encounters, where thought fails to make sense of particular affective formations, bounding itself only by the dark possibilities of imagination (Woodward, 2014, p. 23). No longer the property of an outlined action, subject or object, threat here dwells in treacherous everyday landscapes – the lingering eyes of a passer-by, anonymous messages scrawled on your neighbourhood's walls, strangely rearranged papers on your desk, an unfamiliar Facebook friend request, little notes discovered on your way to work, sounds of clicking interfering your phone calls, greasy fingerprints on your windows, a recurring white van in the gloom of night.

Unconcerned with direct intimidation, a paranoid politics relies on the discreteness of withdrawal. If advertising commonly relies on making itself visible – floating proudly above highways, painting otherwise grey-toned city life in bright colours, and sporting LED backlights to overcome the anonymity of the night – then what I witnessed that night of the workshop was an ordeal much more diffuse, reliant on the appeal of ambiguity, a shadiness uncommon to the otherwise customer-oriented methodologies of advertising. What do the private investigators want? When or where might they strike again? What else are they capable of (especially given that they are hired by corporations with unimaginable spending capacities)? Who else is involved? This is the advertiser at work without advertising panels, without glossy images or snappy linguistic puns, the advertiser unconcerned with advertising, with drawing attention, with announcing itself. This is an (non-)advertiser at once far away – never capable of being fully grasped – and close-by, forever present in the possibility of its exercise of influence; a delirious blend of omnipresence and absence. The result is a labyrinth of hostile appearances so totalising, so stifling, any attempt at exiting appears utterly futile, the naïve fantasy of a madman. The only imaginable resort: to put down one's weapons and dream of a future when all this will have blown over.

The letter warns legal action, in the form of suing, might be taken if no action is undertaken by the time of the deadlines outlined in the letter.

Part three. The outside

Chapter 6

'Images of happiness, tried and true sensations, kind words, smooth surfaces, familiar feelings and the innermost intimacy, in short, narcosis by the pound and above all: no war, above all, no war.' (Tiqqun, 2010a, p. 11)

6 In praise of the Vandal

6.1 A crime scene

We are carried away by the push and pull of London traffic. I lean my head against the window glazed with condensation. The cold night passes by anonymously as blurs of light and dark. I look around me: everyone is either asleep or pretending to be. Like New York – I remember a hotel chain once claiming in its bus shelter adverts – London is a city that never sleeps. And yet, here we are, surrounded by quiet bodies, exhausted bodies, drifting off into the night. Unbelievable as it seems, it can be in a bus packed with people that one experiences the unimaginable solitude of city life.

I step out of the bus, shaking with cold. 'Oh sh*t!' a man screams, pointing at my feet: I am surrounded by a fractured carpet of tiny shards glistening in the glow of bus shelter light. I look up at the advertisement. The light bulbs are trembling erratically, like unnerved stroboscopic lamps, casting a delirious veil onto the scene – on and off, on and off, on and off. Where the tiny shards once made up a smooth surface, there is now a gaping emptiness embraced by fractions of glass hanging like loose teeth from the steel advertising frame. Everyone who got off the bus with me has disappeared. Cars and motorbikes swirl past, unknowing and uncaring. I keep standing there, engulfed by the visceral, unworldly scene pulsing around me. The scene is devoid of any human traces: no bodies, no statements, no reasons, no demands. And yet, it is brimming with energy. Herein lies the terror no less than the attraction of the crime scene: the vitality it leaves behind; smears of bright red, shiny objects that pierce and cut (whenever I see a shattered window I swear I can hear the shattering) and, above all, so many unknowns – the what-happened, the who-done-it, the why-done-it, the how-done-it. Unknowns are horrifying without the promise of their resolution (see Bauman, 2006, p. 55, pp. 94-95), when they perpetually withdraw into the terrifying darkness that is the *unknowable.*

Who or what could have done such a thing?

I sit down to begin to solve the riddle of the crime scene so violently disarranged around me. Is this the result of a stretched-out battle between the Vandal (victor) and the Advertisement (vanquished), or the outcome of a single knock-out blow? The first seems more likely. And there must, surely, have been a weapon. Amongst other material defences enrolled in the regime of order (see Section 4.3), outdoor advertisers proudly celebrate their vandal-proof lightboxes and digital screens,

resistant to human and environmental assault. One promotional video[61] shows an advertising employee running towards a screen, wielding a heavy chunk of wood high above his shoulder, before throwing his full weight into slinging the projectile into the centre of the screen… Nothing. After a dozen attempts, the weapon merely bouncing off, again and again, he walks away panting, but smiling, looking one last time over his shoulder at the indestructible façade, before stepping out of frame. And yet, here lie the remnants of a blasted-out panel. I imagine someone beating the centre of the screen with a brick. The assailant is breathing loudly in fits; restless but focused – one weapon, one prey. But to what end?

Figure 35 - Ad black block: glass carpet around shattered bus shelter advert. (Paris, September 2016) Image by Steffi.

When I got back home, I wrote in my research diary: is this subvertising? It mattered, I thought. A victim of the ethnographer's gaze, I was certain there had to be a series of subjects, intentions, statements, rehearsals, a bedrock of explanation, behind the scenes that so forcefully swirled around me, ones that could be traced, if not back to

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[61] See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nzr0aao2SF0

their clear articulations, then at least to their presence in some concealed shape or oblique form. I began digging. I called on Donna, Steve, John, Sylvie, Marco, and others to ask if they knew of anyone assaulting advertising space in this fashion. Donna knew two people, named Nicolas and Dan, but they had left London months ago. I reached out to them anyway. No response. I followed a few other traces, but each time, I was stopped in my tracks. I felt like Kafka's protagonist in 'An Imperial Message' (Kafka, 1971), trekking his way out of the vastness of an imperial castle, climbing up endless flights of stairs, crawling through plenty underground passages, and running across open empty spaces – every step getting closer simultaneously pushing him one step back away from the exit, the outermost gate perpetually remaining postponed, forever withdrawn. *This email account that you tried to reach does not exist.* Again and again, silence. *Please, speak to me.* I'd love to hear what you have to say. *Please? Please...* Silence. There I was, trying to hold on to the promise of ethnography, desperately digging for tracks of communication to uncover. I had reached ethnography's limits.

What a shock it was then when, after a quick internet search, I found hundreds of newspaper articles documenting surges in attacks on bus shelter advertising. They denounce advertising destruction as 'senseless', 'unruly', probably the work of frustrated youth with too much time on their hands. These youths, according to the media articles, are the sons and daughters of broken homes, the 'children without fathers' (Jones, 2012, p. xix), who find solace in wandering the streets together brazenly, causing mayhem wherever they travel; who personify the drama of failed education and lacking discipline, sacrificing themselves and, most importantly, sacrificing others on their mad pursuits through the city. They're devilish figures, who arrive in the depth of night and leave before the sun rises. Whose kids are these? All I can tell is that they make the blood boil of authorities and the public alike. We lack the grammar for making sense of and dealing with these unique perversities. But what is it about their assaults that outrages so vehemently? Is it the failure to take up responsibility, bodies disappearing as rapidly as they strike, leaving in their wake a terrifying anonymous monster? Is it their infuriating refusal to speak, to carefully communicate demands?

These 'selfish vandals,' decries one newspaper (Wigan Today, 2017, n.p.), 'are repeatedly wrecking a bus shelter.' *Vandals,* now here's a delightful term! Wherever around the world destruction prevails over advertising space, journalists are ready to shout *Vandalism! Vandalisme! Vandalizëm! Vandalismo! Vandalství! Vandalizmus! Vandalismus!* I must say, I have become affected by the term. And even more so once I delved into its etymology. The Vandals, an East Germanic group of tribes, fled into

the Roman Empire after a series of battles with the Huns and Visigoths. The aggravating relation between the Romans and the Vandals erupted with the Vandals' ransacking and looting of Rome in the fifth century. The Romans, devastated by what they saw as 'senseless destruction' of property and art, wrote texts that synonymised the word 'Vandal' with barbaric destruction and defacement. Deleuze and Guattari turn this insulting depiction into an alternative image. For them, the Vandals are an exemplary case of the war machine, the hero of their book 'A Thousand Plateaus' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987; Culp, 2016b, p. 22). The migratory war machine of the Vandals produce 'lines of flight', where the Vandals 'come in off the steppes, venture a fluid and active escape […] launch flows whose quanta heat up and are swept along by a Stateless war machine' against the violence of the 'rigid segmentarity of the Roman Empire, with its center of resonance and periphery, its State, its pax romana, its geometry, its camps, its limes (boundary lines).' ([sic] Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, pp. 222-223)

Is the advertising Vandal,[62] whose ambiguous traces stuck with me until long after that hazy night in London, the contemporary of Deleuze and Guattari's Vandals, striking and defacing with a savage roughness, speaking barbaric words foreign to the language of the polis? Is the advertising Vandal to advertising what the Vandals were to the Roman empire? In which case, might it present an alternative to the advertising-subvertising contestation I have highlighted in Chapter 5 and that I will, at the end of this chapter, call 'symmetrical antagonism' (The Invisible Committee, 2015, p. 156)? If so, then the Vandal's nihilistic drive, a force that negates above all else, might perhaps offer a glimpse of advertising's transcendence, that is, a world *outside of advertising* and its exhaustive, recuperative reach. Let us start by delving a little deeper into the crime scene – how might we make better sense of the fleeting bodies that are the perpetrators of the crime?

6.2 Observation 1: Missing perpetrator

How naturally we name things, concepts, events, and people. We credit them with qualities, identities, and narrative structures. Many contemporary philosophers and cultural theorists trace the urge to name and lock into distinctive identities back to

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[62] From now on, in this chapter, I will refer to 'subvertisers' to denote those practitioners we have encountered before, such as Brandalism, Donna and Sylvie, whilst using 'the Vandal' to speak of those who, which will become clear in this chapter, operate by a different logic of (dis)engagement with advertisers.

Kant and, even further back, to Descartes, both of whom 'rendered encounter and society metaphysically secondary to the stable identity of the individual *ratio*.' (Saldanha, 2010, p. 2418; emphasis in original) But 'the ascription of body, the imposition of bounded and enclosed self-possession' (Harney and Moten, 2017, p. 166) is not only the remit of ontology, but also that of power. Foucault (1982) and Tiqqun (2011b, pp. 161-163; 2010a), amongst others, have written about how the assertion of identities and qualities delimits experience by setting out framings to 'integrate' ourselves into, and that incorporate themselves into us; restraining our capacities for becoming (otherwise).

Advertising is one industry amongst many that has its own commercial stakes in the identity game. The subject is a profitable fiction that advertising is more than happy to write. On the one hand, advertising appropriates bodies' desire to have an identity, to be recognised and known as an individual, identifiable subject. Bodies' urge to narrate their own individual stories, to share their ways of thinking, feeling, acting, and consuming with others (including corporations), allows advertisers to know and appropriate profitable qualities of definable bodies. It is no wonder that psychoanalysts and psychology graduates populate the floors of advertising agencies; expert namers of the 'teenage girl', 'aspiring single', 'prudent pensioner', 'busy mom' (see Elmer, 2004). They work alongside survey experts, professional qualitative interviewers, neuro-scientific researchers and online data analysts in marketing research companies to first identify the most promising 'consumer profile', to then investigate its qualities and, finally, to invent creative ways of inserting advertising and its products into its assumed lifeworlds. Without people's urge towards transparency, towards sharing information about themselves with others (including intentionally and unintentionally with corporations), advertising fails to undertake research and, subsequently, lacks the knowledge needed for effectively intervening into the lives of (potential) consumers. Information is the oil that keeps the operations of advertising running. As Blanchot (1981, p. 42) says: 'We can't do anything with an object that has no name.' It becomes an inaccessible form. It becomes nothing.

On the other hand, advertisers produce recognisable, identifiable subjects. In actively assigning qualities and lacks to bodies in their advertising texts, sounds and images, advertisers create and re-create identities (see for instance Section 2.2.1 on advertisers' production of gendered identities). In this sense, the recognition of a self-possessive, identifiable subject is not only advertisers' necessity, but also a field for further acceleration. Identity is both the requirement and making of advertisers.

Chapter 6

Given power's investment in identity, could it be that with disappearance and withdrawal presence swells? Against 'compulsory visibility' (Culp, 2013), Tiqqun writes: 'The more I am anonymous, the more I am present.' (2010a, p. 206) But there is something thoroughly counterintuitive about this logic. Judith Butler (1997, p. 123) argues that 'naming is an act that precedes my will, an act that brings me into a linguistic world in which I might then begin to exercise agency at all.' Echoing this sentiment, Lisa Stevenson tells us that 'there can actually be no physical survival, no feeding of the body, without that prior linguistic life, without being given a name […] to survive one must be given a name.' (Stevenson, 2014, p. 109) Once I am named, I can say: 'I am, I exist, I am recognized.' (Stevenson, 2014, p. 182) In this view, to create a space of visibility is to claim a formed 'self', a formed 'we' and ultimately, a political territory. Passing through this space is conceived of as the struggle for recognition. How, by contrast, might the withdrawal from naming make-present bodies? Taking up 'anonymous singularities' is the creation of 'an experience which will not be immediately flattened out by a binary machine assigning a meaning/direction to it, a dense experience that can transform desires and the moments where they manifest themselves into something beyond desire, into a narrative, into a filled-out body.' (Tiqqun, 2010b, p. 50) 'Abandon' is reborn as 'abundance.' (Nancy, 1993, p. 36) Naming, here, arises as 'an aggressive act, a performative coup de force, summoning into existence something not ready, not able, or not willing to be born.' (Harrison, forthcoming)

At first glimpse, the majority of subvertisers affirm the withdrawal from identity, operating as most do without reference to a personal name, to a clear figure. However, for the subvertiser, it is not the face, the body or the (personal) name that is the guarantor of identity, but a created persona, an aesthetic production that may or may not be collective. How far are they removed here from the logic of advertisers? Are advertisers, too, not reliant on a crafted image, a text, a set of propositions and colour schemes, in no doubt in excess of a single face, a single name? Anonymous singularities come in different shades: as aliases, as nicknames, and as no-names.

Michael Taussig helps us navigate these differences. As he tells us, '[a]n alias tends to act as camouflage, to be as undistinguished as possible (e.g. Jack Smith), while a nickname is theatrical, a flashing light intended, for one reason or another, to stand out.' (Taussig, 2012, p. 117) He continues: '[Nicknames] partake of the magic of doubling and enlarge the theatricality of our world.' (Taussig, 2012, p. 125) The nickname is not the opposite or dissolution of the name as a unique identifier, but its intensification: the expanded desire to stand out, to cut out a recognisable territory. Brandalism or Harry Williams – which is most likely to be remembered? Indeed, the

desire to be recognised and recognisable by alias, form and aesthetic, in other words, by 'brand', as I have already noted (Section 5.1), is one of the urges tangling subvertising to advertising. If most subvertisers prefer to veil their face, their true name, and in doing so, dramatise their being, then the advertising Vandal takes an extra leap, preferring anonymity, one that actively withdraws, blasting the very logic of naming in order to assert itself. The Vandal: possessor of all names and no names. It is less concerned with asserting an oppositional political identity (of 'anti-advertiser') and more an antagonistic movement against 'politics as the governing fantasy of realizing, in an always indefinite future, Imaginary identities foreclosed by our constitutive subjection to the signifier.' (Edelman, 2004, p. 17)

Figure 36 - Stone and shattered glass panel. (London, June 2018) Image by Andreas.

There is something deeply vulgar about repelling one's name, that mooring of identity we tend to think of as immutable. The unnamed body that flees all that should be enclosed by the Kantian and Cartesian notion of the human conducts something akin to the withdrawal from life – linguistic suicide is existential suicide. What is left is an alien, alienating presence, a dark blur both unfamiliar and presumably threatening, a sinister force that might emerge and disperse at the blink

of an eye, leaving in its traces nothing but inhuman(e) carnage. The Vandal's withdrawal is so antagonistic to recognition, to identity, that one barely recognises its products as human, that is, as involving human activity. The passer-by is left to wonder, who or what would desire such fierce absence? Only something monstrous…

Being reduced to an object, a worthless vandal, in newspaper articles and board roams alike, is not the failure of the Vandal but its precondition, what it actively celebrates rather than denounces. This involves following Smith (2016, p. 118) when he writes: 'When the demand is to 'treat people like people' this means ignoring the ways in which the world determines who gets seen as a person and who is not extended that privilege.' Given that advertising is invested in the production of subjectivity and identities (Lazzarato, 2014, p. 40), and therefore by extension, with determining what counts as (the) human, to remain dedicated to the category of the distinct and self-determined human, is to remain invested in subjects as consumer subjects, commercial subjects, capitalist subjects. And so, staying with the nothingness assigned to it in newspaper articles and elsewhere (*Scum! Dirty vandals! Nobodies!*)*,* the Vandal prefers to inhabit the abyss, where subjects never form into wholly unified selves, let alone universalise into sovereign bodies. Instead, and contrasting the supposed human subjectivity of the nameable and identifiable advertiser and subvertiser, the Vandal appears to happily fold into the more-than-human (or less-than-human).

In escaping notions of humanity that have their roots in Enlightenment thinking, the Vandal desires to embrace and elaborate geographers' (Anderson and Wylie, 2009; Bennett, 2010; Dewsbury *et al.*, 2002; Dewsbury and Bissell, 2015; Roberts, 2014; Ruddick, 2017; Simpson, 2017) and others' claims towards the 'distributed agency' of bodies as a process spread across encounters between mind, body, and context. Anonymity takes this distribution as more than an ontological whim, instead living it as an existential impulse towards blurring the one and another, exterior and interior, action and reaction, into a collective embrace. Against the logic that sees the world as made up of identifiable and nameable discrete subjects (and objects), complete anonymity celebrates a world in which transcendental conditions cease to make sense, a world demanding, according to Andrew Culp, a 'strategy of nothingness':

> 'Nothingness will reign when the soul annihilates the transcendental conditions that enable all interiority. In this sense, nothingness is not the indulgence of destructive appetites but the making-possible of new ones. Such is the state of war against the perpetual present; at a certain moment, nothing becomes everything.' (Culp, 2013, n.p.)

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Anonymity blurs to the point of indistinction, ridding bodies of their interior. Blurring into indistinctness is a *generic* strategy, in the sense the philosopher Francois Laruelle refers to the term, that operates by way of subtraction. As Alexander Galloway writes:

> 'The generic is not achieved by way of adding something to the real, adding a true life on top of a false one, an authentic existence on top of a profane one. On the contrary, the generic is achieved by subtracting the many definitional predicates that exist within reality.' (Galloway, 2014, p. 198)

Operating by full-blown anonymity, folding into the generic, is a self-sacrificial method 'because an entity (or person) must abandon parts of the specificity of its own givenness, even if only by small increments.' (Galloway, 2014, p. 201) For some concerned with a politics of difference (see Zurn, 2016), blurring into the generic 'imposes a commonality upon different bodies' (Sullivan, cited in Zurn, 2016, p. 29) that problematically dissolves the stakes of race, ability, gender, and sexuality. However, the kernel for theories of 'afro-pessimism' (Hartman, 1997; 2003; Sexton, 2008; 2011; 2016; Sharpe, 2016; Spillers, 2003; Wilderson, 2010) and 'queer negativity' (Bliss, 2015; Edelman, 2004) lies in figuring generic identity as a response to, rather than a dismissal of, the violence perpetuated by material, symbolic segregation (sexism, racism, speciesism, ableism). The generic renders invalid the vicious circle of distinction, as they see it as unavoidably enwrapped in circuits of domination and exclusion. Self-disidentification is the circuit-breaker detaching bodies from the delimitation of any presumed identities or attributes. The self-disidentified body pursues 'endless desertion' (Tiqqun, 2011b, p.56), 'absolute dereliction' (Fanon, cited in Wilderson, 2003, p. 26), escaping from conceptions of the Self, and subsequently, from those who wish to track, to profit. In this regard, what the Vandal retreats from is not only self-recognition, but equally the profitability of self-recognition outlined above. And thus, the Vandal pursues a double dissolution: of the self into a collective and of that collective itself, withdrawing forever from a tendency to be known, to be located, to be recognised. Against the possibility of an identifiable position, the Vandal is 'indifferent to *being any particular way at all.*' (Hostis, 2017, n.p.; emphasis in original) The Vandal then adheres to what philosopher Elizabeth Grosz (2002, p. 471; emphasis in original)

calls 'a politics of *imperceptibility*, leaving its traces and effects everywhere, but never being able to be identified with a person or an organization.'[63]

Figure 37 - Vandalised LinkNYC digital advertising screen. (New York, January 2018) Image by Sylvie.

They will therefore not be found seeking public recognition for their declared opposition to advertising. By contrast, they work in direct opposition to the possibility of amassing (brand) 'ambassadors', (brand) 'fans' or (brand) 'followers' around a fabricated (counter-)identity. There are no heroes or heroines. No exceptionally brave bandits of the night skilfully getting away with their playful, but daring subversions. No youthful rebels applauded by journalists, a liberal mainstream public or, indeed, by advertisers like Sven and Susan. There is only a generic identity that has no virtue but the fact of the event of the crime scene itself: broken light bulbs, split cables, smashed windows, and above all, the unfathomable absence of the perpetrator.

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[63] We might ask here, to defy the final frontier of contemporary visibility, does the Vandal commonly go as far as masking its face from CCTV cameras, as some did in the UK (The Shields Gazette, 2002)? Does it leave its ever-traceable phones at home, shedding all possible links to contemporary surveillance technologies? We can only speculate.

6.3   Observation 2: Motivation oblique

'[W]e can only speak in enemy territory.' (Blanchot, 2010, p. 86)

Words carry well-composed images of empowerment. Think of the collective chants of protesters, the radical manifestos of avant-garde collectives, the bullet-points of party programmes, or the national encouragement of a presidential speech. Surely, no one could declare words redundant? And yet, this is exactly what is at stake if we follow Deleuze when he writes of the imperative to communicate: 'Repressive forces don't stop people expressing themselves but rather force them to express themselves.' (Deleuze, 1995, p. 129) Paul Harrison similarly condemns 'the incessant demand placed upon us, as citizens, as consumers, as representative cultural subjects and as biopolitical entities […] to have and to communicate our allegiances, views and opinions.' (Harrison, 2009, n.p.) The problem with communication, as the putting into practice of a language system, becomes apparent in Roland Barthes' 1977 inaugural lecture at the College de France. Language, for Barthes, is simply fascism. He writes:

> 'We do not see the power which is in speech because we forget that all speech is a classification, and that all classifications are oppressive […] But language – the performance of a language system – is neither reactionary or progressive; it is quite simply fascist; for fascism does not prevent speech, it compels speech.' (Barthes, 1977, p. 5; see also Harrison, forthcoming)

Classification relies on cutting, consensus, imposing a coherent meaning and aim. The problem with classification is that its articulation assumes its unproblematic possibility – as if consensus, coherence and cutting are not also abandonment and reduction. For Deleuze and Guattari (1994, p. 100) 'communication' is one of three sorts of Universals in philosophy, reliant as it is on consensus (across bodies and contexts) as a problematic transcendence over immanence. The obsession with communication and its related forms of classification, Deleuze and Guattari (1987, p. 387) tell us, is a form of State-thought: 'Is it by chance that whenever a 'thinker' shoots an arrow, there is a man of the State, a shadow or an image of a man of the State, that counsels and admonishes him, and wants to assign him a target or 'aim'?'

But we might add that it is also the grammar of the advertiser, whose creative briefings hinge on an advertising campaign's 'target', 'purpose', 'call to action', 'objective', in other words, on the putting-to-use of language as productive signs and symbols, of making it a means towards an end. Further striking at the heart of classification is the obsolete coherence of a 'tone-of-voice', a brand aesthetic, a brand

identity, a brand positioning; all of which are so deeply praised by the schools and offices of advertising. Indeed, advertisers commonly work with advertising agencies and marketing consultants to develop their own 'brand style guides' or 'brand books' – codes and pacts regarding logo size, colour schemes, fonts, customer service tone, commercial photography, in-store atmospheres and so forth – for ensuring a coherent, recognisable brand image across time and space (in shops, social media channels, radio commercials, direct marketing campaigns, etc.). With those same advertising professionals, advertisers develop a 'brand positioning' that serves the purpose of articulating and planning how their brand could take up a distinct space – informed by a set of values, mission statements, manifestos – in the market place and amongst the minds and bodies of customers.[64] Each of these instances insist on a movement of separation, invoking the brand as a singular idea, name, aesthetic, value-system, to compete against other brands.

Here it again becomes apparent how subvertisers' image of the political is deeply coloured by the advertising world it exists in. The shared belief in a logic of classification is one of advertisers' and subvertisers' secret, unspoken pacts. Through language's appropriation, its 'dyslexic' de-formation and re-formation perhaps,[65] subvertisers articulate strict opinions, clear messages, coherent (aesthetic) narratives, visions of a better world. *Subvertising thrives on classification.*

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[64] To give but one example of a famous brand positioning, Apple relies on its presentation of its products as means to 'think differently' – which initially meant differently from Windows users, but now relies more broadly on a differentiation from the mainstream (here: non-creative, outdated, rational). Inside advertising agencies, this type of brand positioning work is most commonly taken up by the 'strategy' or 'planning' department, who draw on and conduct research into the market place of the relevant product category, the brand's current positioning, customer base, cultural trends, and technological development in order to delineate potential paths of differentiation from other brands.

[65] I use the word 'dyslexic' carefully here, echoing the work of philosopher Albert Toscano. Toscano has pointed to the limitations of rendering language 'dyslexic', of mutating it through 'agrammaticality, non-discreteness and non-linearity' (Toscano, 2008, p. 66), as a means of dislocating the communicative ideals of capitalism, and more specifically, of marketing. A dyslexic orientation towards language has become part of the everyday recuperative logic of capitalism, as I have shown in the previous chapter, bringing in as it does seemingly disparate ideas, aesthetics and grammars into commercially productive relations to expand its capacities under the management of 'dyslexic achievers' (Marazzi, cited in Toscano, 2008, p. 66) as a category of corporate leaders. This makes it hard to conceive of subvertising, when it presents itself as invocations of culture jamming or self-produced texts and images, outside of the dyslexic tendencies familiar to advertising.

The Vandal, by contrast, is a figure troubling the advertiser's and subvertiser's logic of communication and its reliance on classification, a figure that is powerful not *in spite of* but *because of* their failure to articulate a comprehensible demand, a graspable future vision or a coherent aesthetic identity. In the absence of classification, what? A barbaric expression, emptied of signification. Not the lack of communication *per se*, but perhaps the emergence of what Maurice Blanchot found in the 20th-century's most radical political writing: an 'infinite, uncontrollable speech,' 'always speaking beyond, going beyond, spilling over.' (Blanchot, 2010, p. 103) But how could such a howl garner a revolutionary spirit? We might learn from Walter Benjamin where he writes:

> 'Marx said that revolutions are the locomotive of world history. But perhaps things are very different. It may be that revolutions are the act by which the human race travelling in the train applies the emergency brake.' (Benjamin, cited in Noys, 2014, p. 83)

Marx himself embraced capitalism and capitalist production as the tools of revolutionary change for entering a time and space beyond capitalism (Noys, 2014). He argued for revolutions as the locomotives speeding up the acceleration inherent to capitalism, until capitalism derails, collapsing in on itself.[66] For Walter Benjamin, the uptake of the idea of progress and acceleration as a revolutionary drive is a treatment of 'capitalist production on its own terms,' incapable of definitively breaking away from capitalism and the very notion of capitalist production (Noys, 2014, p. 90). By contrast, Benjamin's is 'an interruptive politics' that 'destroy[s] the tracks to prevent the greater destruction of acceleration.' (Noys, 2014, p. 90, p. 92) The Vandal enacts its own contemporary prevention. If contemporary capitalism is driven by ever-increasing connectivity and communication (Culp, 2016a), then it might well be headed for the abyss, a hyper-connected and hyper-connecting scheme where nothing escapes control (Virilio, 2006). What might it mean to pull the emergency brake of communicative capitalism? The Vandal views the withdrawal from clear signification as something other than a failure or a lack. If, for Galloway and Thacker, 'double the communication leads to double the control' (Galloway and Thacker, 2007,

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[66] As Benjamin Noys (2014, pp. 83-92) argues, this is the argument picked up by contemporary theorists of left accelerationism who believe that, following Marx, speeding up capitalism (particularly capitalist technological progress) even more than it automatically will should cause it to explode. Accelerationists believe things have to get worse before they get better.

p. 124; see also Harrison, 2009), then perhaps the refusal to communicate on capitalist terms, in capitalist territory, to take force in a register comprehensible to those assaulted, is one of Walter Benjamin's historical emergency brakes. If the Vandal's barbaric words signal anything at all it might be this central premise: we cannot communicate our way out of this world, in a language appropriated by this world.

Refusing to play the game of affects, meanings, actions, opinions, and identities, set out by advertisers, the Vandal searches its weapons elsewhere. The weapons wielded are not only non-representational (Thrift, 2007), in that symbolism or representation are of little explicit concern, but forcefully anti-representational, conducting a direct assault on the logics of language, and linguistic life more broadly. Refusing to 'impose meaning and exert control over what is being signified' (Wood, 2013, p. 165), the Vandal radically embraces a 'radical non-cutting.' (Galloway, 2014, p. 187)

The Vandal constantly withdraws from classification, preferring the ambiguity of the event, the seemingly inexplicable rage, the violent smashing of sacred-profane borders, and its scattered material remains, simultaneously so present and so withdrawn, so visceral and so unintelligible. It no longer communicates with the intention to convince through careful affective-symbolic-material arrangements, as the advertiser or subvertiser might, instead it expresses, consciously or subconsciously, the crushing of the very logic of that arrangement, by way of a multisensual landscape of disorder: threatening gestures, sharp edges, loud shattering, rough surfaces. In this sense, it does not only withdraw from classification; it actively assaults it, making communication strange, displacing it, throwing it off any singular disposition one might communicate or claim (Harrison, forthcoming), any 'point of view of the whole.' (Tiqqun, 2011b, p. 61) It presents a mode of expression and material performance whose communicative logic relies upon disruption, 'threatening everything that contains and everything that limits' (Blanchot, 2010, p. 103), and speaking to us only in extreme tension, in words and actions that generate incoherence and disarray, yoking forward towards something other than their meaning: the movement of their own incessant dissolution.

In short, the Vandal spews out war cries, eruptive and excessive. Unlike the gentle tones of careful elaboration, it favours the immediacy of action over the mediation of action. Leaving behind nothing but shattered glass and fractured electric cables, the Vandal exclaims wildly that '[t]he greatest possible demands don't allow themselves to be formulated.' (Tiqqun, 2011a, p. 7) And thus, the Vandal never critiques. It does much worse: it refuses to communicate in a register intelligible to those it assaults.

Chapter 6

This is the moment when illicit engagements with advertising cease to rely on clever word play, a life of parody or witty imagery. The subvertiser is no longer the creative of their own advertising agency; the copywriter or art director of their very own anti-advertising campaigns; or the advertising strategist of their own anti-advertising brands and brand strategies. The subvertiser erupts as the Vandal.

Figure 38 - Shattered bus shelter advert wrapped in tape by maintenance crews. (Paris, November 2015)

What is at stake in the Vandal's seeming unintelligibility is 'not just the absence but the refusal of standpoint, to actually explore and to inhabit and to think […] 'existence without standing'.' (Moten, 2013, p. 738) This involves asking, however uncomfortably: 'What would it be, deeper still, what is it, to think from no standpoint; to think outside the desire for a standpoint?' (Moten, 2013, p.738) In this vein, we might think of the Vandal in the same way one might think of Occupy Wall Street protesters, who were first and foremost recognised by what they so infuriatingly lacked (a clear motivation or set of demands): as the refusal of standpoint returning as an attempt 'to upend the power circuit entirely via political nonparticipation.' (Galloway, 2011, p. 244) Announcing a figure of sabotage, Tiqqun writes:

> 'I do not respond to the human or mechanical feedback loops that attempt to encircle me/figure me out; like Bartleby, I'd 'prefer not to.' I keep my distance, I don't enter into the space of the flows, I don't plug in, I stick around. I wield

> my passivity as a force against the devices. Neither 0 nor 1, I am absolute
> nothingness.' (Tiqqun, 2010b, p. 41)

Through nonparticipation, the Vandal refuses synthesis with the world of advertising, taking communication as that which 'can be understood as the expansion of the present rather than as the creation of the future.' (Barber, 2014, p. 198) It is that which expresses with barely-human gestures and barbaric words, leaving behind monstrous material arrangements, rather than those who communicate clearly along a habitual, already-established course, that causes fear.[67] It prevents discussion and reconciliation from being established. Those who speak in recognisable words and images (subvertisers) are much easier negated, managed, or, indeed, recuperated.

Picking up Roland Barthes' inaugural lecture at the College de France (1977), Harrison remarks that '[w]hat is truly scandalous, roughish even, is the decline or deferral and so the provisional suspension of the choice (and the blackmail) of the 'yes' or 'no', the 'this' or the 'that', the 'with us' or 'against us'.' (Harrison, 2009, n.p.) The act of 'non-cutting' is therefore of a scandalous nature precisely because 'of suspending the obligation of holding views' (Harrison, 2009, n.p.), and of the political and monetary emptiness of such suspension. So we ask of the crime scene that opened this chapter, in vain: *what could they or it possibly want? What kinds of city and what levels of advertising? Do they, does it, even care about advertising?* This is the Vandal's greatest cruelty: its reluctance to validate its own existence. As a perpetual withdrawal, a self-displacement, it cannot be named adequately, let alone assigned meaning to (except with those kind of catch-all phrases for the unnameable and unclassifiable that I, too, cannot escape in this chapter).

Pursuing to secure the Vandal's justification, desperately seeking to slot it into new typologies, moving deeper and deeper, dissecting layer upon layer of a withdrawing phenomenon, of something endlessly falling apart, we reach the bounds of knowledge, where frustrations further magnify. The only feature 'we recognise [is] that there is nothing there for us to recognise.' (Harrison, 2007, p. 591) Thus, the Vandal emerges only as a seemingly *illogical* network of assault sweeping through

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[67] I am inspired by Spivak's work on the subaltern here (Spivak, 1988). While I do not want to suggest the Vandal assaulting advertising is in any fashion 'subaltern' in the sense of being subordinated with the intensity racialised minorities are, it does, like Spivak's racialised subaltern minorities, encounter the expectance to adopt the language and reasoning of those it feels subordinated by.

the city. Incapable of finding answers within the acts of the Vandal, advertisers, journalists, and local city authorities alike are left in the dreadful darkness of the unknowable, the forever unresolved crime scene. They are sometimes left with no other option than fabricating their own narratives of lost youth howling a desperate cry for help, for emancipation, where '[e]ven anger today,' as Isabelle Stengers writes about the 2005 riots in the Parisian banlieues, 'is interpreted as hiding a message asking for love, understanding, or recognition.' (Stengers, 2008, p. 53)

The Vandal does not, at any point, seek legitimisation from the modes of power it is at odds with, for doing so would expand their legitimacy, and that of their ways of conducting their authorisation. This is the second cruel dimension of the Vandal: its reluctance to find validity through recognition by those in power. This is not simple antagonism to but a deep disinterest in the possibilities of recognition and recuperation by, and cooperation with, state and corporate actors. Like Bartleby, they would, indeed, prefer not to. The Vandal, illogical as it seems to state-corporate actors, exists in itself and for itself – a 'means without end' (Agamben, 2000), renouncing 'any order of preference, any organization in relation to a goal.' (Deleuze, 1998, p. 153) Here, it presents an ethos so foreign and antagonistic to the commonplace communicative logic of (resistance to) advertising, that even subvertisers denounce and ridicule it.

A few evenings before arriving in Paris for Brandalism's COP21 subvertising campaign, an advertising Vandal, unknown to the anti-advertising collectives involved in the campaign, wreaked havoc on the city's advertising structures. Steve told me many local subvertisers perceived it as an act not only incompatible with their subvertising, but antagonistic to it, producing as it does an unfortunately counter-productive set of images of those concerned with moral questions around urban advertising, as, indeed, 'just a bunch of vandals.' (Steve, November 2015) There is nothing particularly shocking about this response. Resistance, far beyond subvertising, more often than not echoes the productivist logic of capital, as Walter Benjamin's statement about Marx suggests, searching for weapons to 'outproduce the capitalist world system.' (Culp, 2016b, p. 11) The political philosopher Alberto Toscano writes:

> 'Create. Invent. Innovate. Network. Under the non-authoritarian hegemony of capitalist realism such ubiquitous imperatives have come to occupy the place of the seemingly exhausted, or unduly crass, industrial command: produce. Concurrently, we witness a tendency to present a putative resistance to the exigencies of accumulation in terms congruent, if not synonymous, with the

> ubiquitous language and culture of the new capitalism.' (Toscano, 2008, p. 56)

The Vandal defies capital's and resistance's dependence on the constitutive logic of permanent production, on establishing new levels and forms of relation and liveliness (Macfarlane, 2017, pp. 300-301; see also next section), opting instead for an affective mode of (non-)engagement much less familiar and much more daunting: the desire to disassemble.

But there is something particular to this desire, a cause of much exasperation: its promise for existing indefinitely as a kind of infinite antagonism. How does one face up to the interminable event? The Vandal's assault encloses no points of resolution, precisely because it is disconnected from any end. It is thus end*less* in a double sense of the term: without resolvable demand or aim (e.g. a change in policy), and, as a result, without foreseeable termination. There will be no ending, no final blow, no concluding shattering. Forever penultimate, that is, permanently existing as the assault before the last. Promising to be forever out of the grasp of capture, of recuperation, what is left is nothing but an indefinitely definite assault, insisting on the impossibility of resolution through assimilation, inclusion, debate or policy change. This is perhaps the Vandal's only promise, its only definite statement – *you may find no logic to our actions, we may forever withdraw, forever displace, but one certainty we can offer: our permanent hostility.*

These are infinite cries for an end of this world, not unlike the high-pitched squeals of an emergency brake, perhaps.

6.4   Nihilist yearnings

The Vandal's experiments verge into the borders of nihilism. As I have shown so far, the Vandal seemingly dwells in a disconcerting aimlessness, praises indifference, favours desubjectivation, takes failure (of naming, of recognition, of signification) as a metaphysical principle (a question of 'when', not 'if' (Thacker, 2015, p. 14)), exerts a boundless intolerance, carries a total disbelief in existing political formations, cherishes a resolute preference of negation over affirmation, asking nothing but the end of a world, if even that. How could any nihilistic attitude and practice harbour a political promise?

Before answering this, we need to ask: what, exactly, do we mean if we declare and denounce a person, a practice, a phenomenon, as nihilistic? We might turn to Deleuze, via Nietzsche, to help us navigate and distinguish what sense of life-as-*nihil*,

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of nihilism, is at stake in the Vandal. The Vandal appears far removed from what Deleuze terms 'negative nihilism'. Yet, it is still worth briefly highlighting as it frames what I consider to be the Vandal's mode of nihilism. With negative nihilism, Deleuze writes, life attains the value of 'nil', life becomes valueless or worthless, in light of a 'fiction' of higher values superior to life that depreciate it. He writes:

> 'In the word nihilism *nihil* does not signify non-being but primarily a value of nil. Life takes on a value of nil insofar as it is denied and depreciated. Depreciation always presupposes a fiction: it is by means of fiction that one falsifies and depreciates, it is by means of fiction that something is opposed to life [...] The idea of another world, of a supersensible world in all its forms (God, essence, the good truth), the idea of values superior to life, is not one example among many but the constitutive element of all fiction. [...] Thus, in its primary and basic sense, nihilism signifies the value of nil taken on by life, the fiction of higher values which give it this value and the will to nothingness which is expressed in these higher values.' (Deleuze, 1992, p. 147; emphasis in original)

Negative nihilism appears incompatible with the Vandal's preferred mode of existence. In effect, a pure negative nihilism, transcendental values' full depreciation of life, is perhaps the advertiser's utopia: a place and time of total passivity, where life is accepted as governed by the 'high values', no longer of 'God' or 'essence', but of money, representation, self, and, as seen in Chapter 4, of 'sacred' advertising space itself, all of which are presented as truthful and good. In this 'utopia', lives arrive at meaning only through the framing of advertising's higher values, its transcendentals. The supreme reign of advertising's higher values, in this 'utopia' of negative nihilism, would translate into an automated consumer vulnerability to being affected along the advertiser's preferred terms and intensities. Negative nihilism is marked by a particular kind of silence, the silent passivity of the consumer who speaks only when it is asked of her.

Deleuze identifies a second form of nihilism, 'reactive nihilism', which responds to the first and appears much more familiar to the practice of the Vandal, echoing its resolute non-passivity. Here, Deleuze writes, '[t]he supersensible world and higher values are reacted against, their existence is denied, they are refused all validity – this is no longer the devaluation of life in the name of higher values but rather the devaluation of higher values themselves.' (Deleuze, 1992, pp. 147-148) It is *because of* and *in response to* the preferred nihilism of the advertiser and the depreciation of

life by its sacred 'higher values' that vandalism turns towards a completed nihilism: 'we cannot transcend nihilism without realizing it.' (Tiqqun, 2011a, p. 10)

The Vandal is nihilistic then only insofar that it is antithetical to all modes of affirmation but one: the affirmation of negation, of destroying that which destroys it. The Vandal's reactive nihilism does not end at 'the negative of 'judgement'' (Nietzsche, cited in Deleuze, 1992, p. 70), it slips into an *active* negation, 'an *active* will to nothingness.' (Hardt, 2003, p. 51; emphasis in original) But negativity, expressed as dismantling, need not be dreary. Quite the opposite, the 'affirmation of annihilation and destruction' is, for Nietzsche, inherently joyful (Nietzsche, cited in Deleuze, 1992, p. 174), especially when what you destroy is that which destroys you (Culp, 2016b). Thus, resisting the allure of advertising worlds (see 'Interlude: A story of allure') and their ways of acting and speaking (see Section 5.1), the Vandal finds release or satisfaction (perhaps even joy?) not in the affirmation – employment or even re-appropriation – of advertising language, aesthetics, identities, and objects, but in experimenting with their resolute negation: their annihilation.

Figure 39 - Digital advertising screen, splintered. (Paris, November 2015)

The exclusive potential of a nihilistic impulse towards negation only truly reveals itself when we start by considering the relation between advertising and affirmation. Affirmation is the advertiser's preferred mode of engagement, both in terms of how it relates to those existing in a potentially profitable relation to it (current or future customers) and, as I have highlighted in Chapter 5, to those existing and acting in certain ways at odds with it (subvertisers, anti-advertising activists). Regarding the former group, advertising is predominantly reliant on positive affects: the enjoyment

of dazzling untouched landscapes, charming imagery of an ideal family life, familiar expressions of excitement, inmost intimacies, generous words, symbols and gestures. Products and services slot into these positive passions, expanding and accelerating their capacities to enthral. And so Don Draper, the protagonist of the Mad Men television series, remarks correctly: 'Advertising is based on one thing: happiness.' ('Smoke Gets in Your Eyes', 2007) For him, happiness is 'a billboard on the side of the road that screams with reassurance that whatever you're doing, it's okay. You are okay.' ('Smoke Gets in Your Eyes', 2007) Wherever negative affects do enter an advertiser's frame (sadness, anger, jealousy, and so forth), they are soon resolved, overcome and transformed into the affirmative, along the path carved by a particular product, service, or brand.[68] Loneliness attains a social dimension, fatigue turns into vigour, jealousy into understanding or forgiveness, boredom into delightful adventure. Negativity never persists. If anything, advertising is the promise of negativity's resolution. With the promised moment of consumption, negativity loses its grasp, and eventually fades out in the distance, far away from the promised brand world. In transforming negative passions into positive ones, advertising in effect promises an ethics of affirmation, not dissimilar to the ethico-political orientation for resistance favoured by Rosi Braidotti (see Braidotti, 2006a; 2006b; 2010), amongst others.

Positive affect is not only the domain of advertising content, also of the advertising industry more broadly, which reproduces itself through an insistence on its creative, affirmative ethos. My uncomfortable experience of pointing out the moral dubiousness of advertising cars to primary school children, as narrated in the introduction to this thesis, speaks to the reign of affirmation. All but one of my colleagues seemed deeply embarrassed by my critique. Another, more senior colleague, even came up to me afterwards, telling me we are in the business of selling products. He finished his declaration with the intimidating words: 'This is not the place for hero stories, for combatting big corporations […] If you want to do this, go work for an NGO or become an activist or something.'

This orientation against negativity, reproduced via offhand judgements, embarrassed smiles, secret email chains, and so on, carries the subtle power of pervading and infecting advertising employees' thinking life, how they come to frame their everyday

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[68] I draw this distinction between positive and negative affects from Rosi Braidotti's work on Spinozist ethics (see Braidotti, 2006c; 2010).

ethical negotiations, how they shape their engagements with colleagues, clients, and the workers across the commodity chain of whichever product or service they work for holds together. In questioning the underlying logic of the chain, I had poked through the compulsory positivity reigning the halls of the advertising industry. I was not invited to any of the next meetings, without any declaration: possibly too junior, likely too disruptive. I never quite garnered the bravery for proclaiming a clear antagonism, but the rare moments when I could not hold back a critical remark added up to something of an unusual position that ended up decidedly marking my presence in the office. A few months after our hallway conversation, on the day I departed from my advertising career, I received what is still my all-time favourite greeting card: a large image of Mother Theresa – my face digitally mapped onto hers – below the words: 'Mother Theresa, we will miss you.' But while my negative orientation towards advertising was somewhat unique inside the industry, I sensed I was not alone. There was something more collective about this incapacity to put negativity into words or actions, something hardwired into the wider social fabric of advertising professionals' lives.

The longer I worked in the industry, the more this oppressed negativity seemed to surface around me as sighs in the office late on a Sunday night, one-on-one emails declaring an impossible sense of exhaustion, hushed speculations of a life outside of advertising by the coffee machine, or the subtle laughing-away of a client's investment in horrid labour conditions. There were stories of burnt-out colleagues rushing through the corridors, weeping under their breath, only to burst out into tears in the lonely safety of the bathroom. Such stories always seem to travel but never quite become points of open discussion. They drift along the undercurrents of advertising life until, by chance or intentionally, they garner traction and find a means of articulation. In their pamphlet titled 'How to Switch Sides: A Letter to the Disillusioned', Brandalism (2016a) cite two such instances from advertising professionals who have reached out to them. 'I've gotten in trouble for speaking about moral issues,' notes one; while another confesses: 'To be mildly sceptical or critical is taboo.'[69] (Brandalism, 2016a, p. 5) Surely, some advertising professionals

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[69] In this sense, following the path lined out by Isabelle Stengers with regards to scientists, we might ask: what if advertising, as an apparatus of capture, extends both externally (recuperating contestation, for instance), and internally (drawing employees into circuits of commercially productive positivity)? In this case, we might consider the vulnerability of the advertising professional and wonder: what if we recognise the vulnerability of the advertising employee, work with it rather than declaring it as well-deserved or politically irrelevant? Are we otherwise 'not contributing to the vulnerability

seem unaffected by this obsession with affirmation, but others crush under its emotional toll, effectively burning out, whilst others, of course, leave the industry.

These are all personal stories of a work ethic antagonistic to negativity. This ethic of 'compulsory happiness' (Culp, 2016b, p. 2) is tied up with the luring image advertising seeks to (re)produce of itself – one built around the prevalence of a 'creative ethos' (Osborne, 2003; Mould, 2018; Toscano, 2008),[70] a youthful vitalism, and the promise of supposedly anti-hierarchical rhizomatic relations between employees (Culp, 2016b),[71] all of which one experiences bodily when walking around advertising agencies' open-plan offices, where colleagues play and laugh at pool tables, lounge in colourful chairs, play hip music, or work behind large iMacs. The refrain from negativity is much more than simply a preferred mode of convivial engagement with colleagues, clients, customers and even those contesting advertising practices; it is what makes the industry possible, attracting both future colleagues and future clients. Put simply, affirmation keeps advertising afloat, negativity threatens to set it ablaze.

The subvertiser is happy to reproduce the affirmative logic of advertising, on at least two levels. First, (s)he commonly presents humoristic twists on or hopeful solutions to the issues prevalent in advertising worlds. Yes, Robert Montgomery tells us in one of his 'Billboard poems' (see Section 5.5), we are trapped in 'a shadow festival,' but, he continues, we will emerge from it, re-born, stronger and inspired; we will look at the sky again, eat self-grown food again, touch what we make again. Brandalism echoes this affirmative gesture; sometimes by way of dark imagery (see Figure 2), but only ever with the intention of proclaiming: another world is possible, even if by symbolic negation – *the horrors you witness here are not ours, they have no space or*

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exploited by the capture process?' (Stengers, 2008, p. 55) I believe Brandalism's pamphlet offers one important counter-move.

[70] As Deleuze and Guattari wrote in 1994, advertising commonly declares 'we are the creative ones, we are the ideas men!' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994, p. 10), putting 'itself forward as the conceiver par excellence, as the poet and thinker.' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994, p. 99) It is worth noting how, somewhat ironically but unsurprisingly, the work of Deleuze and Guattari is often distilled into 'a kind of colourful mantra of positivity' and celebrated in the circles of business schools, management journals and start-up companies (Toscano, 2008, p. 57; Macfarlane, 2017).

[71] I say 'supposedly' because, as I have already suggested in Section 5.1, despite appealing images of 'horizontal' organisational structures, advertising remains tied up in games of status and exclusivity, exemplified not the least by the simple fact of escalating salary differences between the lowest-paid staff and the best-paid directors.

time in our imagined futures. Second, the subvertiser establishes all manners of entanglement with advertising's ways of thinking, acting, speaking and relating. But, as I will go on to ask in the next and final section, is advertising-subvertising's shared affirmative logic not the condition from which advertisers are able to affirm, and eventually recuperate, forms of contestation? If so, then this is the limit of affirmation as a mode of contestation: willingly or unwillingly preparing the path of recuperation, and ultimately, the path of exhaustion. But this is also the entry-point of the Vandal. In light of affirmation's inadequacy, we are left to wonder whether the Vandal is perhaps, paraphrasing Eugene Thacker (2015, p. 19), the pessimist who is actually an optimist that has run out of options. Frustrated by the limits of an affirmative politics, which relies on the potential of establishing new relations, the Vandal actively seeks to annihilate them, minimising the connections, the lines of communication, that make up advertising and subvertising, power and resistance. They pursue the negativity that might set advertising ablaze. It is here, to return to the question introduced at the beginning of this chapter, that we might, however tentatively, be fleeing away from the advertising-subvertising relation on a path to advertising's outside.

6.5   The outside: Ethics after advertising

So far, in this chapter, I have suggested that the Vandal posits the distortion and undoing of the 'I who expresses, and of the 'what' that is expressed. As I have argued, within its pursuit of an ethics of negativity, the Vandal furthers subvertising's departure from advertising, not only by undermining industry 'outputs' but also by refusing to even acknowledge, let alone replicate, the epistemological framework of that industry and its outputs. In a sense, subvertisers are still tied up in what The Invisible Committee refers to as *symmetrical* antagonism, 'constitut[ing] themselves on the same model as what they're fighting.' (The Invisible Committee, 2015, p. 156; see also Culp and Dekeyser, 2018) A double vulnerability is the price paid for succumbing to the 'curse of symmetry.' (The Invisible Committee, 2015, p. 156)

On one register, the curse of symmetry harms by binding resistance to the ontological tendencies of that which it resists. The result is a symmetrical opposition entangled with and dependent on what is opposed, making the opposing and the opposed 'function as a pair, in alternation, as though they expressed a division of the One or constituted in themselves a sovereign unity.' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, pp. 351-352) The problem with dialectic negation is that it keeps us inside of the logic of relations. Foucault reminds us: 'To negate dialectically brings what one negates into the troubled interiority of the mind.' (Foucault and Blanchot, 1987, p. 22) Opposition

can then only exist within relation to what it opposes; or, put differently, opposition remains wedded to the idea of what one opposes. It *needs* what it opposes in order to exist, and cannot live separately from it.

We might think here more broadly of the well-known dialectics of racism and anti-racism, sexism and anti-sexism, or capitalism and anti-capitalism, 'hopelessly entangling each within each other,' (Culp, 2016b, p. 35) as if adding up to 'an antagonistic whole.' (Tiqqun, 2011b, p. 38) The result is an 'identity [that] is always governed, in advance, by the image and value of the other.' (Grosz, 2002, p. 471) The dangers of this entanglement, of this dependence, become apparent when one considers the political as a convergence of ends *and* means. The failure of symmetrical engagement lies in its moment of separating the two, distinguishing what one opposes from the ontological (e.g. a self-possessed articulation of subjectivity), social (e.g. hierarchical relations) and organisational (e.g. militaristic infiltration) conditions of what one opposes. For Tiqqun (2011b), modifying the ends without altering the means is, at best, a futile adventure, and at worst, the paradoxical intensification and rendering more powerful of that which one seeks to undo.

Thus, the Bolshevik Party organised its anti-capitalist struggle into 'a disciplined and hierarchical politico-military machine,' the Red Brigades assassinated what they saw as the fifty core members of the state, and the Algerian National Liberation Front massacred European colonisers; each replicating familiar methods of war towards liberatory ends (The Invisible Committee, 2015, p. 156). This is the tragic vulnerability wedded to symmetrical antagonism: taking up to the features, organisational and otherwise, of what one is opposed to. The replication of means becomes the reproduction of the horrors associated to the ends. In a non-militaristic grammar, many subvertisers too, as I have shown in this and the previous chapter, remain tied to the logic of advertising, whilst perhaps not in terms of organisational form,[72] then in their calls towards recognition, in their tendencies towards distinction, in their affirmative gestures, or in their reliance upon the possibility of evoking (alternative) truths.

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[72] As I have argued in Section 5.1, subvertisers and subvertising collectives tend to collaborate on the basis of non-hierarchical forms of organisation, distinguishing them clearly from advertisers' hierarchical structures in terms of decision-making, salary and status.

Interconnected with the first, symmetrical modes of relating carry a second vulnerability: '[T]he vulnerability to capitalism as a capture apparatus.' (Stengers, 2008, p. 40) In replicating an aesthetic, an organisational form, a manner of speech, a drive towards exposure or identity, they produce a recognisable form, 'a *recognizable* face.' (The Invisible Committee, 2015, p. 158; emphasis in original) The ties enabled by a proximity to the logics and desires of capital secure the possibility of antagonism as a mode of commercially productive activity. Maria Daskalaki and Oli Mould (2013, p. 5) offer the illustration of practices such as skateboarding, yarn bombing and urban exploration, where the desire for 'identification and formalization […] allows individuals, as members of a particular subculture, to be targeted by advertisers for profit.' (see also Mould, 2015, pp. 123-125) To give another, closer example, we might want to think of subvertising's recognisable (to capital) dreams of exposure, of 'going viral' (see Section 5.1). Given that advertising is in the business of exactly that, providing exposure, subvertising is sensitive to affirmative gestures of reconciliation or appropriation. By contrast, what does advertising, and more broadly, market capital have to offer to those indifferent to being recognised or acclaimed by commercial actors, a mainstream public, governmental institutions, or news media professionals? Will they even find paths along which they might connect with them (recalling my frustrating attempt at making contact with them in London)? Advertising, such as that of Black Gulls Breweries, can find little inspiration in its destruction by the Vandal, few reasons to affirm, unless, of course, it is willing to abolish itself and the epistemological and commercial world it is engrained in. We might think of the Vandal here as, however temporarily, crafting what Isabelle Stengers calls an 'arts of protection against capture.' (Stengers, 2008, p. 56)

Rather than an 'internal', dialectical negation implicated with the 'curse of symmetry' and its outlined double vulnerability, Tiqqun proposes the pursuit of an antagonism without recourse to or synthesis with that which it denounces: '[A] negation that comes *from outside.*' (Tiqqun, 2011b, p. 39; emphasis in original) But there is something unfamiliar, shocking even, about the belief in the (possibility of the) outside, given the current dominant ontological beliefs in the immanent conditions of the world. The proclaimed 'saturated immanence' (Neyrat, 2018) envisions a complex, horizontal world of relational forces, allowing us to move away, once and for all, from the burden of essentialism (of the body, identity, space, object) (see Harrison, 2007). More than a metaphysical imperative towards a 'relational ontology' (Harrison, 2007, p. 592), immanence is also the grammar employed to describe our political moment, pinpointed perhaps most clearly in 2000 by Michael Hardt and

Antonio Negri when they sensationally claimed: 'There is no more outside.' (2000, p. 186)[73]

This is 'a world immunized against the outside' (Neyrat, 2018, p. 7), creating 'the experimental conditions of a permanent revitalization, endless restoring the integrity of the whole' (Tiqqun, 2010b, p. 12) through the incorporation of all towards the end of the one. Advertising's affirmative recuperation of contestation offers but one example of capitalism's 'immunological drive' (Neyrat, 2018, p. 16) towards absorbing all that might come to destabilise its endurance, any form of entropy, re-orientating it towards fuelling the expansive charge of its circuits of production. But, critiquing the assumed totalising quality of saturated immanence, the philosopher Frederic Neyrat suggests '[t]his repudiation or foreclosure, to use Lacan's concept, of the outside has stunted contemporary thought to the point where all separation, all radical interruption of the regime of saturated immanence, appears at best as an impossibility, at worst as a crime.' (Neyrat, 2018, pp. 4-5) The problem with immanence occurs when its ontological predicament blends with its political manifestation; or put differently, when the philosophy of immanence is written out as a mantra for one's political imperative: because there is no outside, we cannot, or should not, desire its manifestation. 'Separate oneself? Madness. A first step toward terrorism,' Neyrat (2018, p. 5) continues. Thus, immanence emerges as the condition of and resolution to the manifestation of power (see Massumi, 2015b, pp. 42-43).[74] The problem with the appeal to an affirmative politics of immanence, is that it plays

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[73] A similar gesture is made in geographical scholarship on 'flat ontologies' in its reliance on actor-network theory or on a particularly vitalist, connectivist reading of the work of Gilles Deleuze (see Marston *et al.*, 2005). As Paul Harrison notes, critical of a prioritisation of the relational, 'in the proliferation of biophilosophy, the unstoppable materialisation of actor networks and constructivist totalisations of the social or the cultural, few have been asking about breaks and gaps, interruptions and intervals, caesuras and tears.' (Harrison, 2007, p. 592)

[74] Implicitly echoing Negri and Hardt (2000), Massumi argues for the necessity of an *immanent* form of resistance. He writes: 'Counterpower must operate immanent to contemporary capitalism's paradoxical field, in resonance with the economy's inmost end. [...] An *immanent counterontopower*: what other alternative is there, given the globalization of capitalism's neoliberal regime of power? There is no getting outside it. Immanence is not an option: it is a condition of life, and the seat of becoming.' (Massumi, 2015b, p. 43; emphasis in original) As a result of the immanent condition of life, for Massumi, the only option left for resistance is to practice complicity in ways that are strategic (Massumi, 2018).

into the hands of the integrational efforts of connectivity that allows contemporary capitalist power to make-productive what contests it.

The outside to the affirmative economies of advertising and subvertising, the Vandal echoes the punk ethos of 'no future' (see Marcus, 1990): 'The only future we have comes when we stop reproducing the conditions of the present.' (Culp, 2016b, p. 13) Refusing to confuse metaphysics and politics, the Vandal conjures simultaneously radical relationality (the decentred, anonymous 'subject' and its generic identity) *and* the political necessity of severance. Immanence *demands* separation. Fleeing the curse of symmetry, the Vandal crafts an 'art of distances' (Tiqqun, 2010a, p. 64; Culp and Dekeyser, 2018) lured by the possibility of a negation coming from the outside. The dream of a distance from corporate and state power takes up a particular demand in light of capitalism's affirmationist operations (Culp, 2016b). It is no longer possible to simply abstain from the flows of capital or the bureaucratic management of the state, as non-state people might have in the past (see for instance Scott, 2009). The deepening of corporate-state refrains' integration into the social fabric, as a shifting of the logics of power, begs an alternative conception of resistance, one that reckons with and exceeds the insufficiency of passive, spatial withdrawal from the social. How, then, to trace a path to the outside? For the Vandal, the possibility of an outside to (advertising) power relies on the reactive nihilism outlined above, spiralling abandonment and annihilation into a paired displacement, one that surfaces 'in irreconcilable contradiction to the existing whole.' (Marcuse, cited in Tiqqun, 2011b, p. 39)

In the form of an irreconcilable contradiction, the force of the outside arrives as 'something incomprehensible in the world' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 378), as circumstances incapable of being interiorised into an antagonistic whole. This demands the waging of war against existing 'images' and the emergence of new ones. As Deleuze and Guattari note, the outside works as 'a force that destroys both the image and its copies, the model and its reproductions.' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 377; see also Foucault and Blanchot, 1987, p. 23) This is the Vandal's and Vandals' war machine, operating by destructive relays rather than images, forever seeking to avoid reproducing the old state or corporate habits of materialising new insides (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 378). Such is the crux of the Vandal: to forge weapons of displacement. It is not designed to invent a good, total whole, that replaces the evils of advertising we are faced with. A life after advertising does not arrive in a predicted form of an advertising-less city, as already noted in Section 4.5, as it enacts a renewed set of sovereign laws, forces and bodies, welcomed by – rather than antagonistic to – law and governance. As Foucault suggests, in his writing on the

force of the outside in the literature of Maurice Blanchot, '[a]nyone who attempts to oppose the law in order to found a new order, to organize a second police force, to institute a new state, will only encounter the silent and infinitely accommodating welcome of the law.' (Foucault and Blanchot, 1987, p. 38) The 'possibility for thought' outside of the interior image (of advertising) 'can only be revealed as such through the abolition of that image.' (Deleuze, 1994, p. 148) The path to the outside is thus fuelled by but one force: 'a contestation that effaces.' (Foucault and Blanchot, 1987, p. 22)

But what if what we are left with is just that disconcerting image, the Vandal as a figure of destruction? How could bursts of destruction possibly be good news? In part, this is the wrong question to ask. It is driven by an image of displacement as inherently frightening. This is of course the social, material, legal and performative territory of the regime of order (Section 4.3), incessantly producing and reproducing human and non-human disorder as the unruly, uncivil, threatening. But is displacement not the logic of movement, of renewal, of finding ourselves moved by the beauty and misery of this world, '[t]he very motor of becoming,' as Elizabeth Grosz (2005a, p. 4) would have it? It also practices useful assaults on metaphysical consistency. Consistency relies on distinctions which, in turn, promotes the conditions for domination and exclusion: whiteness, maleness, non-queer, able-bodied (Smith, 2016). In this sense, the Vandal's destruction is frightening, seemingly unethical, only if one is wedded to any grounding of a conception of 'the good'. Against the backdrop of such motives, the adventure of destruction abolishes any conception of the good, of virtue, of innocence as well as the sufficiency of living a 'good' life in an otherwise bleak world (Hostis, 2017; Wang, 2012). The good commonly emerges as 'an appearance of good sense that disgusts us' (Blanchot, 1997, p. 112), adding to the forms of oppression that require our hostility (Hostis, 2017), and as a value unfortunately nonthreatening to the powers that be, a constraint on the possibilities of action. As Jackie Wang writes: 'When we rely on appeals to innocence, we foreclose a form of resistance that is outside the limits of law, and instead ally ourselves with the State', delimiting critical practice to a politics of safety and innocence 'that reproduces the 'good', compliant citizen' (Wang, 2012, n.p.); or, to paraphrase in light of advertising-subvertising relations, in allying ourselves with corporations in our practices of resistance, we end up reproducing the 'good', compliant consumer.

If there is an ethical injunction at play in a politics of annihilation, then perhaps we find it here: perpetual displacement is a prerequisite to an ethical life. An ethical life is an existence lived waging war against 'every possibility of subordinating thought to

a model of the True, the Just, or the Right.' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 377) Any ethics worthy of its name desires its own abolition. The experience of the outside, Foucault remarks, 'must be directed not toward any inner confirmation – not toward a kind of central, unshakable certitude – but toward an outer bound where it must continually contest itself.' (Foucault and Blanchot, 1987, pp. 21-22) Ethical life becomes an abandonment and prevention of ethics understood as the re-insertion of transcendental forms, ideological or otherwise. This was the failure of the Vandals, who were so certain of their will to leave nothing behind but a Rome in ruins and flames: they were in the end also 'the ones who produced the most startling reterritorialization: an empire in Africa.' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 223)

The fate of the advertising Vandal relies on its keeping at bay of advertisers' dreams of carving out spaces, times, identities, and populations; on remaining driven by a movement 'with no conclusion and no image, with no truth and no theater, with no proof, […] no affirmation, free of any center, unfettered to any native soil.' (Foucault and Blanchot, 1987, pp. 23-24) Here displacement does not summon a new ethics, but *is* the new ethics – a life lived in embrace of the shock of the outside. What perhaps, at first, spoke to us as a cruelty, the threat of blind hostility promising nothing but a devastating ending, now re-emerges not as a breakdown but a breakthrough. 'There's no longer any place for innocence in this world,' write The Invisible Committee (2017, p. 129). 'We only have the choice between two crimes: taking part in it or deserting it in order to bring it down.' The Vandal has made its choice, leaving behind in its wake the most delightful of crime scenes: the material remains of an ethics that cuts the ties with what dulls us, and that deepens those with what enlivens us.

If in Chapter 4, Chapter 5 and the Interlude (A story of paranoia) I outlined three refrains of advertising's powers to exhaust – its negative force in the regime of order, its affirmative force through amicable atmospheres, and its destabilising force through paranoia-inducing corporate infiltration – then in this chapter, I asked: what mode of contestation might outlive this exhaustive reach of advertising? How might we conceive contestation through an alternative (non)relation to advertising? I proposed the advertising Vandal, and the crime scene it leaves in its wake, as helpful conceptual devices for exploring these questions.

On a first level, and this was the key argument of the chapter, against the backdrop of the Vandal, subvertising reveals itself as tied up in a symmetrical mode of contestation with advertising. This symmetrical antagonism between advertising and

subvertising, driven by a desire to affirmative, emerged along at least two paths in this chapter. The first was a shared ontological and aesthetic impulse towards the possibility and desirability of the recognisable, individual subject, one that is ideally engulfed by the potential of public fame. The second was a common interest in articulating, through processes of classification and signification, a range of strict opinions, hopeful futures, explicit demands, recognisable images and words. The central limitation of such symmetrical, affirmative modes of relating, it was argued, is that it makes-possible and paves the path for advertising's powers to exhaust and recuperate.

On a second level, this chapter found in the figure of the Vandal a mode of antagonism in excess of symmetrical, affirmative relations. The negative politics emerging from such antagonism is centred around the undoing, rather than the subvertiser's establishing, of connections with the ontological, epistemological, aesthetic, practical and material underpinnings of what one seeks to oppose. The result is an arts of antagonism without recourse to synthesis or reconciliation with what it condemns, preferring instead a gesture towards the outside. This gesture, at once frightening and compelling in its unforgiving desire towards perpetual destabilisation and annihilation, forever seeks to postpone the taking-hold of advertising's exhaustive, recuperative drive. The theoretical implications for cultural geographers of this political gesture are discussed in the concluding chapter, to which we now turn.

Chapter 6

7 Afterlives: Power and resistance in an age of advertising

'[T]he revolution was molecular, just as much as the counter-revolution was.' (Tiqqun, 2010a, p. 200)

The Vandal is but one of many figures of subvertising we have encountered in this thesis. We have followed various subvertising figures on the streets, onto billboards, and into their squats, workshops, studios, and meetings with advertising professionals. En route, we have witnessed subvertisers' various practices, materialities, spaces and desires, as well as their wide range of entanglements with the worlds of advertising. Tracing these, the thesis offered numerous illustrations of how contestation, in the form of subvertising, becomes a terrain of intervention for contemporary advertising power, and how this, in turn, affects contestation's capacity to open onto future lifeworlds.

Returning explicitly to this central theme, in this concluding chapter I weave together and offer further reflection on the multiple arguments expressed throughout the thesis. The beginning of the thesis started from the premise that, in a world co-constituted by an expanding and increasingly differentiated landscape of advertising, it is necessary to consider how exactly advertising is embedded in the social circuits of contemporary life. The research started from the position that, for us to articulate understandings of advertising's production of social space, we need to consider advertising as a *contested* geography ontologically informed and co-constituted by instability, excess, and contestation. Fracturedness is part of advertising's lifeblood. Taking this seriously, the research sought to examine advertising power not by directly tracing the words, images and spaces of advertising per se, but instead through paying attention to the materialities, spaces, imaginations and practices of those intervening into advertising's production of space: subvertisers. I reflect on this epistemological and methodological movement with greater scrutiny below (see Section 7.3). What is important for now is that this gave rise to two central research questions. In this final chapter, I ask: how, in investigating those two research questions, has the thesis engendered theoretical, empirical and methodological contributions to cultural geographical studies?

The aim is not to close down on the questions raised in the thesis, to utter a resounding conclusion, a clear final word; for as the praxis of the Vandal and the theories of vitalist philosophers have shown us, there is an ontological and

epistemological violence to stripping an event of its excessiveness, its multiplicity, its non-generalisability. Rather, the intention is to open up possibilities beyond the limitations of this thesis. Speaking most specifically to this intention, in the final section of this chapter, I gesture towards the afterlives of this thesis, mapping out some possible theoretical and empirical futures. First, let us return to the first research question that guided this thesis.

7.1 Powers to exhaust

What do advertising-subvertising entanglements tell us about advertising power?

Across Chapter 4, Chapter 5 and the interlude 'A story of paranoia', the thesis argued that tracing the contested geographies of advertising reveals often unexpected, but crucial methods of engagement central to contemporary advertising power. If cultural geographers and a wider, interdisciplinary range of scholars of advertising power most commonly conceptualise advertising as the acceleration of consumptive behaviour or even the production of space-times, then the thesis presented a much more distributed geography, one stretched across a broad, often ragged landscape of material performances, legal constructs, forms of presence, and affective gestures, beyond advertising's fixed spaces, static positions and self-proclaimed intentions. Operating across this landscape, advertising embeds itself deeply into the productive flows of everyday life, doing much more than fuelling bodies' desires and capacities to consume through texts, images and affects. It effectively exhausts bodies' capacity to resist, to contest, to undermine, to ridicule, and thus, to think, feel, act, imagine otherwise. Advertising emerges as a force affecting, intervening into and conditioning our political imaginations. In examining advertising-subvertising entanglements, the thesis encountered three strands of advertising's powers to exhaust.

Examining the urban entanglements between advertising and subvertising, Chapter 4 brought to the fore the social, material, performative and legal engagements advertising enrols to normalise and guarantee an orderly spatial management of the city. To this end, amongst other measures, advertisers manufacture vandal-proof glass, install locking mechanisms, organise educational programs, and train maintenance crews. These measures, which I argued make up a 'regime of order', operate by a logic of consecration, separating the sacred from the profane, the inaccessible from the accessible (Agamben, 2007). They inhibit, resolve, and therefore, exhaust the urban imaginations central to the praxis and desires of subvertising practitioners, imaginations which gesture at an alternative belonging to the city, and which take excess, spontaneity, and chaos as a source of inspiration and

emancipation, rather than as that which needs to be smoothed out to the point of depletion.

Chapter 5 revealed a second register of advertising's powers to exhaust. Honing in on the often convoluted human-to-human relationships between advertisers and subvertisers, this chapter opened with an email exchange between Brandalism and a global beer brewery. In this email exchange and across various other personal engagements between advertisers and subvertisers, advertisers seemed to engineer and negotiate atmospheres which aim to engulf subvertisers in relationships of amicability. Advertisers such as the global beer company underscore the entanglement between advertisers and subvertisers, whilst diffusing and dismissing distinct points of difference. Rather than inhibiting or resolving subvertising, as the regime of order might, the engineered amicable atmosphere affirms and celebrates practices of contestation. However, and this is key, within this apparent gesture of affirmation, lies a desire to blunt subvertising's antagonistic edge, to distance it from itself. This desire marks advertising's attempt at recuperating contestation, making it work towards the displacement of its own boundaries, and ultimately, towards the necessary expansion of capitalist value-forms. Late capitalism, as I have noted following Brian Massumi, is shot through with processes of recuperation, ones that are often guided and facilitated by the contemporary practices, aesthetics, affects and spaces of advertising. Here, in recuperative capitalism, contestation's struggle against power is transformed into a deeper entwinement with it.

The interlude titled 'A story of paranoia' offered a third, final refrain of advertising's power to deplete and exhaust radical imaginaries. Continuing the focus on the human-to-human relationships between advertisers and subvertisers from Chapter 5, but shifting away from amicability into a negative, darker terrain, this interlude pointed towards the deeply embodied atmospheres of paranoia that arose out of encounters with an advertiser's hired private investigators. This atmosphere, intertwining concealment with omnipresence, overtook my own experience and engagement with contestation, however temporarily stifling the capacity to intervene into or imagine beyond the operations of advertising power.

What the interlude and two chapters sketched out is an image of advertising power that has as a central feature, at least since the 1960s, the exhausting of modes of contestation, rendering them incapable of taking hold, let alone of transforming into a broader emancipatory movement. This is the commonly unspoken and unthought of advertising power, barely appearing in the background or undercurrents of its grand billboards, media spectacles and celebrity endorsements, never quite in focus,

but therefore no less yielding. The exhaustive life of advertising power helps to perform the reproduction of everyday life in late capitalism, not only by facilitating the ongoing consumption of goods and acceptance of consumer life, as other scholars have argued (Chapter 2), but importantly, by cutting out or making-profitable the excessive, antagonistic, bleeding edge of contestation. We should thus attend to advertising power as inherently and deeply situated in the everyday present, and allow for critical considerations of its manifold implications.

To offer a final reflection, building on the observations made in this thesis, we might suggest that the corporate endeavours of exhaustion and recuperation, as encountered in this thesis, beg us to question the singular role commonly assigned to the state in counter-revolutionary or counter-insurgency praxis (e.g. Dixon, 2009; Grajales, 2013; Sidaway, 1992). From the Dutch South Sulawesi Campaign's undermining of an Indonesian uprising against its coloniser in the 1940s and the Chinese Communist Party's Campaign to Suppress Counterrevolutionaries in the 1950s, to the Strategic Hamlet Program executed in a collaborative effort by Vietnam and the United States to counter communist insurgency in the 1960s, and Italy's Special Operations Group mass arrests of anarchists in the 1990s, counter-revolutionary tactics are taken as the property and domain of complex, often international networks: police forces, secret services and national armies work alongside political parties, military theorists and state-owned media operators. However, might we not, to long histories of these state-led networks add a corporate refrain? Does advertising not, like these state interventions, take force as a political form undermining radical thought, sentiment and activity, making it instead work for economically productive ends? However, unlike state-led counter-revolutionary practice, the exhaustion of contestation via advertising is, as I emphasised in Chapter 5, unlikely an intentional project, but rather a largely accidental, albeit crucial, effect of corporate engagement with that which contests. Collectively, state-led and corporate forces tangle into a complex, excessive machine of counter-revolutionary materials, affects, laws, discourses, and spaces, tying us desperately into the present, suspending the future.

This contribution of the thesis to conceptualisations of contemporary advertising power is timely, not purely for theory's sake, but because it raises a crucial ethical and political question: how to relate to that which one opposes? It is this inquiry that lead me to investigate, in Chapter 6, the second research question underpinning this thesis.

7.2 Contestation after symmetry

What mode of advertising-subvertising contestation, if any, manages to outlive the exhaustive and recuperative logic of capitalism?

Chapter 6 was an exploration into the conditions making exhaustion and, more particularly, recuperation possible. The chapter picked up from the five levels of entanglement between advertising and subvertising outlined in Chapter 5. Advertising and subvertising are bound together via the lure of aesthetic productions, identity, media skills, financial support and provocation. In the commonly misunderstood, frequently despised and sometimes daunting figure of the Vandal, by contrast, we encountered an 'asymmetrical' mode of contestation, one spurting from the outside, in negation of advertising not only as a particularly vehement mode of communication, but as violent on a broader ontological and epistemological terrain. The Vandal withdraws from and uproots the advertiser's onto-epistemological impulse: to name, to identify, to position, to signify, to cut, to speak truths, to produce, to affirm, to plan, to direct, to govern. The effect is an aesthetic, affective performance that refuses to reproduce the advertiser's mistakes. In this refusal, the Vandal negates the conditions of reconciliation or integration with, or recuperation by, what it opposes. In other words, the Vandal shows us that, to refrain from making stronger or more profitable what is deemed worthy of opposition, it becomes necessary to withdraw from replicating their various ontologies, epistemologies, aesthetics, practices and affective tenor. The result: a non-dialectical antagonism irreconcilable with the worlds it denounces.

The negation of affirmation, at stake in the advertising Vandal, speaks to two strands of cultural geographical scholarship. On a first level, the thesis' interest in the often profitable entanglement of advertising and subvertising reflects geographical scholarship on the commodification and recuperation of 'urban subversions' such as skateboarding, urban exploration, graffiti and parkour (see Mould, 2015). Where Chapter 5 and Chapter 6 complicated this literature, however, is in their questioning of the ways practices, spaces and aesthetics of urban subversions replicate the operations and desires of the techniques of power they contest. In other words, how *subversive* is an urban subversion if it fails to rid itself from the ontological, epistemological, aesthetic or operational life of power? And what might it take for a spatial practice, perhaps no longer an 'urban subversion', to negate the conditions for opening up a corporate opportunity? Exploring these questions, the thesis extended debates on the profitability of spatial practices of contestation.

Conclusion

On a second level, it presents a theoretical and political challenge to the conflation, recognised by the cultural geographer John Wylie, of non-representational theory with affirmation, or in his words, with an 'idiom of force, vitality, materiality and relationality.' (2010, p. 104) In non-representational theories, Paul Harrison tells us, the negative is cast in a monstrous light, as 'life denying rage, absurdity, revenge, anguish, and victimization; everything that burdens and weighs down [...] – ressentiment,' and thus, is set against 'affirmative hope, generosity, love, creativity; the overcoming of fatalism and cynicism via lightness and openness to the future.' (Harrison, 2015, p. 289) It is hard not feel that the 'deck has been stacked before the game has begun, for what monster would ever choose anguish over generosity, fatalism over love, the past over the future, ressentiment over joy?' (Harrison, 2015, p. 289) And thus, there is a forceful lure to affirmation, and its affective companions 'joy', 'optimism', 'hope', 'life'. As Chris Philo writes: 'These new geographies – these new ways of casting light upon the vibrating, gyrating, dancing geographies of the world, or many worlds – are bewitching, seductive, chock-full of hope, optimism, of new politics and new ethics for new times.' (Philo, 2017, p. 257)

The seduction of a 'new politics', an affirmative politics, finds dominance not only in non-representational geography, but across contemporary scholarship:

> 'This 'affirmationism' is the tone of contemporary thought, hegemonic in the precise sense of shaping even the resistance to it, and multiplying amongst a diverse and often antagonistic range of thinkers whose projects resonate in the present: Deleuze ('Affirmation itself is being, being is solely affirmation in all its power'), Derrida (in the beginning is 'minimal, primary yes', 'the light, dancing yes of affirmation'), Negri ('My intention ... is to develop a philosophy of praxis, a materialism of praxis, by insisting on ... the affirmative power of being'), Badiou ('[philosophy] must break with whatever leads it through nihilistic detours, that is, with everything that restrains and obliterates affirmative power'), and many others.' (Noys, 2010, p. 3)

What the Vandal gestures towards, and this is perhaps where it poses questions to non-representational and more-than-representational geographers in a most explicit sense, is the limitation of a politics of affirmation, asking: what is affirmed in affirmation? What is lost in the negation of the negative? Or, more precisely, what if the rush towards affirmation, a tendency towards joy, is equally the operative and affective logic of late capitalism? What if joyfulness, invention, productivity, connectivity and creativity are stories told and retold day after day by advertising

professionals, stories reverberating across corporate offices around the world? Non-representational theorists are only beginning to question the premise of affirmation.

Mitch Rose, for instance, seems guided by a similar doubt when he writes: 'Non-representational theory's ethical/political challenge to live life differently is thrilling for its exuberance – its joyous affirmation of and encouragement for supplementation, multiplicity and vitalism. But I worry sometimes…' (Rose, 2010, p. 345; see also Gerlach, 2017; Harrison, 2015) What, in the end, the Vandal states clearly to non-representational theorists is that affirmation can not be taken for granted. Of non-representational theorists, the vandal asks: can or should we bring back negativity? If so, in what form and under which conditions? Does negativity, in certain contexts, carry within it a desirable, necessitated mode of politics, of (not) relating to a corporate world succumbed by and putting-to-work the affirmative? The very least, the Vandal holds up a mirror: it challenges us to investigate our own practices of resistance. It pushes us to query, however painfully, the ethical injunctions and assumptions of antagonistic practice, and how their moral policing might well be guided by values of 'tolerance', 'innocence' and 'being civilised', values which, at best, a priori direct or limit the scope of resistance, and, at worst, play into the hands of that which is resisted.

But the Vandal cannot present itself as a perfection, as having fashioned the final technique of contestation, an absolute resolution. Rather, the Vandal emerges as an unfolding experiment in crafting an arts of antagonism, wildly in excess of affirmation, that might mount an 'outside' to late capitalism's investment in recuperation. Further, in casting the Vandal in this light, we need to be wary of assigning it a privileged position or capacity. Whilst it might, beyond proffering a theoretical complication, undermine the epistemological, organisational, aesthetic and performative underpinnings of much contemporary resistance, it is, by no means unique in its explorative adventures. Its assaults, its refusals, its denouncements, its terms of (dis)engagement; all of these are echoed across an incoherent array of figures, largely in excess of the struggle over or against the production of advertising space. These figures populate the landscapes of various genres of politics: 'afro-pessimism' (e.g. Sexton, 2016; Wilderson, 2010), 'conspirational communism' (Culp, 2016b), 'black nihilism' (Warren, 2015), 'insurrectionary communisation' (The Invisible Committee, 2009; Tiqqun, 2010a), 'cosmic pessimism' (Thacker, 2015; 2018) and 'queer negativity' (e.g. Caserio *et al.*, 2006; Edelman, 2004). Whilst deeply

diverging,[75] if they share anything at all, it might be a widespread distrust of affirmation, fearing that relationality, connectivity and joyfulness are exactly the affective measures of contemporary power, choosing instead various antitheses (or antidotes) to the charm of affirmation: withdrawal, escape, concealment, refusal, hatred, or, indeed, even indifference.

For afro-pessimists, for instance, the figuration of the Enlightenment subject as a self-possessed, sovereign being is possible only through its casting out of others who presumably do not belong to such a figuration of the human: black bodies, queer bodies, anomalies, etc. The result of this detachment is what Jared Sexton calls 'social death', referring to the objecthood, rather than subjecthood, of both the slave and the contemporary black body. This body, the 'uncivilised' body, is exactly the prerequisite of the constitution of its opposite: civil society. The ethical response, for afro-pessimists, should be less the call that we are, in fact, all 'human', that is, the call for recognition and subjecthood, and more the expression of a desire, following Frank Wilderson III, to 'stay in the hold of the ship.' (Wilderson, 2010, p. xi) The belief is that one cannot claim blackness as 'humanness' without also re-confirming the sovereignty of whiteness (Wynter, 2003). Why demand inclusion in the societies that have negated you?

Instead, afro-pessimists and others interested in asymmetrical or 'negative' politics,[76] and against the logic of rational debate, they pick up Deleuze's call for the production of 'vacuoles of non-communication' in their preference for silence or barbaric speech (Deleuze, 1995, p. 175), on the one hand, and invisibility, or 'incognegro' in Frank Wilderson III's term (2008), on the other hand. From this double movement spurs the political as a disinterest in creating a better world, a better 'civil society', favouring an outrageous refusal, perhaps the least affirmative gesture of all: the end of this world. This refusal, Wilderson tells us, is 'an endless antagonism that

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[75] Not the least in their philosophical inspirations. While most are markedly dedicated to a post-structuralist mode of thought, there is a distinction to be drawn between primarily Lacanian (e.g. Edelman, 2004), Fanonian (e.g. Wilderson, 2010), Foucauldian (e.g. Hartman, 1997), Agambenian (Tiqqun, 2010a) and Deleuzian (e.g. Culp, 2016b) iterations of negative politics. This has given birth to distinct accounts of 'affirmation' and 'negation'. What they share, however, is a suspicion towards the relational, integration and synthesis.

[76] As we have seen, this politics is negative not in a Hegelian, dialectical sense, where its very existence relies upon that which it negates, but emerges negatively as an immediate refusal of the antagonistic totality, of the promise of the relational.

cannot be satisfied (via reform or reparation), but must nonetheless be pursued to the death.' (Wilderson, 2003, p. 26) In perhaps gentler terms, Sarah Banet-Weiser (2018), in her book 'Empowered: Popular Feminism and Popular Misogyny', traces various arrangements of contemporary feminist activity, only to arrive at a similar impasse: popular feminism's desire for visibility, for recognition, is not its vigour, but its downfall, the resolute delimitation of its capacity for collective action and, ultimately, for overcoming feminist struggle (see also Edelman, 2004). The Vandal is, thus, by no means an outcast, a lone traveller in search of the 'outside'. Alongside other anomalies of various kinds (e.g. the maroon, the guerrilla, the fugitive (Hart, 2018)), the Vandal puts into practice philosophies of asymmetrical politics, thrusting a forceful break in the contemporary hold of power and resistance.

7.3 Power via resistance and vitalism: a note on methodology

To summarise, the thesis argued that contemporary advertising plays a central role in the exhaustion, recuperation and, therefore, delimitation of the capacities and conditions of contestation in late capitalism. This entangles advertising more pervasively into the social life of contemporary societies than commonly implied. Unsatisfied with ending on exhausted modes of contestation, the thesis has illustrated that the Vandal, in its material performance and ontological inventions, uncovers the entanglement of power and resistance, and crafts techniques for a mode of activity, a spatial practice, that ventures beyond the contemporary insufficiency of joyful, relational, and affirmative registers of the political. To investigate the two research questions that brought forth this argument, the thesis made a double methodological movement: conceptualising and making use of a 'vitalist methodology', and putting this methodology to use through the technique of researching power via resistance. Arriving at the end of the thesis, it is now possible to briefly reflect on the main advantages encountered and questions raised through the thesis' wielding of this twofold methodological orientation.

A vitalist methodology brought to light the more-than-representational tenets of power. This approach proved valuable in allowing us to move beyond the usual analyses of advertising power conducted by cultural geographers and other scholars interested in advertising power, who tend to pay attention primarily to the ways advertising is constituted by and produces worlds through its agglomeration of texts and images. By contrast, a vitalist approach disables exactly such a textual reading of advertising power. It sheds light on how power is commonly reliant on non-representational or more-than-representational ways of engaging bodies, ways that

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exceed the self-proclaimed aims and methodologies of those considered to be exerting that power.

The potential of a vitalist, more-than-representational methodology was amplified by researching power via resistance, and by doing so by 'becoming a subvertiser', in terms of our investigation of both power and resistance. Firstly, regarding power, in Chapter 5 it was only by 'becoming' Brandalism, by organising with them, by joining Sylvie's meetings with advertisers, that the recurrence and prominence of affirmative, often subtle but deeply affective, gestures started standing out. These stories were never told in any of the foundational interviews; they were deemed irrelevant to the general picture of subvertising. Likewise, it was only through the embodied encounter with the private investigators (see 'Interlude: A story of paranoia') that I became attuned to the heterogeneity and more-than-representational qualities of paths along which advertising exhausts the possibilities of alternative imaginaries. Only by being present, by letting go of my researcher position, by getting swept away by the eventfulness of the field, did advertisers' reliance on concealment and withdrawal become apparent. As these two examples illustrate, becoming a subvertiser helped make visible some of the invisible lives of power.

Secondly, and echoing Michel Foucault (1982, p. 780), researching power via an ethnographic engagement with resistance does not only allow us to examine the often concealed particularities of power relations, but also the ways they might be dissociated, in ways that exceed the potential of, for instance, interviewing subvertisers or of undertaking a content analysis of subvertising posters. To give just one example, the chosen methodological orientation allowed this thesis to investigate the peculiar (dis)entanglements between advertisers and subvertisers. Thus, it was the subtle but poignant atmosphere experienced in the Parisian squat that revealed the peculiar disjunction between the modes of organising of advertisers and subvertisers. Without these intimate engagements with the worlds of subvertising, I consider it unlikely that I would have noticed 'the Vandal' as a figure of contestation operating according to a distinct logic that detaches it from 'the subvertiser'.

The method of ethnographically researching power via contestation did, however, raise a number of challenges. In the same way that overemphasising or starting from those deemed to be benefiting disproportionately from the exercise of power (e.g. advertisers) partially predetermines what we will encounter and study as researchers, the reversal of this strategy equally carries its limitations. On a basic level, the decision to limit the field of analysis to advertising-contestation relations made it impossible to understand how practices of advertising come to affect 'consumers'.

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This decision directs how we approach and conceptualise the particularities of advertising geographies. While this decision was a conscious one, a shift away from the common but limited approach of investigating advertising power via the words, images and materialities of advertising, it does present a set of boundaries for what the study reveals about what is included in the geographies, methodologies and audiences of advertising power and how these affect everyday social realities. On a second level, one of the central challenges of investigating power via resistance, and particularly doing so through ethnographic work, has been that it roots my critique in a particular material and geographical locale. It becomes hard, therefore, to evaluate to any serious extent whether the exhaustive powers of advertising carry a global dimension beyond Western Europe and the United States.

It is, however, significant to note that, following a vitalist methodology, the thesis was not set out to provide inspiration for a novel general or universal theory of advertising power. Instead, following Derek McCormack, amongst others, it was an attempt at remaining immanent to the eventfulness and singularity of lifeworlds (McCormack, 2003; Dewsbury *et al.*, 2002). Yet, and contrasting McCormack and various other non-representational theorists, its aims were decidedly political in the sense of explicitly hoping to bring to life relations of power and their contestation. The resultant ethical question the thesis had to struggle with, one that I believe is significant in light of vitalist methodologies more broadly, is centred around knowledge production: how to avoid the problem of generalisation whilst not losing the dedication to a political impulse? In other words, how to retain a political sensibility amidst a commitment to the messiness, immanence and non-categorisability of social reality? A main challenge is therefore to marry a vitalist methodological orientation with the political.

In this thesis, the methodological response to this challenge has been to illustrate how the exercise of power is not abstract, universal, instrumental or straightforwardly intentional. Power was, in other words, always tied up in messy, contested, localised and material processes of enactment. This was not a case of refusing to present accounts of power, but of taking seriously their indeterminability, excessiveness and situatedness. The concrete stories told in this thesis made such instances of power come to life, without claiming to offer examples of a 'general rule' of power.

It is however easy but also insufficient to argue that an event, a set of power relations, an object, a body, is complex, singular, messy, indeterminable. At this point, a vitalist orientation might easily enable 'flat ontologies' (e.g. Marston *et al.*, 2005), where 'complexity' becomes 'a way to defer a sufficient answer' (Culp, 2016b,

p. 34), or give rise to its political companion, an affirmative (micro)politics – if there is no outside, then a micropolitics of experimenting with new relations is all we have left. Upon encountering the limitations of this tying of a vitalist philosophy to affirmative politics, Chapter 6 decided to engage an alternative set of theories. In these 'negative' theories and the figure of the Vandal, the thesis found a number of tools for circumventing the overinvestment in empirical description and underinvestment in the political, whilst avoiding the trap of generalisation. We were left with a 'negative' politics that separates immanence as ontology from immanence as politics.

A last methodological challenge to raise relates to a vitalist methodology's refusal to start from identity categories, whether these are self-assigned or socially produced. In thinking bodies as processual, assembled, distributed, and more-than-human, and indeed in excess of essentials or given qualities, the question of identity is sometimes too easily pushed aside. A vitalist, affective methodology makes it hard to come to terms with the work identity categories enact in the worlds of both power and resistance. These stories too easily remain untold. This, I believe, is the dangerous, but often unconsidered edge of a vitalist orientation: whilst it does not, by definition, exclude questions of identity (see for instance the work of feminists inspired by vitalist thought such as Elizabeth Grosz (2004; 2005b)), its ontological drive has a tendency of masking their contemporary salience. While I do not wish to argue that a vitalist orientation ignores such questions by default, it is not however, as opposed to a more structuralist or psychoanalytic approach, instinctively part of its realm of interest.

Acknowledging this challenge, in this thesis I have sought to return to the question of identity in Chapter 6 through an engagement with, amongst others, the fields of afro-pessimism and queer negativity. However, it needs to be noted that, in taking the more-than-representational as its starting-point, the thesis did not take identities of gender or race as a primary site of investigation. Unanswered, therefore, remained questions around the *bodies* of subvertising: how are they gendered, racialised, classed, informed and produced by age and ability? How does this affect the possibility for and danger of illicit activity?[77] What does this tell us about advertising

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[77] Whilst the geographer Paul Routledge emphasises that 'various forms of (dramatic, arrestable) direct action have been undertaken in different contexts by people of differing gender, ableist, class, and ethnic backgrounds' (2002, p. 485), there remains an

power and spaces of contestation? It would be disingenuous to overlook the largely male, white make-up of the subvertising landscape.[78] This, indeed, points towards a problematic that was (Thien, 2005) and remains (Saldanha, 2015) dominant in the realm of vitalist thought and, more broadly, of non-representational theory. The challenge that requires ongoing negotiation by these scholarly fields, in geography and beyond, is: how to conceive of bodies as simultaneously distributed, in a sense 'post-identity', and performed or violated through various forms of identity?

The multiple questions raised regarding methodologies of researching power via vitalism and resistance, I believe, offer grounds not for leaving them behind, but for pushing vitalism beyond its familiar self, into a sphere of knowledge production at once immanent, political and reflective of its limitations.

7.4 After this thesis

The thesis was, from the start, a speculative adventure. Its aim was to tell a different story about advertising power in the hope that it enacts new beginnings, in geography and beyond, and that it carves out new paths of contestation. This story started in an unlikely place: the offices of one of the largest, most profitable advertising agencies. Likewise, its endings will surpass the pages of this thesis. The project that was this thesis remains unfinished, its moment of arrival likely never materialised.

One path along which the themes of this thesis could be picked up is by widening the scope of what is included in a conception of advertising as a contested geography. Employing the same method of investigating power via resistance, an investigation of, for instance, more everyday ordinary forms of resistance (e.g. Adblocker,

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important consideration regarding which bodies are able to undertake which physical, mental or legal risks.

[78] On the basis of my own ethnographic work and interviews, I can note that around 70% of the encountered subvertisers (by which I mean those who actively go out and intervene into advertising space, and not those who, for instance by taking-part in Brandalism, pass on their art work without doing the actual installation) are white and male. Which is not to suggest that subvertising is purely Western, male, and white. As becomes apparent in the subvertising timeline (Appendix I), subvertising practitioners do exist in places including Argentina, Iran and Indonesia. Further, in countries such as the United Kingdom, activist collectives including Black Lives Matter, critiquing racism in the criminal justice system, and Sisters Uncut, addressing domestic violence, have been central forces behind the ongoing advancement and proliferation of the subvertising movement.

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anonymisation), legal action against advertising (e.g. Ad block Bristol's attempt to legally ban advertising in the city), or artistic forms of resistance (e.g. see Thornton, 2018 on poetic interventions into Google advertising) could further investigate how advertising is intervened into, whilst revealing various techniques of power exhausting or recuperating those interventions.

Particularly interesting, in this regard, would be to pay attention to the subjects, practices and imaginations that arise in resistance to expanding digital advertising technologies (social media advertising, celebrity video endorsements, face ID technology, artificial intelligence marketing, and so forth) in the Global North and South. One significant case study could be China's social credit system, where facial recognition, bodily scanning, location tracking, big data applications and algorithmic governance are enrolled on a mass scale to ascribe citizens an individual score (regarding, amongst other variables, professional conduct, consumption behaviour, involvement in tax evasion, and peers' own scores) which in turn determines their accessibility to housing, schools, health care, and travel, as well as enabling personalised advertising and commercial offers (Ramadan, 2018).

But is the digital truly, as media theorist Alexander Galloway (2014, p. xviii) proclaims, an insatiable and inescapable beast? What might it mean to refuse digital advertising's reliance on transparency, connectivity and exposure? What does this, in turn, tell us about advertising's exhaustive logics vis-à-vis difference, including forms of contestation? This would allow us to contribute to and complicate theorisations of power in 'network cultures' (Terranova, 2004), digital 'connectivism' (Culp, 2016a) and contemporary 'societies of control' (Berry and Galloway, 2015), and the ways the related techniques of power come to be resisted.

Secondly, and further contributing to those debates, it would be useful to investigate how recuperative capitalism is expressed not only via advertising's various geographies, but also through the operations of other industries such as public relations, mobile phone technology or surveillance technology. This would shed light on the diverging but particular ways recuperation comes to intervene into and make-profitable the practices, spaces and imaginations set out to contest capitalist expansion and capitalist value-systems. This would allow us to examine in greater detail the hypothesis, briefly expressed in Section 6.1, of late capitalism as a counter-revolutionary power complimenting its state-led counterpart.

Thirdly, from various forms of contestation against digital culture, surveillance capitalism and recuperative logics it might be possible to trace a politics exerted through a negative attunement to technology. Indeed, starting from those

subvertisers who have decided to live a life of digital anonymity, total disconnection, full encryption and digital sabotage, it would be possible to conceptualise, illustrate and provoke a broader politics of 'techno-nihilism', and how this plays out in network cultures and digitised cities. Underscored by an interest in the philosophical and historical underpinnings of a negative attunement to technology, such a project could start from the (neo-)Luddite movement and anarcho-primitivism, move onto a sentiment of techno-nihilism arguably found in contemporary Heideggerian thought and towards calls for technological assault in collectives such as the Committee for Liquidation or Subversion of Computers,[79] and calls for technological desertion from post-Marxist French thinkers (such as Tiqqun, as already encountered in Chapter 6).

These ideas could be read alongside currents of techno-utopianism and accelerationism (inspired by the work of Gilbert Simondon, Donna Haraway, and Nick Srnicek) and their uptake by media geographers (e.g. Ash, 2015). On the one hand, such a project, complemented with ethnographic research into urban communes (e.g. Grow Heathrow), rural communes (e.g. ZAD), artistic practices (e.g. Zach Blas) and activist organisations (e.g. Fuck Off Google), would be a modest provocation launched at accelerationist thought and affirmative politics, both of which appear happy to engage networked culture or smart cities, each in their own ways, in an affirmative register. On the other hand, this would extend existing critical considerations of the emergent 'techno-utopian vocabulary' (Pollio, 2016) that celebrates digital technologies as the enhancement of security (Klauser *et al.*, 2014), inclusion (Hollands, 2015; Leszczynski, 2016), efficiency (Kitchin and Dodge, 2011), and sustainability (Beumer, 2017). What remains underexplored, and a project into techno-nihilism might begin to unravel, is the question of how digital landscapes and infrastructures are actively and creatively contested, and how this contestation engenders radical alternative imaginations, experiences and politics beyond/besides techno-optimistic paradigms.

Fourthly, building on the initial work undertaken by this thesis and a limited amount of geographical scholarship into negativity (Harrison, 2015; Gerlach, 2017; Rose,

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[79] The Committee for Liquidation or Subversion of Computers was a self-proclaimed anarchist network known for firebombing French telecommunications companies in the 1980s. Today, various groups, such as the Mexican collective named Individuals Tending Towards the Wild, launch similar assaults on technological infrastructures.

2014),[80] it would be possible to make explicit, in a disciplinary contribution, the conceptual value of 'negative' geographies. The aim of such an intervention would not be to trace a singular line of negative thought, nor to present negativity as a demarcated field of geographical study that exists within opposition to affirmation. *Besides* affirmation; not against, or beyond. Instead, against a de facto dismissal of negativity as irrelevant or counterproductive, this project would be interested in speculating the negative as an ontological orientation and political sentiment that might complicate or supplement existing geographical scholarship. Encouraged by a sense that it is ever more difficult to think in terms that are not affirmative in tenor, demonstrated by the claim that 'the recourse to the affirmative has become second nature' (Noys, 2010, p. xi) or that 'theories of life, of vitality, and of affirmation, are in the ascendant' (Harrison, 2015, p. 285), the impulse here is to proliferate a series of approaches which present negativity as a framing, a register, a politics worthy of geographers' redemption.

This thesis, I hope, offered a generative terrain from which to imagine power in an advertising age anew. But more importantly, in tracing a material force, a force of retreat and assault, sometimes incompatible with the powers that be, but always impatient to push beyond the fatigue and exhaustion of the present, it also sought to carve out possibilities for future iterations of contestation. Whether these forces will be caught on the way, in a recuperative trap, or whether they'll continue to dig deeper, deserting further underground, diversifying and expanding ruinous passions, remains of course, as of yet, to be seen.

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[80] As well as on two conferences sessions titled 'Besides affirmation: on geography and negativity', organised by myself and the cultural geographers Joe Gerlach and Thomas Jellis at the American Association of Geographers 2018 conference. The introduction to these two sessions is, at the time of writing, being edited by myself and the two co-organisers into a paper for the journal *Area*.

Epilogue: An echo from elsewhere

It had been almost a year since I sent the final, desperate email to Donna's friend Nicolas. I had come to terms with the impossibility of knowing about the Vandal; or perhaps more correctly, I had given up. It seemed pointless to pursue someone whose main urge seems to *not* be pursued, to *not* be known. And yet, there was the email. Sent at an ungodly hour the night before. It took me a moment to realise 'wmoha@gmail.com' wasn't some spam account that had somehow snuck through my remorseless email filter. The email had the same subject line I used a year earlier; it had to be him. Had I somehow found the one route, tunnel or bridge out of Kafka's purportedly boundless imperial fortress? I was shaking with excitement, and almost didn't dare open the email. I held my breath, took another sip from my morning tea, and then, I clicked:

> 'Hi Thomas, sorry for the late reply, been busy with all sorts of things, moved back to London and haven't really checked this email account in a long time. I think I have a sense of what you want to talk to me about. I should have some time in a few weeks if you want to meet up. Say hi to Donna if you get a chance. Maybe we could all hang out together?'

I couldn't believe it. I was going to meet him after all. I didn't respond immediately, afraid that I would seem too desperate, or maybe too orderly, that it would somehow decrease the chances of receiving another response. The next day, I wrote back and, after a number of back-and-forths, two cancellations, and one misunderstanding, we finally met in August 2018.

I searched for the man described in his email: brown hoodie, short curly hair, thick glasses. There he was, in the back corner of the cafe. He was a slender, tall figure, with a pale and bony face. I walked up to him. He was hunched over a tattered little notebook, writing frantically on light brown pages already crammed with dark scribbles and sketches. 'Hi, sorry... are you Nicolas?' Only then did he look up. 'Oh sorry, didn't notice you there.' He gave me an affectionate broad smile, shut his notebook, and slid into his backpack. 'Nice to meet you.' As I got up to fetch us drinks, it suddenly dawned on me that I had invited Nicolas to the same cafe where I interviewed two advertisers. Would he be appalled by the sleek design, the overpriced coffee, the clearly not-second-hand vintage sofas, the possibly pretentious

descriptions on the menu? But then I realised I knew absolutely nothing about the person sitting in front of me. *Quit presuming.* I loosened up and sat down.

We instantly embarked on a stream of conversations, flowing from one topic to another, so effortlessly so that I almost forgot that I had arrived with one particular question that needed answering. After a long conversation about the financial difficulties of living in London, he seemed to be getting a little restless, tapping his empty cup of coffee, and untangling his earphones. I sensed he was about to announce his departure (had he forgotten why I wanted to meet?), so I garnered the desperately needed courage. The simple question finally rolled off my tongue: 'Why do you destroy advertising spaces?' His eyes lit up and, to my surprise, he opened his backpack and took out that same little notebook and started flicking through it, his eyes racing across the pages and its tiny scribbles. 'Got it,' he said and then remained silent for a few seconds. 'I found this text in some book a while ago, I don't remember where, but I thought you'd like it,' he said, and then started reading:

> 'Deeply lost in the night. Just as one sometimes lowers one's head to reflect, thus to be utterly lost in the night. All around people are asleep. It's just play acting, an innocent self-deception, that they sleep in houses, in safe beds, under a safe roof, stretched out or curled up on mattresses, in sheets, under blankets; in reality they have flocked together as they had once upon a time and again later in a deserted region, a camp in the open, a countless number of men, an army, a people, under a cold sky on cold earth, collapsed where once they had stood, forehead pressed on the arm, face to the ground, breathing quietly. And you are watching, are one of the watchmen, you find the next one by brandishing a burning stick from the brushwood pile beside you. Why are you watching? Someone must watch, it is said. Someone must be there.'

'That's it,' he smiled. '*What is that supposed to mean?*' I thought, as he ripped the page out of his notebook and handed it over to me.[81] I could sense my bedazzlement pleased him deeply. To add further drama to the moment, he got up quickly, told me he really had to go now, shook my hand, and left the cafe, before I could inquire any

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[81] Only at home did I find out, after an online search, that the text was a very short story titled 'At Night', written by Franz Kafka (1971).

further. I stared at the rippled page as he got out in the blazing summer heat, knowing that I'd probably never see him again.

Appendices

Appendix I: A short history of subvertising

What follows is an admittedly limited account of subvertising history. It is limited because it is unavoidably incomplete. Much subvertising goes unnoticed and remains undocumented. Not all subvertisers seek, or manage to gain, media exposure. Relatedly, unlike practices such as urban exploration or squatting, subvertising is not held together by public online platforms where practitioners share their work. Much activity, from small scribbles to large takeovers, also remains underground out of a legal concern. Further, the subvertising activity documented in the timeline is largely Western. In part, this is due to the lack of recording and publication of these practices in a wide range of countries. However, I also believe that subvertising is currently, and historically, a predominantly Western practice, at least in terms of its large-scale and collaborative iterations. In Middle Eastern and Southern American countries, however, subvertising commonly takes the form of assaulting with paint bombs or taking down billboards promoting a particular political leader or party.

1 century BC

Roman dwellers of Pompeii, excited or upset by certain gladiatorial battles, add personal responses to 'adverts' promoting the events.

1958

The Situationist International, a group of intellectuals and artists, launch their inaugural journal in which they discuss the concept of 'détournement' as the integration of artistic production into cultural spheres (including advertising) in order to denounce their validity.

1968

Employing paint markers and spray paint, protesters during the May demonstrations and strikes express their frustration with advertising and consumerist logics on billboards across the Parisian streets and underground system.

1973

Jean-Jacques Michel and Victor Schwach publish 'Le détournement d'affiches', the first academic paper on subvertising. In the paper, the authors analyse the meaning of the May 1968 subvertising actions.

1977

Emergence of the first subvertising collective: *Billboard Liberation Front.* The BLF, based in San Francisco, uses paint and graffiti to expose and ridicule corporations.

1979

The group *Billboard Utilising Graffitists Against Unhealthy Promotions*, a collective of artists, activists and medical professionals, starts attacking cigarette and alcohol advertising on the streets of Sydney.

1980

Keith Haring moves from painting and drawing into the illicit realm of New York subvertising, first by painting over a jeans advert, reversing its meaning, then more famously, and two years later, by drawing his infamous characters in white chalk across subway advertising spaces.

This is a timeline reading from left to right along a horizontal axis.

1982

Jill Posener publishes 'Spray it loud', the first book dedicated to subvertising. The book showcases a large amount of humorous graffiti interventions into billboards that display the sexist underpinnings of particular advertisements and consumer society more broadly.

1989

The anti-consumerist magazine *Adbusters* publishes its first issue. The magazine prints its own mock adverts, revealing the horrors of certain corporations and capitalist economics more broadly.

1990

Billboard Liberation Front publish 'The Art and Science of Billboard Improvement', the world's first subvertising how-to manual.

1990

New Jersey art collective *Artfux* collaborate with the artist Ron English paste their large-scale posters over billboards in an attempt to hijack the meanings of corporate and state messages.

1991

Mark Dery coins the term 'subvertising' in an Adbusters article, describing it as 'subvert[ing] advertising's attempts at directing the consumer's attention in a particular direction'.

1991

Reverend Michael Phleger, realising that Chicago's minority communities contained large disproportionate number of alcohol and tobacco advertisements as white neighborhoods, splattered red paint on billboards. He went on trial and was acquitted. Reverend Phleger followed in the footsteps of Reverend Calvin O. Butts who conduct similar subvertising in Harlem a year earlier.

1992

The organisation *Résistance à l'Agression Publicitaire* (Resistance against the aggression of advertising), also known as 'antipub', is founded by media theorist François Brune, writer René Macaire and artist Yvan Gradis. Using subvertising, they confront the advertising industry and its multiple socio-economic effects. In the decades that follow, antipub collectives spread across France and Belgium.

1993

New York-based graffiti writer paints his pseudonym *KAWS* onto a billboard in New Jersey.

1998

The artist *Zevs* 'shoots' advertising models by spraying dripping red graffiti paint between their eyes.

2002

The subvertising collective *Consume Hasta Morir* is founded, and starts developin counter-advertising strategie: including the subvertising o: billboards across Madrid.

In Berlin, the artist *Zevs* cuts out model from billboard in what he calls a 'visual kidnapping', asking a 500,000 € ransom from the attacked advertiser.

2002

Kylee Magee paints over his first billboard in Melbourne. It is the first of many subvertising acts, always undertaken midday, that would eventually lead to the organisation *Democratic Media Please*, an organisation that removes advertising from public space in order to confront corporate control over the media landscape.

2004

In Paris, hundreds of subvertisers, under the common pseudonym 'Robert Johnson', paint over advertisements in multiple metro stations using brushes and paint bombs. A trial is organised against 62 of the alleged 'vandals'.

2003

Bill Posters installs his first hand painted '48 sheet' billboard subvertisement in Liverpool, UK.

2004

The infamous street artist *Banksy* writes the famous words 'The joy of not being sold anything' on an empty billboard in London.

2005

The *Cut Up Collective* starts appearing on the streets of East London. Their method, unsurprisingly, is to select and cut up a billboard poster into thousands of pieces ('pixels'), reassembling the pieces into an entirely novel poster, which is then, in turn, installed on the original billboard space.

2005

Creation of the *Collectif des déboulonneurs*: a Parisian subvertising group known for painting graffiti slogans onto advertising spaces.

2005

The London-based artist *The Decapitator* 'beheads' models on outdoor advertisements by pasting his own digital prints of a decapitated head over the original heads.

2007

The first recorded digital billboard hack. The process exposed by the *Tottenkoph*, the hacker herself, during the hacking conference Defcon.

2008

'Close window' buttons, recognisable from online pop-up advertisements, are pasted on billboards and bus shelter advertisements across France the *Pop Down Project*.

2008

Launch of the Argentinian collective *Proyecto Squatters*. The collective is a self-proclaimed counter-advertising group known for painting over, writing over, or crossing out the texts and images of advertising to subvert their messages and bring to light what advertisements commonly hide.

2008

The New York Street Ad Takeover project, organised by the New York subvertiser Jordan Seiler, paints over 20,000 feet worth of advertising space in largest collective subvertising campaign to date.

2009

Poster Boy, an artist known for cutting up and mashing together Ney York subway advertisements with a razor blade, is arrested.

2009

Following on from its New York edition, Jordan Seiler organises the *Madrid Street Ad Takeover* project, installing 106 posters designed by an international group of artists in bus shelters across the city.

2010

Parisian graffiti writer *Hijab Princess* paints veils and hijabs onto half-naked models on billboards.

2011

The subvertiser *Vermibus* attacks the fashion industry with his 'dissolving' of the models on fashion adverts. Many similar interventions take place in the years that follow.

2011

Prague-based subvertiser *EPOS257*, extending his previous paint ball attacks on billboards, produces a homemade paint cannon to create 'abstract paintings'.

2012

On the 25th of March, the subvertising group *Les Déboulonneurs* wins a court case launched against them for writing graffiti over billboards and bus shelter advertising. The judge deemed their actions to be protected under a 'freedom of speech' and 'reason of necessity' defence.

2012

Brandalism launches with the world's largest subvertising campaign, taking over 36 large billboards with artworks from 28 countries addressing the social, economic and environmental effects of advertising.

2013

The urban exploration collecti On The Roofs hack a billboa on a skyscraper roof in Hong Kong, displaying their own content. The video of the actic is viewed by millions, and is soon followed by a surge of rumours claiming the action w a publicity stunt for a drone company.

2014

This is a timeline spanning 2014 to 2016.

2014

The subvertiser *EPOS257* publishes a visual guide to creating anti-advertising paint bombs using light bulbs.

2014

Vermibus organises the first edition of 'No Ad Day', calling on subvertisers across the world to remove as many adverts from the street as possible.

2015

On the day when most people return to work after their Christmas holiday, London-based subvertising group *Special Patrol Group* takes over London Underground advertising spaces with quotes from anthropologist David Graeber pointing out how, under capitalism, most jobs are 'bullshit jobs'.

2015

Jordan Seiler launches *Public Access*, an online platform where anyone can buy keys that open the advertising spaces in their part of the world.

2015

In Paris, *Brandalism* installs 600 subvertisements, by 80 artists, denouncing the corporate domination of the COP21 UN Climate Talks.

2015

Activists alter Hungarian government's anti-immigration billboards. Using paint, they reverse and ridicule the government's far-right messages.

2015

Graffiti artist *Katsu* uses a 'graffiti drone' to reach and paint onto a billboard installed high above the streets of New York.

2016

A town councillor is arrested for hacking a large digital billboard in central Brussels, displaying a political message in opposition to the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership, a trade agreement between the European Union and the United States. In the weeks that follow, hundreds of anti-TTIP posters are installed in ad spaces across the city.

2016

Brandalism installs a series of subverts in front of the UK's largest advertising agencies, calling on advertising workers to quit their job. The subvertising action is followed up with personal 'direct mail' hand-delivered to advertising workers, offering a 'how to leave advertising' manual and inviting them to join an 'Advertisers Anonymous' meeting.

2016

Black Lives Matter install fak[e] bus shelter posters across London, exposing the deaths taking place in police custody and the lack of prosecution o[f] the murderous officers involve[d]. The days following the action police scan bus shelters for finger prints, but no arrests a[re] made.

Timeline

2016 — Indonesian hacker displays pornographic movie on a large digital billboard in Jakarta, and is subsequently jailed.

2016 — Subvertisers gather in the UK to plan and launch the collective *Subvertisers International*, a collective of activists, artists, NGO's and citizens from seven different countries determined to investigate and overcome the ways advertising negatively affects society.

2016 — Benjamin Netanyahu, the Prime Minister of Israel, demands 150 subvertisements critiquing Israel on London Underground tube carriages are instantly removed. The subvertisements, installed by the subvertising group *Special Patrol Group* in collaboration with London Palestine Action, condemned the United Kingdom's support of the Israelian government and arms industry.

2017 — Throughout the entirety of the year, the New York subvertising initiative *Art in Ad Places* collaborates with a variety of artists to install weekly phone both posters. The posters range from political manifestos, to abstract paintings and subversions of particular corporate advertisements.

2017 — Hacked billboard in Cardiff displays swastikas and messages about 'Shariah law'.

2011 — *Brandalism* launches the most extensive manual to date, offering suggestions about the keys, clothing, and attitude required for undertaking subvertising.

2017 — Artists and activists in California illegally disassemble billboard structures to turn them into shelters for the local homeless population.

2017 — *Subvertisers International* launches a call to participate in a global subvertising action. Subvertisers from Buenos-Aires, Brussels, Berlin, London, Lisbon, Mexico, Melbourne, Paris, Stockholm, Warsaw, Tehran and cities across the United States part-take in the coordinated actions.

2017 — In Italy, the artist *Hogre* is charged with 'Public Offense to Religion' over a satirical bus shelter subvertisement depicting an aroused Jesus and stood in front of a young boy, in response to the charges of sexual abuse in the Vatican.

2017 — *Special Patrol Group* organises bi-monthly 'how to hack advertising' workshops in London. The workshop also offers what the collective calls 'Ad Hack Packs', fitted with keys opening one third of bus shelter advertising spaces across the world.

Following a deadly shooting in a Florida school, the artist collective *Indecision* paints over a billboard promoting a shooting range, altering its text into 'Shoot a school kid, only $29'. A few months later, the same collective take-over of a billboard in California with the text ""We make kids disappear' – I.C.E."", in a critique of the separation of migrant children from their families by immigration agency.

2018

New subvertising collectives are started in Wellington, Barcelona, Lyon, and other major cities across the globe.

2018

2018

Across Brazil, billboards of far-right politician Jair Bolsonaro are assaulted with 'paint bombs' and set on fire as he runs for and attains presidency.
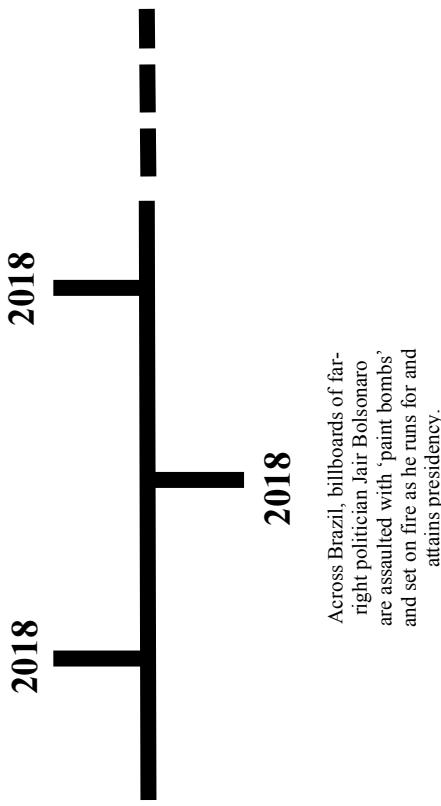
Appendix II: Sample interview questions with subvertising practitioners

The following questions were employed as guiding, exploratory topics, rather than as a chronologically ordered list of direct questions to be delivered to research-participants.

- Do you remember your first subvertising action? What sparked it and how did it make you feel?
- What kind of materials are involved in the process of your subvertising practice? Have these changed over the last years?
- Why do you choose to work with the medium of advertising space?
- What are you hoping to achieve through your interventions?
- In this regard, do you see your work as an artist or political expression, or both?
- Do you consider the overtaking of advertising space as a political statement in itself?
- Even if only partially political, what kinds of political ideologies or beliefs does your practice relate to?
- Do you see your work as a strategic instrument towards the ideology you set forward?
- What is the role of images in your work? What is the role of language and textual appropriation in your work?
- What is the role of the original in your work?
- What kind of online platforms do you use and why?
- Have your interventions previously been addressed by advertising companies?
- If so, what was the response and how do you feel about their response?
- If not, do you see this as a potential threat to the artistic or political potential of your work? How do you expect to respond to any future responses by brands or outdoor advertising companies?
- Can you describe the feeling that arises when subverting an advertisement? Does this motivate you to work with this medium?
- How is surveillance negotiated when modifying, removing, replacing or defacing the advertisement space?
- Have you previously encountered struggles during implementation? From by-standers or from authorities and how did you negotiate this?

- How much preparation is required before your implementation?
- Does the geographical location of the space, its spatial context and its format inform the form and content of your subvertising interventions?
- How do you feel about the practice increasingly gaining popular attention?
- Do you feel part of a broader 'subvertising movement'? If yes, where do you see this movement going in the future?

Appendix III: Sample interview questions with advertising professionals

The following set of questions were used as a guidance during semi-structured interviews with two groups of advertising professionals: advertising agency workers, and outdoor advertising company workers. While the majority of these questions is uniform across the two different professions, a few were more applicable to one than to the other. Photo and video elicitation were enrolled throughout the interview.

- Have any of the outdoor advertising campaigns you work(ed) on ever been responded to with subvertising?
- What do you believe the intentions were of the subvertising practitioners involved? Does this relate to your profession specifically or do you see these as statements on a broader level?
- On this basis, do you believe they were successful in their intentions?
- What was the response on behalf of your advertising agency? Did this include a plan of action in response to the subvertising act?
- Do you agree to this response? Why?
- What, in personal terms, do you think is the influence of subvertising and cultural jamming on your professional field (if any)?
- Do you perceive it as a threat to the world of advertising? Do you believe this threat is increasing?
- Do you know the legal consequences of the subvertising practice? Do you agree to these or do you think these should be more or less severe?
- How does this relate to freedom of speech and to the legal status of copyright?

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