

# Sensuous Solidarities: Emotion, Politics and Performance in the Clandestine Insurgent Rebel Clown Army

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**Abstract:** This paper is concerned with the political performance of the Clandestine Insurgent Rebel Clown Army (CIRCA) during the protests against the G8 meeting in Gleneagles, Scotland in 2005. In particular, the paper is concerned with how emotional experiences within political moments or events can be constituted through performances that fashion “sensuous solidarities”. Sensuous solidarities are generated through diverse bodily movements and techniques, and are indicative of both the performative character of activist subjectivities and the content of activists’ public (political) performances. Reflecting on my participation in CIRCA, this paper will argue that sensuous solidarities constituted a series of complex, contradictory and emotive co-performances and resonances with police, other protestors and the public and in doing so will consider the efficacy of those forms of activism that Duncombe (2007, *Dream: Reimagining Progressive Politics in an Age of Fantasy*. London: The New Press) has termed “ethical spectacles”.

**Keywords:** emotion; politics, performance, solidarity, ethical spectacle

## Sensuous Solidarity and the Ethical Spectacle

Laughter moves through the crowd like ripples over water. It begins with a face, or rather myriad clown faces of a deviant army, and proceeds through series of somatic practices—manoeuvres, games, mimicry—that disrupt the “spirit” of the protest event.<sup>1</sup> It resonates through the assembled bodies of the demonstration: laughter transforms faces and the feeling space of the protesters. “Laughter . . . opens the body and mind . . . it can turn humiliation into humour, and a situation of terror into a revealer of truth. It’s a form of sensuous solidarity” (Klepto 2004:410).<sup>2</sup> The behaviour of crowds enacting space with their own logics of discharge, anger, panic, and movement (Canetti 1962) provides an example of how emotional experiences within political moments or events can be constituted through performances that fashion “sensuous solidarities”. Sensuous solidarities are generated through diverse bodily movements and techniques, mobilizing particular emotions, symbolism, and politics (Juris 2008). They are indicative of both the performative character of activist subjectivities and the content of activists’ public (political) performances.<sup>3</sup> Taking an active intervention in a political event as the context, and reflecting on my participation in this event, this paper is concerned with how sensuous solidarities

were embodied and performed in a particular time and place: the protests against the G8 meeting in Gleneagles, Scotland in 2005. I will argue that they constituted a series of complex, contradictory and emotive co-performances and resonances with police, other protestors and the public and in doing so I will consider the efficacy of those forms of activism that Stephen Duncombe (2007) has termed “ethical spectacles”, that is, performances that attempt to demonstrate the political character of spectacles such as the G8 meeting and open them up for examination and participation.

From 6 to 8 July 2005 the G8 (group of eight nations) met at Gleneagles, Scotland. The G8—which consisted of the USA, Canada, Japan, Britain, Germany, France, Italy and Russia—held annual summits where top government officials discussed issues such as the macroeconomic management of the global economy, terrorism and arms control etc.<sup>4</sup> With the emergence of the alter-globalization mobilizations, such summits have been accompanied by protests—both at the places where the G8 meet, and elsewhere across the globe. These protests provide a critique of neoliberal capitalism, debate alternatives to it, and challenge the “business-as-usual” performance of such summits by attempting to disrupt their operation.

In the months prior to the G8 protests, a collaboration between artists and activists called the Laboratory of Insurrectionary Imagination (Lab of ii) toured nine British cities<sup>5</sup> in order to introduce people to various forms of cultural activism, including that of the Clandestine Insurgent Rebel Clown Army (CIRCA) which had been founded in November 2003 to respond to George Bush’s visit to the UK (Klepto and Up Evil 2005). In early July, people from around the world gathered in Edinburgh for the “Make Poverty History” march and a week of actions around the G8 meeting in Gleneagles, Scotland. They were met by an army of 160 rebel clowns, formed from a series of 2-day workshops that had been organized by the Lab of ii in the months prior to the G8 meeting. CIRCA represented a form of politics that embodied disruptive and emotive interventions in specific sites. It sought to utilize various types of tactical performance in order to raise public awareness about issues, challenge popular assumptions and open up a dialogue on particular issues.

This paper will discuss: first, the interplay of emotion, performance and the prosecution of politics; second, cultural activism and the particularities of ethical spectacles; third, clowning as a form of subversive performance in society and a particular form of such performance, rebel clowning; and fourth, CIRCA and its practice of sensuous solidarities. The paper will conclude with a consideration of the potentials and limitations of such politics.

## **Emotion, Performance and Politics**

Emotions are personal feelings that occur in relational encounters with human and non-human others (eg see Bondi 2005). They mediate social and political processes through which people’s subjectivities are reproduced and performed (Kwan 2007). Politically, emotions are intimately bound up with power relations and also with relations of affinity, and are a means of initiating action. People become politically active because they feel something profoundly—such as injustice or ecological destruction. This emotion triggers changes in people that motivate them to engage in politics. It is people’s ability to transform their feelings about the

world into actions that inspire them to participate in political action (Chatterton, Fuller and Routledge 2008; Routledge 2010). As feminist geographers and others have argued, collaborative association with (activist) others, necessitates interaction with others, through the doing of particular actions and the experiencing of personal and collective emotions, through creativity and imagination, through embodied, relational practices that produce political effects (Anderson and Smith 2001; Bennett 2004; Bosco, 2007; Pulido, 2003; Thien 2005).

Hence emotions are both reactive (directed towards outsiders and external events) and reciprocal (concerning people's feelings towards each other). Shared emotions of activism create shared collective identities and are mobilized strategically (eg to generate motivation, commitment and sustained participation). Activists create shared emotional templates in order to find common cause, and to generate common narratives and solidarities (Askins 2009; Bosco 2006, 2007; Ettliger 2004; Ettliger and Bosco 2004; Goodwin, Jasper and Polletta 2001; Jasper 1998; Juris 2008; Mansbridge and Morris 2001; Taylor and Rupp 2002). They frequently find expression in (public) protests that can be understood as ritual performances creating image events that amplify emotions such as anger and transform them into senses of collective solidarity (Juris 2008).

Performance and the performance of emotions have become increasingly important in the practice of politics. Indeed, emotions have always been an important element of the practice and performance of politics through the engineering or channeling of fear, anger, aggression etc (see Giroux 2007; Megoran 2005; Ó Tuathail 2003; Oslender 2007; Pain 2009; Pain and Smith 2008; Thrift 2004).

The contemporary media present the real world as a drama, a staged spectacle (Debord 1983). In most strategic sites of the "real world" events happen because of their potential fitness to be televised (Baumann 1992). As Baudrillard observes, "the manipulation of media images constitutes the continuation of politics by other means" (1988:16). Under such circumstances, both politicians and grassroots activists "act" for television, hoping to elevate their actions into public events (see Routledge 1997). Indeed, as social movements engage increasingly with the media—as they become a form of media (Melucci 1989)—so there is a tendency for them to perform what Truett-Anderson (1990) terms theatrical politics. The recognition of the importance of images, performance, and emotions in the prosecution of politics means that activist performances—particularly cultural forms of activism—become important sites of political intervention.<sup>6</sup>

## **Cultural Activism and Ethical Spectacles**

Forms of resistance associated with labour struggles, revolutionary movements, peasant movements etc have frequently taken place at sites of production (eg factories and fields), destruction (eg places of resource extraction), and decision (eg government and corporate headquarters). The methods of resistance associated with such locations have included strikes and picket lines at sites of production, road blockades and tree-sits at sites of destruction, and direct actions and global days of action at sites of decision (eg the G8 protests).

Cultural activism—which informs the aforementioned practice of grassroots politics—involves art, performance, activism and politics combined in myriad ways to challenge dominant ways of seeing and constructing the world and to present alternative views of the world. It is in part concerned with addressing the social, psychological and emotional impacts of issues such as war, injustice, environmental crisis, and the exploitations associated with capitalism. Frequently, such activism takes the form of “culture jamming”, that is, a repertoire of actions and practices attuned to consumerist culture and mass-mediated images.

Cultural activism poses challenges in sites of intervention that include consumption, potential and assumption. Points of consumption include chain stores, supermarkets etc and hence are confronted by such tactics as consumer boycotts, market campaigns etc. Points of potential include imagining possible future scenarios about how to live and attempting to actualize alternatives “on the ground” such as the Critical Mass bicycle actions (see also Pickerill and Chatterton 2006). Points of assumption necessitate challenging underlying beliefs and control mythologies, and thus the role of cultural activism here is to hijack spectacles using the images and signs of popular culture. In so doing ethical spectacles are fashioned.

Taking its inspiration from the work of Brazilian Augusto Boal’s *Theatre of the Oppressed* (Boal 1992), the International Situationists (Knabb 1989) and Ken Kesey’s Merry Pranksters, ethical spectacles involve an activism of tactical performance that attempts to raise public awareness about issues, challenge popular assumptions and open up a dialogue on a particular issue. Dramatic or unexpected imagery is often deployed to make a deeper impression on the viewer. Indeed, the form of the performance is part of the content. Activists model a form of behaviour—one that is creative, bodily engaged, surprising, and emotive—in their forms of dissent that they hope others will ultimately follow (Duncombe 2007).

Ethical spectacles are participatory, open-ended, and playful urban transformations whereby the politics desired is embodied in the means of the spectacle. The principal characteristics of ethical spectacles are that:

- 1 they are autonomous in character, in that they are self-organized creative actions;
- 2 they are participatory, in that people (including the public) actively participate in the creation and performance of the spectacle;
- 3 they involve transformative play (such as humour and satire) to communicate messages to the public. Such play necessitates (like all jokes) active audience participation and imagination (so they get the joke) which creates an intimacy between the performer and the audience. Indeed, such narrative interdependency works against social relations of hierarchy and separation (eg between the “performer” and the “audience”);
- 4 they are open-ended, being open to ongoing modification and adaptation to specific situations, always being in motion and involving contingency at the level of form and meaning;
- 5 they are transparent, creating clearly absurd spectacles to get people to reflect upon normal reality in some way. Such transparent spectacle allows spectators to look through what is being presented by the performers to the reality of

what is really there. Whereas the society of the spectacle employs illusion in the pretence of displaying reality, ethical spectacles demonstrate the reality of their own illusions;

6 they embrace theatrical elements. (Duncombe 2007:124–152)

The focus on the ethics (rather than the purely political character) of such performances is important. As Laura Pulido (2003:49–50) argued, there are three benefits to cultivating a dialogue on ethics in political activism. First, relations of honesty, truth, and interpersonal acknowledgement can be nurtured. Second, a moral language can be constructed, which is important because the Left has settled for making arguments based on policy, fiscal analyses, legal precedents, and history to almost the complete exclusion of ethics. Third, it contributes to us becoming more fully conscious human beings. While political consciousness is distinguished by its focus on structures, practices, and social relations of societal and global power; self-consciousness refers to self-knowledge, including the understanding of one's motivations, desires, emotions, and relationship to the larger world. As I will argue below with relation to CIRCA, the performative attributes of ethical spectacles involve interpersonal acknowledgement, a "moral" language and a particular *placed* politics creating sensuous solidarities and emotional resonance.

## **Clowning as Subversion: The Clandestine Insurgent Rebel Clown Army**

Clowning is one of the oldest forms of live performance, and has taken the form of the trickster, jester, fool, harlequin, buffoon. The clown has been interpreted as an innocent outsider, an agent of playful confrontation, who exemplifies the social order in exaggerated relief and in doing so challenges people to experience their "true" situation (Berky and Barbre 2000; Boyd 1988). As David Robb notes: "the clowns turn a situation upside down to reveal its absurdity: in doing so inviting contemplation" (2010:94). Clowning has been associated with the inversionary rituals of carnival "the temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order" (Bakhtin 1984:10). As Stallybrass and White (1986) argued, the carnivalesque is characterized by the critical inversion of official words and hierarchies; creative disrespect of hierarchical rank, norms and prohibitions; and the temporary retextualizing of social formations to expose their "fictive" foundations (see also Lane Bruner 2005). In challenging expected forms of normalcy, the clown seeks to free others from social constraints, inviting reconsideration of the order of things (Berky and Barbre 2000; Brightman 1999).

The clown is a creature of chaos. His [sic] appearance is an affront to our sense of dignity, his [sic] actions a mockery of our sense of order. The clown (freedom) is always being chased by the policeman (order) (Robbins, quoted in Boyd 1988:104).

Today, the clown is a popular archetype seen at circuses, children's parties, hamburger and other corporate adverts, and on public streets. While the clown is frequently an object of fun, entertainment or commodification, s/he is also a subversive figure who confuses categories imposed by the system, for example through mockery, and who undermines authority by holding it up to ridicule

(Klepto 2004). As such, clowning represents a challenge to biopolitical processes of governmentality that attempt to generate normalizing behaviours and regulated conduct amongst people (Foucault 1979a, 1979b).

An important performative element of clowning is that of play. Play can rearrange and question existing social arrangements, and through parody and satire, for example, connect bodies, emotions, and lived worlds (Juris 2008). Play also has a transformative dimension: satire, irony, and humour can make political messages more palatable to the public and encourage active participation from the audience. Jokes are active and social, their meanings shared by performers and spectators (Duncombe 2007). As Colonel Klepto, one of the founders of CIRCA argues: “[c]lowns become through their bodies, they think with their hearts and feet, and they play with everything and everybody” (Klepto 2004:408).

Clowning sees through the pretensions of the social order and become that pretense in order to expose it (Boyd 1988). CIRCA confronted the hegemonic (militarized) political discourse and practice of the war on terror and subverted it through creating an army of clowns.

The explanation behind the name on the CIRCA website is as follows:

We are clandestine because we refuse the spectacle of celebrity, and without real names, faces or noses, we show that our words, dreams, and desires are more important than our biographies. We are insurgent because we have risen up from nowhere and are everywhere, and because an insurrection of the imagination is irresistible. We are rebels because we love life and happiness more than “revolution”, and because while no revolution is ever complete, rebellions continue forever. We are clowns because inside everyone is a lawless clown trying to escape, and because nothing undermines authority like holding it up to ridicule. We are an army because we live on a planet in permanent war—a war of money against life, of profit against dignity, of progress against the future. We are an army because a war that gorges itself on death and blood and shits money and toxins, deserves an obscene body of deviant soldiers. We are circa because we are approximate and ambivalent, neither here nor there, but in the most powerful of all places, the place in-between order and chaos (<http://www.clownarmy.org>; see also Klepto 2004:407).

As an ethical spectacle, CIRCA was an autonomous initiative, in that it was self-organized by activists who wished to participate in it, and creative in its approach to activism (see Pickerill and Chatterton 2006). The purpose was to develop a form of political activism that brought together the practices of clowning (and elements of other forms of physical theatre) and non-violent direct action which took emotional and political responsibility as an act of self-constitution. Activists (or in this case rebel clowns) actively participated in the creation and the performance of the ethical spectacle of CIRCA’s approach to protesting the G8. Active participation was nurtured primarily through the establishment of affinity groups.

Practically, affinity consists of a group of people who share common ground (friends, lovers, shared beliefs and dreams etc), and who can provide supportive, sympathetic spaces for its members to articulate, listen to one another, share concerns, emotions, fears etc. The politics of affinity enables people to provide support and solidarity for one another, and incorporates consensus

decision-making, which is non-hierarchical and participatory, embodying flexible, fluid modes of action. The common values and beliefs articulated within the politics of affinity constitute a “structure of feeling” resting upon collective experiences and interpretations, which are co-operative rather than competitive, and which are predicated upon taking political action.

The aim of CIRCA was to develop a methodology that transformed and sustained the inner emotional life of the activists as well as being an effective technique for taking direct action, arguing that a destructive tendency within many activist movements was forgetting the inner work of personal transformation and healing in addition to practising politics on the streets (Klepto 2004).

Activists’ embodied performances at protests can be emotionally potent, not least because, under protests’ conditions of danger and uncertainty, they can introduce the element of play (Juris 2008). Nurturing the emotional dimension of activism provides the tools to “play creatively and embody...honesty and openness” (Klepto 2004:408). CIRCA embodied an emotive politics that was deliberately disruptive and challenged the performative logics of the G8’s stage-managed political event in Gleneagles. Moreover, CIRCA also disrupted the “feeling rules” (Henderson 2008:31) of the protests against the G8 through an emotional and “empathic resonance” (Berky and Barbre 2000:242; see also The Invisible Committee 2009). This is a relational process (and co-performance) between the rebel clowns themselves, and between them and other protestors, the public and the police. Such articulation of particular emotional registers was a specifically *placed* activity: the efficacy of CIRCA’s performances depended upon the production of an emotive politics in specific sites. The various practices of rebel clowning were constitutive of different relationships to space (eg through the uses of space in rebel clown manoeuvres) which enabled the articulation of “rebel clown logic”—an associative logic, based on visual signs and emotional (dis)orders. This served as both critique of the dominant discourses of the G8, and a challenge to the policing of protest space. By opening up the political spectacle of the G8 meeting for critical examination, debate and participation, CIRCA practiced “sensuous solidarities”. These are emotive politics that were indicative of both the performative character of activist subjectivities and the content of activists’ public performances.

## **Sensuous Solidarities**

### ***Activist Subjectivities***

Jeff Juris (2008:62) argued that protests are complex ritual performances, powerful image events that provide material terrains where activist subjectivities are expressed through distinct bodily techniques, and emotions are generated. The practice of solidarity entails powerful emotional ties. As performative rituals, protests operate by transforming emotions: they amplify an initiating emotion such as anger and channel or transmit it into a sense of collective solidarity. The feeling spaces generated can be both personally and collectively transformative (see Routledge and Simons 1995), and can be potent mobilizing forces in social movement building.<sup>7</sup>

During the G8 protests, there were 15 different rebel clown affinity groups (“clown gaggles”) from different places. For example, there were groups called Glasgow Kiss

(the group that I participated with, named after the Glaswegian slang for a headbutt), Group Sex, Backward Intelligence etc. Sensuous solidarity was nurtured in a variety of ways. First, rebel clown training was organized through a series of 1-day and 2-day clowning workshops. These provided a common repertoire of clown army practices, which were then practised and refined during subsequent affinity group meetings. Such repertoires were shared by all CIRCA participants, and were thus transferable between different clown groups at different protest actions. The workshops introduced people to a range of clowning techniques including physical training and body work, rebel clown movements and manoeuvres such as “socking”, “fishing”, and marching (see below), physical and narrative improvisation, and exercises to release the “inner clown”.

The latter relates to an important emotional dimension to rebel clowning. “The clown awakens us to a vital awareness... [t]he clown opens us up to new worlds of being” (Berky, quoted in Berky and Barbre 2000:240). In addition to those emotions generated in the act of protest, CIRCA’s approach attempted to nurture the emotional dimensions of activist subjectivity, especially through the development of sensitivity and vulnerability. It was argued that, after years of activism, activists often lose this sensitivity to the world, even though it was what motivated them to become activists in the first place. As Klepto argues: “by working with the body, the art of rebel clowning... [finds]... the vulnerable human being who once felt everything deeply” (2004:409). Through (re)discovering one’s inner clown (eg a child-like wonder at the world, one that is vulnerable, playful), the idea was for activists to learn to cultivate a sense of being through staying in clown rather than acting *like* a clown (Klepto 2004). Rebel clown training involved a plethora of games. Group play was particularly designed to stimulate spontaneity, and in so doing “to kill the ‘cop in the head’” (Verson 2007:183), that is, open up activists to new ways of thinking, feeling and practicing politics. Further, a range of games were developed in clown training workshops that were used prior to the protests to “get in clown”, that is, to tap into those senses of spontaneity, complicity, and absurdity associated with the subversive intent of rebel clowning.

Second, all CIRCA “clownbattants” shared a common “multiform”. Military uniforms were deconstructed, decorated and subverted according to the individual creativity of each person and/or group. Moreover, rebel clowns wore personalized clown face make-up. Part of clowns’ exaggerated performance is that of the painted face (Boyd 1988). While there are several types of clown and clown face in the history of clowning,<sup>8</sup> the white-faced clown is the clown most people first think of when they hear the word “clown”. This was the style of clown face make up worn by most CIRCA clownbattants, although CIRCA clown faces deviated from prescribed “classical” forms, reflecting activist whim and creativity. The face is a primary site of emotional communication, communicating people’s emotional state to one another. Facial expressions can actively produce in us the emotional response they are often said to simply to “express” (Gibbs 2001). While some people fear clowns, many associate them with fun, laughter, foolishness, slapstick and, at times, anti-authoritarianism. As one protester noted:



One of the things that really stood out at the G8 protests was the army of clowns. I first saw them at the Make Poverty History demonstration. I remember seeing a group of people dressed in military uniforms marching in a very disciplined manner. I thought "what is this?" Then first I noticed that they were wearing all kinds of colourful dress . . . you know really making fun of the military. Then I saw all these ridiculous clown faces. Some looked like circus clown faces, others looked like bandits with black masks painted across their eyes, others were just parodies of what a clown is meant to look like. It was really funny (interview, August 2005).

The clown faces and multiforms were a form of tactical media. The clown faces were masks that performed several functions. They hid activists' true identities, providing protection from police surveillance. Moreover, the wearing of masks has traditionally been a satirical response to social masks of convention: using a mask to expose the masks of etiquette (Robb 2010). Hence, the mask affords a protection from everyday positionalities and conventions enabling the freeing up of personal inhibitions. In addition, clown faces exaggerated the absurdity of the notion of a clown army. While military uniforms are associative of war/security (in the form of the regular army) and aggression/militancy (in the form of certain types of grassroots activism), the (deconstructed) rebel clown multiform in combination with the usually friendly clown face was a deliberate attempt to undermine the intimidation and violence associated with alter-globalization protests. Clown faces and multiforms served to magnify activists' commonality and enabled activists to act together, while at the same time attracting media attention. The clown faces and multiforms also created a sense of affinity within the diversity of clown protagonists (see Figure 1).

Third, the workshops and multiforms helped to develop group dynamics and close interpersonal relations. Despite the seriousness of the protests against the G8, clown workshops and actions involved a great deal of play and laughter which helped to forge deep emotional bonds between people and groups. Feeling part of a clown army (while at the same time acting autonomously in affinity groups), sharing aspects of uniform and language, and having their own specific clown identities was empowering and provided activists with a deep sense of solidarity. For example, approximately 160 rebel clowns held a preliminary meeting prior to the "Make Poverty History" demonstration in Edinburgh, Scotland on 2 July 2005. Everybody sat in a huge disorderly circle. Then, each rebel clown stood up and briefly introduced themselves with their rebel clown name, for example, "General" Panic, "Colonel" Oftruth, "Corporal" Punishment, "Private" Function, etc. We all started to laugh at the deliberate and absurd play on words that mocked military rank. The ubiquitous air of tension prior to the prosecution of political action was partially transformed into waves of laughter and joyful expectancy that were then carried forth into the demonstration.

The emotional dimension of such activism was supplemented by a decision-making process based upon consensus. During the protests, clown councils were held, whereby activists would sit in a circle and have meetings concerning strategy and tactics. Each affinity group would propose a spokesperson who would sit at the front of their group and discuss matters with the other affinity group's



**Figure 1:** CIRCA, Faslane submarine base, Scotland, July 2005 (source: photo by Rabbitman)

spokespersons. Each issue raised by the “spokes council” would be discussed by each affinity group amongst themselves and their decision communicated back to the entire council via their spokesperson. Once consensus on each issue was reached activists would move on to the next issue. These councils were held every day during the protests, at first in Edinburgh, and then at the “Hori-zone” rural convergence site near Stirling, that had been established by activists as their base of operations during the days of protest. Each group also kept in contact via mobile phone. Of course, like any other form of decision-making, consensus decision-making invariably involves tensions and disagreements that need to be resolved. In the clown councils activists might agree to differ and to allow each group to pursue its own set of actions during the protests. Or activists might all agree on a specific strategy during one of the protests.

Affinity groups tapped into people’s desire to be social, nurturing a politics that recognized everyone (in the group) and their participation. Affinity with others creates intensive encounters wherein practical politics—embodied, intersubjective and relational—is practised. For CIRCA the emotional life of activists and non-activist others (such as the police) were sites of struggle. CIRCA was an attempt to change the way activists felt as well as the way they struggled. Innovative forms of creative street action—materialized through various clown “operations” (see below)—were understood as being crucial for building and inspiring movements. They were affected through the deployment of rebel clown logic.

### ***Rebel Clown Logic as Public Performance***

The face-to-face encounters experienced through workshop “games” and through direct action enabled the embodying of emotional affinities. In particular, it was the conducting of action with others in particular events—in demonstrations, blockades, occupations, street theatre etc—in *particular places* that forged the bonds of association crucial to the creation of common ground. While sensuous solidarities were developed and nurtured during the preparation for particular protest events (such as the rebel clown workshops), it was through the practice of resistance within places of protest—on the streets; around the perimeter fence surrounding the Gleneagles Hotel—that solidarities and emotional bonds were further grounded and deepened between activists.

Performance heightens everyday behaviour, being interactive and liminal, and allows for dominant social norms to be questioned, played with, subverted, and transformed, thereby creating spaces of political possibility (Thrift 2000). Rebel clowning utilized the emotive power of transformative play (eg humour, satire, mimicry, wordplay, surprise, desire, grotesquery) to communicate messages of opposition to the G8, and to alter the emotional dynamic of protests.

The shared bodily and emotive experiences, eg the flows of adrenalin or tiredness through the body; feelings of excitement, fear and joy, establish a shared (group) memory and story of protest events, as well as shared strategic repertoires, all the more powerful because they were *felt*. As Anna Gibbs argues, “[b]odies can catch feelings as easily as catch fire” . . . they resonate “from one body to another, evoking tenderness, inciting shame, igniting rage, exciting fear” (Gibbs 2001:no pagination).

CIRCA acted as emotional vectors at the G8 protests and acted to disrupt the dominant “message” of the event. As Henderson (2008) argues, all politics is a politics of hope on some level. Part of the emotive engineering of the G8 event was that the G8 leaders would, after much discussion, address key international issues such as the “third world debt” and climate change. Through the intervention of celebrities such as Bono and Bob Geldof, an estimated 200,000 people travelled to Edinburgh, Scotland to “Make Poverty History” (Barr and Drury 2009). In the G8 they invested their hope and not a little trust, that the likes of George Bush (then US president) and Tony Blair (then UK Prime Minister) would “do the right thing” and provide solutions to the pressing problems that confronted the planet and many of its people. In response to this desire accompanied by expectation, CIRCA introduced a disruptive emotional intervention. This was fuelled by moral anger at the injustices of war, capitalism and environmental destruction, but expressed through satire, laughter, vulnerability and the particularities of rebel clown logic.

Rebel clown logic is an associative logic, based on visual signs, wordplay and emotional resonance. It drew explicitly on key elements of clowning, attempting through playful confrontation to exaggerate and invert the social order, retextualizing it in order to reveal its absurdity, and invite others (such as the public) to reconsider it. Rebel clown logic was combined with the multiforms, clown faces, and clown manoeuvres in order to attempt to subvert the hegemonic logic and the taken-for-granted world articulated by the G8. Rebel clown logic used (deconstructed) army uniforms to associate itself with a culture of permanent

war, and through that to the connections to neoliberalism, wars for oil<sup>9</sup> and the war on terror. This was achieved through the construction of a “clown space” materialized through a series of CIRCA “operations” that were deployed during the G8 protests. Through the power of association—under the rubric of the “War on Error”—rebel clown logic, combined with the performance of a clown army, parodied the War on Terror. The War on Error was a struggle waged against the political “errorism” of Imperial wars (such as the war in Iraq); the economic “errorism” of neoliberalism, and the environmental “errorism” of over-consumption and fossil-fuelled economies.

Through the very idea of a clown army (and its resonance with the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq) and the satirical representation of the war on terror, the public were invited in on a variety of jokes in order to create an emotional intimacy between them and the rebel clowns. The War on Error served as an emotional domain of desire, laughter, joy, that attempted to overpower the dominant discourse—that the G8 was meeting to discuss and solve the problems of war, debt, injustice, and environmental crisis—through a range of tactical performances.

For example, the CIRCA Operation HA.HA.HAA (Helping Authorities House Arrest Half-witted Authoritarian Androids) was deployed to invert the logic and expectations of the 6 July demonstrations against the G8. Instead of replicating the choreography of recent protests against neoliberal globalization—where, for example, some activists had utilized the Black Bloc tactical regime of dressing in black, covering their faces with bandanas and engaging in property damage and violent confrontation with the police, and others had tried to climb the security fences and disrupt the meetings—CIRCA wanted to deploy rebel clowns to keep the world’s most dangerous “errorists” (ie the G8 politicians) under house arrest in perpetuity, by helping the police to build the fences higher around their meeting place at the Gleneagles hotel, and never letting them out.

Through such open-ended theatrical spectacles, to which public participation was encouraged, CIRCA attempted to fleetingly bring into being new worlds and possibilities. They deliberately attempted to subvert the normative function of space through what Uitermark (2004) terms “carnavalesque hacking”. The “deprogramming of space” implies an intentional disruption and the disorientation of consensus reality: in this case the established choreography of protest at global days of action whereby protesters attempt to disrupt the meetings (of the G8 in this case) and the police are trained to aggressively stop them from doing so.

CIRCA also embodied important elements of direct action. First, CIRCA actions were prefigurative in character—in that the political ends desired (ie ones that were participatory, collaborative, non-violent, and playful) were embodied in the means used. Second, CIRCA actions were synecdochic—symbolic action was deployed in an attempt to directly resolve, or at least challenge the perceived problem at hand, that is, that of the dominant discourse of the war on terror and the dominant social relations between police and activists that existed at protest events (Franks 2003).

CIRCA actions were also open-ended in that, within the loose structure of any clown “operation”, there was space for spontaneity as well as adaptation and response to emerging events, such as the interchange and mixing of surprise unorthodox movements with orthodox direct confrontation. CIRCA tried to remain

open to the spontaneity of clowning and of the event, so as not to become too rigid in their action and play (Routledge 2000, 2005).

CIRCA tactical performances were also clearly transparent: CIRCA was clearly not a real army, but rather people who were presenting themselves as one, albeit a subverted, deconstructed deviant clown army. It was an obvious performance, and in particular, one that alienated the familiar world of militarization and foreign wars. In so doing, it encouraged the viewer of the spectacle to step back and look critically at the taken-for-granted world. Indeed, CIRCA directly addressed the dominant discourse of the War on Terror, a war that nurtures fantasies of fear, and where the desire for security is cloaked in the reality of war. This spectacle pretends to be real via distraction (eg there are weapons of mass destruction in Iraq) and substitution (permanent war will secure peace). In contrast, CIRCA presented an ethical spectacle, the War on Error, through which fears were acknowledged and then deconstructed. The patent artificiality of the "War on Error" made the message more effective. It caused people to laugh (thereby dispelling fear of "security" at demonstrations); it highlighted the falsity of supposed reality (that the G8 leaders really will solve the problems associated with neoliberalism and war), and it let the audience in on the production, by dressing up as an army of clowns. Moreover, CIRCA also tapped into a popular desire to rebel, and drew upon a powerful emotional repertoire that was transmitted beyond the body of the rebel clown.

### ***Emotional Resonance***

On the level of mediated surfaces—such as news coverage of the G8 protests—CIRCA might be interpreted as a particularly dramatic example of activists dressing up as clowns in order to bring colour and laughter to protests. Indeed, alter-globalization protests have in part been characterized by their carnivalesque elements. However, if we trace the material processes of emotional resonance—not least in the spacing of emotional response in the crowds of demonstrators—and its associated communication of counter-hegemonic ideas, something more profound emerges. By working with the body—through various clowning games and manoeuvres—CIRCA attempted to acknowledge and reveal the fears and anxieties as well as joys and pleasures of being human in these violent times. In addition, as Bakhtin (1984) argued, the purpose of play/games was to draw players out of the bounds of everyday life, liberating them from the usual laws and regulations. Through the opening up of emotions, games can serve to deprogram the regulated, inhibited self.

The main target of protestors is a potentially mobilizable public rather than decision-makers (Doherty, Plows and Wall 2007). CIRCA's strategy was to acknowledge the vulnerability of activists as well as people's fear and concerns during protest events and in the climate of tension generated by the War on Terror. Part of this strategy was also to transform fear through laughter, play, and ridicule. Bob Berkey, a professional clown and performer argues:

The role that the clown plays in society is they allow us to see ourselves more clearly. The clown's job is to do something in front of you that you will laugh at, and this is the *laugh*

*of recognition*: you recognize that what I am doing is something you have experienced (quoted in Berky and Barbre 2000:244, italics in the original).

Berky goes on to argue that the laugh of recognition enables the development of what he terms a “kindred flow” (2000:246) between people. Hence, laughter with others can generate bonds of solidarity. In political contexts (such as at protests), such laughter can work to dispel intimidation, as Bakhtin (quoted in Robb 2010:90) notes: “laughter liberates not only from external censorship but first of all from the great internal censor; it liberates from . . . fear of . . . prohibitions . . . of power”.

Importantly, such emotional work not only played within the terrain of rebel clown subjectivities. The excessive behaviours of the clown army involved playing a range of games, and executing a repertoire of rebel clown manoeuvres with other protesters, the public and the police. For example, instead of battling the police and security at the G8 meeting—the by now familiar choreography of global days of action protests—CIRCA actively sought to undermine and ridicule the intimidation and provocation of security forces at demonstrations, through a strategy of “divide and fool” (Klepto 2004:406). Rebel clowns blew kisses to riot cops behind their shields (in Edinburgh at the Carnival for Mass Enjoyment, one rebel clown was seen landing a big red lipstick kiss onto a riot shield). Rebel clowns followed the evidence gathering teams around, preventing them from conducting their surveillance by both idolizing police gear (eg uniforms) and hogging the lenses of police cameras, particularly when the police were attempting to film other protesters. When the police lined the streets to pen in the demonstrators, rebel clowns would intersperse themselves between the police officers and mimic and exaggerate their behaviour.

The emotional work of the rebel clowns was relational, exceeding the individual, creating emotional resonance between rebel clowns, between them and other activists, and between them, the public, and the police. This was affected in a number of ways. First, through the rebel clown manoeuvres of fishing and socking, there was emotional resonance within and between rebel clown gaggles. Fishing entailed rebel clowns moving together in a synchronized clump like a school of fish. The person who found themselves at the front in the direction of the clump initiated a motion, gesture and sound. As the clump moved it gradually kept changing direction, with new people finding themselves at the front of the gaggle and initiating new motions, gestures and sounds. Hence leadership roles organically rotated amongst the group; physically embodying non-hierarchy, and eroding assumptions about leadership that can be ingrained in activist bodies (Verson 2007). Socking entailed a gaggle of rebel clowns moving forward and backward as if a sock was being pulled inside out. They moved forward as a clump. Rebel clowns at the back of the clump moved to the front of the clump and then froze in position. When they found themselves at the back again, they moved to the front. When the rebel clowns reached a destination, they reversed, rebel clowns at the front moving to the back. These movements were performed with an emotion, such as socking forward with love, and backward with disgust, or forward with desire, and backward with nausea etc. The emotional register of a particular rebel clown was transmitted to the others in the example of fishing. The rebel clown gaggle’s direction and behaviour constantly changed like a school of

fish or a flock of birds (see <http://www.clownarmy.org/rebelclowning/main.html>). The feeling space within the gaggle seemed to exceed one's personal emotional capacity: "You *feel* part of something greater. There is a joy and delight in rebel clowning that gets transmitted between different clowns and between different gaggles" (Private Conversation; overheard July 2005, italics added).

Second, the emotional resonance within and between rebel clown gaggles was further amplified in interaction with other protesters. Frequently at global days of action, collective anger at the injustices of neoliberal capitalism and war have brimmed over into crowd violence and pitched street battles with the police. As a result, movements will often avoid such material expressions of anger in the fear that it will delegitimize their cause not least in the glare of the mainstream media (eg the debate about protestor property damage in Benjamin 2000). Indeed, within protest events, there are a range of "feeling rules" (Henderson 2008:31) whereby potentially disruptive emotions (and the political risks that they embody) are emotionally engineered by the authorities. Certain feelings and behaviours are considered legitimate at protests and others not (Henderson 2008). In demonstrations, anger must be controlled and disruption managed: "[in] the restricted context of the demonstration, it is the protesters who are targeted as a minority, and whose raised and angry voices seem to threaten violence in the face of order...social regulation of anger, however, generates...control scripts in individuals" (Gibbs 2001:no pagination).

CIRCA consciously attempted to disrupt these feeling rules through a range of practices. These practices gained in emotional power because of their place of performance. Although the G8 meeting was officially held between 6 and 8 July, activists organized a week of protests. These commenced on Saturday 2 July with the "Make Poverty History" protest in Edinburgh the capital of Scotland. The following day in Edinburgh a "counter-summit" was organized by a coalition of Left groups and organizations. Monday 4 July saw a Carnival of Mass Enjoyment held in Edinburgh, in protest against the everyday grind of capitalism, which was heavily policed and saw a range of confrontations. The same day also saw a successful blockade of the Faslane nuclear submarine base, organized by the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. Here, CIRCA provided a critique of the hypocrisy of the British government that, while possessing its own weapons of mass destruction, such as the nuclear-armed submarines, participated in the war in Iraq based upon (erroneous) claims that such weapons existed there. On Tuesday 5 July there was a protest against the Dungavel Asylum Seekers' detention centre (prison), where asylum seekers and "illegal" immigrants were detained—although inmates were removed by the authorities for the day of the protest (Barr and Drury 2009). Wednesday 6 July saw the mass protest against the G8 in Auchterarder where they were having their meeting at the Gleneagles hotel, and an attempt was made by some thousands of the protestors to get to the perimeter security fence that had been erected around the hotel, and scale it.

The location of many global days of action was specifically sited at those places where the "architects" of neoliberalism were meeting. This was to articulate opposition to hegemonic discourses of neoliberalism and attempt to physically disrupt the meetings and so prevent "business as usual"; and articulate alternatives

to neoliberalism (see Routledge 2003). As Don Mitchell (2003) argued, conflicts are waged through a combination of communication (speech) and conduct (action), and in the USA these have become increasingly separated in the practice of legislation governing such conflicts. Hence, protest gains much of its power to challenge the status quo by not only being allowed to occur in the first place, but also, crucially, being *placed* at the sites of political power and decision-making.

The protests in Scotland were enacted in those very sites of hegemonic political theatre (Auchterarder), repression (Dungavel), or threat (eg Faslane) that the protesters were challenging. Such places were also important because in these sites disruptive expressions of emotion were controlled. Moreover, they were enacted in full view of the public and the media, hence amplifying their particular emotive effects. CIRCA were not just occupying space in order to protest, but also opening up space to alternative experiences and meanings, hence politicizing it (Duncombe 2007). CIRCA was also claiming space through emotional bonds (Ahmed 2004): spaces of (police) intimidation were transformed into clown spaces of play and mockery.

For example, in order to mock the stop and search “anti-terrorist” laws, which have regularly been used to intimidate protesters, CIRCA clownbattants filled their pockets with deliberately ridiculous objects such as strings of sausages, feather dusters, underwear, rubber ducks, sex toys etc. In the event of a stop and search by the police, such items would have to be laid out on the street and documented by the police. As the rebel clown website noted: “Dozens of police officers searching an army of clowns is a weird enough sight, but when members of the public see all the objects being taken out the absurdity of the situation *overflows*” ([http://www.clownarmy.org/operations/CIRCA\\_G8.pdf](http://www.clownarmy.org/operations/CIRCA_G8.pdf): p11, emphasis added; see also Klepto 2004:410).

Indeed in such a street theatre of the absurd, the laughter often resonated between rebel clowns, other protesters, and the public. Changing the context of policed protest spaces can itself be a subversive act, as intimidatory spaces get temporarily transformed, for example through the laugh of recognition, creating empathic bonds between protestors. For example, some activists at the G8 protests commented after the event that the presence of CIRCA had helped diffuse tense situations at certain times and places. Speaking about the demonstration to close down the nuclear submarine base at Faslane, Scotland, one activist noted:

There had been a real sense of intimidation and threat from the police at the base during the early part of the morning. This all changed when you clowns turned up. The police didn't know how to respond to you. There was that hilarious moment when a group of clowns crept up behind a police chief and started following him around copying his movements. Every time he turned around they would all freeze until he turned back and continued walking. We were all cracking up laughing. You really changed the atmosphere at the base (personal communication, July 2005, Faslane base, Scotland).

However, as Henderson (2008) notes, emotions such as anger can be a prime motivator of some activists (not least because it is a dominant emotional response to perceived economic and environmental injustices), and one that is also present and expressed at many protests, not least those against the G8. In such contexts



not all protestors liked or appreciated CIRCA's politics of ridicule and play—their absence of anger was read by some as a contravention of the “appropriate” emotional behaviour at such an event and a breach of collective solidarity. For example, as protestors gathered in a park prior to the start of the demonstration in Auchterarder, a group of rebel clowns played various games with some of the other protestors, while being watched by somewhat grim-faced Socialist Worker's Party (SWP) activists. A CIRCA activist suddenly shouted “I know let's all go and hug the miserable socialists!”, whereupon the rebel clowns ran up to the SWP activists and hugged them. CIRCA's performances could be read by some as not taking the protests against the G8—and the associated critiques of war and injustice etc—seriously enough. Hence, while Duncombe (2007) is correct that play tends to attract folk to participate (in the “games”) this does not apply to all protestors or protests. Certainly the SWP activists were less than enthused by CIRCA's attempts to engage them. Moreover, key elements of rebel clowning such as the multiforms, faces, and manoeuvres set them apart from everyone else at the protest. The emotional response from some activists towards CIRCA was one of annoyance and even anger.

Third, there was emotional resonance between the rebel clowns and the police as CIRCA attempted to access the person behind the police uniform thereby crossing “uncommon ground” (Chatterton 2006). As Gorringe and Rosie (2008) note, the policing of protests in the UK involves a mutually constitutive interplay (a co-performance) between police and protestors. The police operate with specific “frames” which influence how they view different protest groups, eg differences between legitimate and illegitimate protest, and “good” and “bad” protestors.<sup>10</sup> Police strategy towards protestors is to make contact, ascertain protest objectives and set boundaries, not least because the policing of spaces of protest is heavily influenced by the fear of losing control (Earle and Soule 2006), and authority (Zajko and Beland, 2008).<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, the police continue to use surveillance to intimidate protestors and create controlled spaces (Zajko and Beland 2008).

Hence, emotional control scripts apply as much to police as they do to protestors—even if certain police can exhibit excessive behaviours such as beating, or even causing the death of activists (eg witness the policing of the G20 protests in London in 2009). In the broader geopolitical terrain of the war on terror, and under the heightened security that attended the G8 meeting, the police were expected to perform to a particular “restricted” emotional register, not least to reduce the political risks of disruptive emotions in those responsible for policing the protests. This “restricted” emotional register was further amplified by the physical restrictions located in the place of protest, exemplified by the construction of a perimeter fence and watchtowers surrounding the Gleneagles hotel, and the delimitations placed upon the route of the public demonstration.

However, the character of policing changed between different protests. Gorringe and Rosie (2008) argued that the policing of the “Make Poverty History” protest in Edinburgh involved crowd management and welfare rather than control. This was because protestors were deemed “good” (although “Black Bloc” protestors at the demonstration were perceived as “bad” and were penned in by police). At Dungavel and Auchterarder, there was much more police aggression against protestors (interviews, Glasgow, August 2005). For example, in Auchterarder, beneath the

rotors of Chinook helicopter blades, protestor blood was spilled in clashes with mounted police.

CIRCA's emotional resonance with the police was varied and, in part, influenced by the place of protest, and how the police perceived the potential for disruption and disorder at such sites. First, at the "Make Poverty History" protest police were at times complicit with rebel clowns and were seen mimicking the clown salute. This entailed the right thumb of the right hand being held to the nose, with the hand vertical, palm facing to the left, and the fingers wiggling. It was used when clowns met each other, and whenever clownbattants encountered authority figures such as the police (Routledge 2005). Discussing the "Make Poverty History" protest, another rebel clown commented:

Our affinity group was having a meeting sat in a circle in the middle of the road down a side street. Suddenly three police vans appeared and stopped in front of us as we were effectively blocking their path. We had a quick discussion as to how to proceed. We decided to let the cops through but of course we are rebel clowns, and so we decided to act as if we had the superior rank in the situation. We acted like military police, halting the cop vans while we theatrically checked for (non existent) traffic coming in the other direction, and slowly waving the police vehicles through while some of the group gave the cops the clown salute. As the vans passed, one cop stuck his head out of the window and gave us the clown salute back! (Major Disaster, personal communication, July 2005).

Second, during some CIRCA operations, police officers were witnessed smiling and laughing in interaction with rebel clowns despite their emotional control scripts. Referring to the demonstration against the G8 at Auchterarder, a rebel clown from the CIRCA gaggle "Glasgow Kiss" takes up the story:

The demonstration at the main protest was being hemmed in and delayed for long periods by the police. There seemed to be a deliberate attempt to antagonize the crowd. Glasgow Kiss decided to take some action to change the dynamic somehow. We noticed that there was a private house set back from the road just up front to our left. The front garden was separated from the street by a waist-high wall. Behind the wall were maybe ten police officers, all on alert. You know, grim set faces, stiff bodies bristling with latent aggression. Waiting for something to kick off, I guess. General Panic and Captain Outrageous went over to the wall and started playing peek-a-boo with the cops. The rest of us joined them just for some light relief. We would duck behind the wall and then jump up in front of the police officers just the other side of the wall and shout "Boo!" at them. This went on for a while. At first, the cops just stood there staring blankly ahead. Slowly, their faces began to crack. A smirk here, a grin there, some stifled chuckles. A female officer started to really laugh and had to be replaced by the commanding officer (General Strike, personal communication, July 2005).

Third, at other times police became angry, frustrated and annoyed by the mockery of the clown army activists and acted in an aggressive manner (interviews, Glasgow, August 2005). Hence, during the protests at Auchterarder several gaggles of rebel clowns (including my affinity group) joined other protestors in occupying a barley field that was adjacent to the security fence and watchtowers surrounding the Gleneagles Hotel. Some activists attempted to scale the fences and pull them down, while rebel clowns performed various manoeuvres in front of the fences. The security

response was to deploy mounted riot police and aggressively drive everyone from the field. As a young female rebel clown was struck by a police baton, another rebel clown cried "leave her alone, she's only a clown".

Parody, ridicule and play might at times be deemed harmless or at least containable by the authorities during protests, but this is relative to the perceived threats of disorder within a given situation (Robb 2010). The tactic of "staying in clown" frustrates police management protocols, since they are dependent upon negotiating with protestors (ie talking sense to them), rather than dealing with a rebel clown who while sensitive, acts nonsensically (Verson 2007). An example of this occurs when a police officer approaches a group of rebel clowns and asks them who is in charge. Rebel clown logic necessitates each clown to point in a different direction (including up and down), to no-one in particular and shout "he is", "she is", "they are" "the dog" etc. Also, as one function of mounted police is to intimidate protesters (and thus generate fear), the act of laughing at the police acts to redistribute power and agency in a situation/place. It subverts the protocols of policing; and deconstructs the opposition between "good" protestors who obey authority and "bad" ones who react with violence. As a result emotional resonance breaks down.

The performance of CIRCA was interpreted by some as one of the successes of the anti-G8 protests, but this was not shared by all, and since 2005, rebel clowning in the UK has gradually disappeared. This raises the issue of the potentials and limits of ethical spectacles and sensuous solidarities, to which I will finally turn.

## **Sensuous Solidarities and Ethical Spectacles: Potentials and Limitations**

Through its intervention into sites of political meaning CIRCA engaged in a particular form of cultural activism that sought to utilize various types of tactical performance in order to raise public awareness about specific issues and practices (the G8 meeting, the War on Terror); challenge popular assumptions about such practices and open up a dialogue concerning them. In particular, what I have termed "sensuous solidarities" were fashioned. Such emotive politics were indicative of both the performative character of activist subjectivities and the content of activists' public performances. Emotional affinities between rebel clowns were generated through shared bodily repertoires and games developed at clown workshops, and through the use of multiforms and clown faces.

Sensuous solidarities were grounded in particular places of protest and constituted disruptive emotional interventions and performances. Shared bodily and emotive experiences such as feelings of excitement, fear and joy, establish shared memories and stories of protest events, as well as shared strategic repertoires. In particular, in those places that comprise the targets of protest, where disruptive expressions of emotion are frequently controlled, or where intimidation is the preferred register of emotive control, emotive resonances that counter or transform such dynamics can be counter-hegemonic and politically empowering.

This was achieved through the deployment of a rebel clown logic, including ridicule and parody, and through emotional resonance between rebel clown

gaggles, and between them and other protestors, the public and the police. As such CIRCA fashioned a series of ethical spectacles that employed symbols and associations that sought to inspire, offer direction, and open up people's imagination. These theatrical interventions were self-organized, participatory, open-ended, transparent, and communicated through transformative play (such as humour and satire) (Duncombe 2007). The ethical dimension of such performances cultivated interpersonal relations, articulated a morally informed critique of the G8 and the War on Terror, and directly engaged with personal and interpersonal emotions.

Felix Guattari (1996) has warned of the dangers of practices such as perception, movement in space, mimicry, and embodied experience being arranged in hierarchical, linear, and individualized configurations by the dominant languages of power (ie the state, neoliberal capitalism etc). He argues that a response to this danger would be to "stir up uncertain desire-zones...to make bodies, all bodies, break away from the representations and restraints of the 'social body' and from stereotyped situations, attitudes, and behaviours" (1996:37). Moreover, "[l]anguages of desire lead straight to action...they begin by 'touching', by provoking laughter, by moving people...toward those who speak and towards those stakes of concern to them" (1996:76–77). The emotional resonance generated by CIRCA constituted a line of flight from the particular apparatuses of capture that Guattari cautions us against, such as the powers of authority and intimidation, where such a line of flight was not one of escape, but rather a set of tactics and capacities that affirmed life; articulating a counter narrative to the War on Terror; and effecting emotional disruptions to the "feeling rules" and control scripts of demonstrations.

However, the processes of mediatization and resonance of political performances are beyond the control of activists. The originality of rebel clowning as practiced at the G8 protests in 2005 has subsequently been recuperated into logics of mass-mediated entertainment, control, and reification. Concerning entertainment logics, following the G8 protests, the British television station, Channel Four, ran a series of programmes on the war in Iraq, called "Iraq: the bloody circus". The television adverts for this series portrayed military combatants under siege in an urban war zone, under fire, some being hit by bullets and falling to the ground. Each combatant wore a clown face. The brief history of the Clown Army was not so much repeated, as subverted, the first time as activist farce, the second time as televised tragedy.

Concerning control, at the protests against the G8 summit in Heiligendamm, Germany in 2007, there was not only a large presence of rebel clowns from predominantly mainland Europe, but also a unit of police who were specifically deployed to "play" with the clown army. Rebel clown activists were aware that, while such a police deployment attested to the impact that CIRCA had had upon the G8 protests in 2005 (and subsequently elsewhere around the world at various protests), its purpose was to "manage" or occupy the attention of rebel clowns in Heiligendamm, thereby controlling or managing them. The effectiveness of this police deployment was undermined when rebel clowns suggested swapping items of clothing (such as hats) with the police. Once in possession of police clothing, rebel clowns ran off with it, and the police reverted to their more familiar control scripts (interview, Glasgow, 2007).

Concerning reification, Verson (2007) argued that activists need to question the “viral” nature of protest ideas. She alerts activists to the danger of rebel clowning being copied and, as a result, the insurrectionary imagination—that which opens up the world of activism to limitless experimentation and adaptation—becoming atrophied. Certainly CIRCA has suffered from increasing imitation. Clown armies have emerged in the USA, various parts of Europe and Australia, among other places, not least because CIRCA was perceived to be so successful at the G8 and looked like fun to those who witnessed rebel clowning at the G8 protests, or elsewhere on TV, in documentary films or on the internet (such as You Tube).

However, it has been the case that activists have sometimes dressed up as clowns rather than being *in clown*. At the demonstrations against the UN climate talks in Copenhagen in 2009, I attended a preparatory meeting for a rebel clown action (concerning international border controls) to be held outside of the French Embassy. At a meeting of close to 40 would-be rebel clowns less than half had undertaken any clown training at all, and only one had been present (as a rebel clown) at the G8 protests in 2005. There was an absence of a coherent issue and place-specific “rebel clown logic” to apply to the protest. Rebel clowns who attended the protest went through the (e)motions of a familiar script, whose appropriateness for the protest in question was, for some, questionable (interviews, Copenhagen, Denmark, 2009).

While CIRCA embodied certain subversive potential it might be argued that this was place and time specific, that is, primarily limited to the G8 protests of 2005. The political and emotional resonance of CIRCA’s performances at a time of wars on terror (and the attendant climate of fear) became dissipated in other times and settings: rebel clowning became a default protest setting for some activists potentially curtailing serious confrontation with injustice in other contexts. As Benjamin Franks argues:

Repeating tactics, reifying them as *the* route to liberation, not only creates a vanguard whose actions are supposed to bring us all emancipation, but enable dominant groups to contain and discipline revolt. The effectiveness of the method is diminished, making the act more-or-less symbolic. To counter this recuperation activists are aware of the need to construct new methods and new alliances to remain “one step ahead” (2003:35).

Certainly, while clown armies have emerged in various parts of the world since 2005, they have, as one of the reviewers of an earlier draft of this paper argued, “died a death” in the UK. In an attempt to retain the insurrectionary imagination, activists in the UK have pursued other sites of intervention, such as the hijacking of a coal train on its way to the Drax power station in North Yorkshire in 2008, and the establishment of Camps for Climate Action from 2006 onwards.

Therefore it is important not to romanticize or overstate the effectiveness of CIRCA. The political meaning of performances remains transient if not ultimately expressed in material reality (eg as political change) (Duncombe 2007). Rebel clowning, like carnival, was mostly symbolic: the status quo returned once the protest was over (Robb 2010). However, CIRCA actions were both prefigurative (the political ends desired were embodied in the means used) and synecdochic (action while symbolic was deployed in an attempt to challenge dominant discourses and social relations). The process through which political action is prosecuted is therefore

important. This was particularly the case in CIRCA's attention to the emotive register of activists' experiences. Sensory experience can interrupt perceptual givens (Panagia 2009). As Rist (quoted in Kwan 2007:30) notes "messages that are conveyed emotionally and sensually can break up more prejudices and habitual behaviour patterns . . . than intellectual treatise". What is important about such an approach is a concern with the specific emotions that might empower progressive political practices (Henderson 2008). Indeed, various rebel clowning tactics have resurfaced, for example during the Camp for Climate Action at Kingsnorth, Kent in 2008 (in the form of the Great Rebel Raft Regatta<sup>12</sup>); and during the protests at the UN Climate meetings (in the form of the Bike Bloc actions<sup>13</sup>) that took place in Copenhagen in late 2009.<sup>14</sup> Attention to the emotional dimensions of activist experience and (inter)action remains a potentially compelling intervention in the repertoire of political performance, particularly when combined with the confrontational approach of direct action and the subversive power of humour. It opens up potentials to deregulate conduct and fashion liberatory feeling rules of political action. If this is the legacy of CIRCA then the rebel clown may yet have the last laugh.

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## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> See Routledge and Simons (1995) for a discussion of embodied spirits of resistance.
- <sup>2</sup> Kolonel Klepto was the pseudonym used by one of the founders of the Clandestine Insurgent Rebel Clown Army (CIRCA).
- <sup>3</sup> I am grateful to Aaron Franks for this insightful differentiation of activist performance.
- <sup>4</sup> The G8 has now been replaced by a broader group of nations, the G20.
- <sup>5</sup> These were: London, Bristol, Manchester, Birmingham, Sheffield, Aberdeen, Edinburgh, Newcastle, and Glasgow.
- <sup>6</sup> This idea is drawn from the Smartmeme Collective (who discuss "points of decision"), quoted in Verson (2007).
- <sup>7</sup> See Goodwin, Jasper and Polletta (2001) for analyses of the emotional constitution of activism within social movements.
- <sup>8</sup> For example, the white-face clown (eg Bozo the clown); the Auguste clown (eg Albert Fratellini) and the tramp or hobo clown (eg Charlie Chaplin).
- <sup>9</sup> Although see Retort (2005) for a more nuanced analysis.
- <sup>10</sup> Indeed, Della Porta and Fillieule (2004) argued that the police stereotype activists into three groups: genuine protestors, "troublemakers" and "rent-a-mob".
- <sup>11</sup> Indeed Zajko and Beland (2008) argue that policing in the UK is marked by the shift away from escalating force to negotiated management of protestors, which has made the police more tolerant of spatial disruptions, as long as protestors agree to limit the scope and duration of their actions.
- <sup>12</sup> An initiative to create an activist "pirate fleet" to approach the Kingsnorth coal burning power station via the river Medway with the intention of breaking into it and shutting it down.
- <sup>13</sup> An initiative to create numerous bicycle "swarms" whose intention it was to attempt to break through the fences surrounding the conference centre where a UN climate meeting was taking place.

<sup>14</sup> This was due in large part to the fact that one of the originators of CIRCA was also heavily involved in each of these initiatives.

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