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Stream: Inspiring Critical Thought
2017, Vol 9(2), pp. 45-54
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Situationism and Performative Communication: The Counter-Conduct of Committed Indifference

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Abstract

The generateonal dysphoria associated with spectacular society extends into regions of outright aporia when confronted by the logocentrism of authoritative readings and tertiary levels of obedience demanded by transcendental hegemony. While a level of epistemological interpretivism is, *a priori*, necessary in a milieu of frenzied anti-pragmatism, judgments of counter-conduct must be preceded by perspicacity in order that degrees of nuance are not confused with arbitrary placement in a hierarchy of constitutive endowment. Soteriological confidence in the face of atomized consciousness developed in post-structural thought, can only lead to iniquitous commitments to verisimilitude in terms of what constitutes the genuinely praeter or obeientiam. Modes of operational disobedience manifested in the previous century such as counter-culture, vanguardism, and the cultural-front, all express such ontological ambiguities concerning prima facia, paradigmatic judgments, particularly if any strong theory of non-cognitivism is adhered to. This paper investigates the degree to which Situationism, as a mode of active or interrogative counter-conduct, might contribute to a specific delineation of a hierarchy of constitutive endowments, or might, on the other hand, only cede space to a more organistic notion of disobedient behaviours.*

*For a wieldier and less pertinent abstract, see Appendix A.

Keywords
situationism, counter-conduct, spectacle

"In 1988, to help prove his case against the CanLit establishment, [Crad Kilodney] submitted a number of stories by famous writers such as Chekhov and Hemingway (names and titles often preposterously changed) to a CBC Radio literary contest. All were rejected by the jury" (Levin, 2014). The editors of the cultural studies journal *Social Text* similarly fell prey to such a hoax when they published an article in their Spring/Summer 1996 issue by Alan Sokal which was "'liberally salted with nonsense,' and in his opinion was accepted only because only because '(a) it sounded good and (b) it flattered the editors' ideological preconceptions'" (Weinberg, 1996). The Sokal affair and the CBC short story hoax set a precedent for the notion that an important practice of protest or dissent can be expressed in the form of parody, and such dissent is not necessarily recognizable to many people without a wider context or even confession by the author. Failure to initially recognize such protest is evidence that people involved in an institution and its discourse have difficulty even imagining another kind of discourse or viewpoint. The critical judgments implied in aesthetic contests, or the application of standards as implied by professionalized intelligentsia (particularly in their contemporary "postmodern" manifestations), invite mockery if we understand this mockery as an

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inherent skepticism of a rarified, enclosed discourse that engages in continual self-referential acts of justification. While the abstract to this paper, for example, almost sounds like it really means something—it doesn't. It's gibberish, a counter-conduct mockery (perhaps) of academic obfuscation.

What appeared to inspire Foucault, in one of his 1978 lectures at the Collège de France, to search for, and coin, the term *counter-conduct* was a desire to name an aspect of dissent or protest that didn't fit into traditionally accepted aspects of dissident behaviour. And what may be the most important element of this search is the recognition that certain behaviours, though disruptive and potentially revolutionary, are accounted for in systems themselves—accounted for, in that they are perceived as inevitable, coherent, and, at some level, manageable (Foucault, 1978). Such manageable dissent might take the form of labour disruptions, marches for racial equality, or even academic discourse. Martin Luther King Jr., for example, may have challenged two hundred years of race relations in the United States, but his efforts were not cognitively incoherent, even to the most fervent racists in Alabama or Mississippi. What is more difficult to manage, however, are more cognitively disruptive efforts of revolt, because such efforts don't fit with normally accounted for types of actions. This potential cognitive disjunction can result from the fact that certain acts of rebellion or dissent flow from *a priori* understood expectations of social or economic relations. The Arab Spring, for example, may have disrupted a decades-long authoritarian streak, but as acts of rebellion it was easily understood as part of a tradition of protest that grows out of an already comprehended set of unequal social and economic relations.

"How can we designate the type of revolts, or rather the sort of specific web of resistance to forms of power that do not exercise sovereignty and do not exploit, but 'conduct'?" (Foucault, 1978, p. 266). Given his general conceptual concerns about the nature of power, Foucault's (1978) effort to find some explanatory notion for tendencies of dissent that don't fit into the traditional boxes of economic and political protest was an understandable and important endeavour.[1] However, for a notion of counter-conduct to be meaningful—or the "conceptual hinge" Arnold Davidson (2011) points us to—it would have to be directed at tendencies of protest that are, or were, abnormally disruptive, that shifted the stable social ground in such a way that the common or customary discourses of hegemony were made to some degree incoherent by the acts of protest themselves. In looking for some explanatory notion for tendencies of dissent that don't fit into the traditional boxes of economic and political protest, to what degree must those tendencies be coherent and exploitable, and to what degree might they just be disruptive and destabilizing?

> They are movements whose objective is a different form of conduct, that is to say: wanting to be conducted differently, by other leaders (*conducteurs*) and other shepherds, towards other objectives and forms of salvation, and through other procedures and methods. They are movements that also seek, possibly at any rate, to escape direction by others and to define the way for each to conduct himself (Foucault, 1978, p. 259).

Something like the Sokal affair (or to be very generous, the above abstract), though it is a non-traditional protest and certainly somewhat cognitively disruptive, is also fairly coherent, as it operates within a long tradition of literary mockery and satire. It might be expected that for any form of protest to have a significant and lasting impact, it must be fairly coherent or, to put it in terms that align with Foucault's (1978) original discussion, it must both counter [some aspect of prevailing hegemony] as well as be conductive (that is to say, that it must conduct people both *away* from some tradition AND *towards* something else). And it seems that most new, apparently novel, forms of dissent fulfill these requirements. We are dealing here, then, with several broad and significant

questions, including: how are certain forms of revolt atypical or divergent ("that could be called specific revolts of conduct" (Foucault, 1978, p. 259)), do these forms of dissent have some form of recognizable conductivity (that is, do they point toward some sort of alternative order or vision), and finally, are these forms of protest cognitively disruptive? This final question is important because, arguably, a key motivation to adopt a new or different notion of dissent such as *counter-conduct* is not only to point to forms of power that 'conduct' rather than exploit, but to account for protest efforts that, through their targeting of power in the form of *conducting*, for want of a better phrase change the rules of the game in some way, and by doing so form a vanguard of protest that, at different times in history, act as a kind of political unconscious (to borrow a phrase from Fredric Jameson) of long-term political and social changes. It's fair to say, then, that we might need to think of examples of counter-conduct on a spectrum of conductivity, in which it is relatively easy to see a movement's disruptive or destructive power and/or motivation, but more difficult to see where such an effort might stand in relation to its goal of conducting groups or societies in specific ways or directions. "By whom do we consent to be directed or conducted? How do we want to be conducted? Towards what do we want to be led?" (Foucault, 1978, p. 264); must these counter-conducts offer answers, or is it precisely that they raise such questions which constitutes their disruptive nature?

The English Peasant Revolt of 1381, for example, though a movement that appears as typical or customary to modern political consciousness, was, to the aristocracy of the time, cognitively disruptive in a significant way (De Vericour, 1873). Though small-scale peasant unrest may have been par for the course in Medieval Europe, the idea of a generalized and organized peasant revolt was still a novel event in fourteenth century England (Hampton, 1984). When barely literate tradespeople like Thomas Baker, Abel Ker, and Wat Tyler offered up organized revolt and specific demands, it led to a kind of moral panic among the aristocrats (ibid.). The cognitive or paradigmatic disruption grew, in large part, from the traditional aristocratic perception of the peasantry as little more than a class of savages. The aristocracy had believed they could conduct the peasantry in much the same way the peasantry conducted their sheep (ibid.). Though such revolt would quickly get absorbed into the realm of the manageable, expected, and even conventional, at the time the efforts of those like Tyler were cognitively disruptive in a way that might be difficult for us to imagine now.

We now see the Peasant Revolt as a standard political or economic revolt which fits into what is presently a long history of such dissent. However, in the context of 1381, the peasant leaders were expressing something relatively new, an organized class warfare, an effort that their masters didn't even think them capable of. On the other hand, while the Peasant Revolt was potentially a form of counter-conduct, it ultimately drew its coherence and meaning from the way it conducted people toward a new, differently organized, vision. In this sense, counter-conduct as outlined by Foucault (1978) has a great deal to do with context, the potential for acts of dissent to unbalance, unhinge, or derange conventional lines of social demarcation (both of the prevailing hegemonic order as well as the commonly accepted patterns and strategies of dissent and protest). Such protest may not even appear at first as protest at all, but rather simply as erratic, bizarre, or capricious behaviour. Under such conditions, a social dissonance arises that can make both rebellion and reconciliation difficult to understand.

For example, when Achilles withdraws from the fighting in *The Iliad,* and a group led by Odysseus calls on him to return to battle, they can't seem to sway him because Achilles' would-be persuaders misunderstand the true nature of his protest. Odysseus, Ajax, and Phoenix offer him gifts and then talk about the honours derived from battle and the status that Achilles will gain from returning to the war. But Achilles has already abandoned such notions because it is precisely his personal honour that has been insulted by Agamemnon. Odysseus and his men are now operating in a different paradigm than Achilles and so they have trouble understanding the real nature of his pro-

test against the leader of the Achaeans. Feyerabend (1999), in an exploration of the discord in this Homeric episode, says:

> One theory that has become rather popular assumes that languages, cultures, stages in the development of a profession, a tribe, or a nation are closed in the sense that certain events transcend their capacities. Languages, for example, are restrained by rules. Those who violate the rules of language do enter new territory; they leave the domain of meaningful discourse (p. 20).[2]

In this interpretation of events, Achilles is breaking the laws of Homeric language by separating the inseparable—the rewards of honour from honour itself—and thus speaking nonsense. But Feyerabend (1999) contends that, "it does not follow that the regularity [...] constitutes meaning so that whoever violates it is bound to talk nonsense" (p. 21).

While the discord of Achilles' protest might have unintentionally relegated him to the margins of nonsensicality, when Alan Sokal submitted an intentionally nonsensical article to the journal *Social Text*, the editors would have had trouble anticipating Sokal's protest because instead of arriving in the form of a rational critique of certain kinds of academic methods or conclusions, it came in the form of mockery or reverse tribute (Weinberg, 1996). The assumption of this form of protest is, in part, the supposition that to effectively critique of a way of thinking or operating one needs to do so from outside of the targeted paradigm. A paradigm, whether conceptual such as postmodernism or more concrete such as capitalist relations of production, generates its own defenses through bounded (though often flexible) hegemonic discourse and loosely agreed upon lines of dissent.

Such dissent emerges, in part, out of a desperate realization that customary routines of protest are not as effective as their advocates would hope. Capitalism met with an early cognitive challenge in the form of Romanticism. Shelley (1821) wrote in his *Defence of Poetry* that "poetry makes familiar objects be as if they were not familiar" (p. 282). Given that Shelley believed that literature had a deeply political role to play in society (McNiece, 1969), it is difficult to imagine this kind of message being expressed in this particular way before the tension that was dramatically emerging between burgeoning capitalist relations and the generations that embraced a deep suspicion of a mechanizing and increasingly technically-rationalizing world. M. H. Abrams (1971) noted that Coleridge's intellectual effort (particularly in the *Biographia Literaria*) is a "persistent enterprise [...] to make the old world new not by distorting it, but by defamiliarizing the familiar through a refreshed way of looking upon it." Similarly, Abrams (1971) said that one of Wordsworth's goals in *The Prelude* was to condemn "habit" and the "regular action of the world." In the face of a world being engulfed by what William Blake (1808) called "dark Satanic Mills," many of the Romantics responded by calling for a wise but childlike view of the world. But the contra-vision of Romanticism gave way in rather short order to Victorian pride and narcissism.

But for all the fastidious gentility of Victorian capitalism (or, in Continental terms, the society of la belle époque), the twentieth century gave rise to forms of protest and dissent that were far more ambiguous on the conductivity continuum. By the end of the First World War, anti-capitalist protest already had a fairly long and illustrious history that had expressed itself in such movements as Chartism, the Social Democratic Alliance, the Paris Commune, the First International, and the IWW. Though such movements had certainly wrestled reforms out of capitalist enterprise and pro-capitalist governments, by 1914 the ultimate outcome of international capitalism had been the mechanized destruction of WWI.

Different forms of hegemony manifest different varieties of ideological authority to conduct, and thus they are bound to exhibit corresponding (not to say inevitable) forms of counter-conduct. Both

feudalism and capitalism, for example, rely on some notion of a "natural" or immutable order to maintain the perception of their hegemonic inevitability. While feudalism relies on a divinely ordained social hierarchy to maintain order and avoid dissent, capitalism relies, conversely, on an equally fictitious notion of meritocracy to justify its inequalities. While they rely on different sources for their certitude, both are dogmatic narratives of certainty that aim to maintain order by underpinning social conduct with a perception of inevitability in the face of potential class consciousness.

The horror of the First World War, and capitalism's apparent failure to progress toward anything but wholesale murder, inspired a line of counter-conduct that took dissent out of the customary lines of political and economic protest and into the realm of a cognitive disruption of this inevitability in ways that are more difficult to see in coherent conductivity terms (conducting *towards*). Dada was the first emergence of this line of dissent in Europe. Dadaist Hugo Ball (1916) had been particularly inspired by Voltaire's mocking spirit as expressed in his satirical novella *Candide*, leading him to declare that Dada was his generation's "Candide against the times." But Dada's derisive critique against contemporary bourgeois values was considerably more biting that anything Voltaire might have dreamed up. The introduction of chance or arbitrary caprice into the artistic process was not just an attack on the aesthetic traditions of the West, it was a reaction to capitalism's instrumental rationalization, a reaction that inherently questioned the value of a rationalizing process that had led to the epic tragicomedy of the War (Foster, 1979). Dada's literary, artistic, and theatrical misbehaviours were intended to elicit a reaction from a public that the Dadaists saw as complacent and inured to the brutality of what was supposedly a rational and evolving society (Gale, 1997). When Marcel Duchamp put a urinal in an art gallery and called it art, the bourgeois sensibility was deeply offended and profoundly confused (Naumann, 1999). Many people may not have liked labour protests or suffragette rallies, but they were easily understandable as a call for representation in milieu of generally growing democracy. An aestheticized urinal, on the other hand, could act as a cognitive disruption to the rationalized social relations themselves.

In historical terms, it is a short jump from the rebellion of the Dada movement to its conceptual successor, Surrealism. André Breton, who had been on the margins of the Dada movement, was initially inspired by his friend Jacques Vaché who was noted for his enmity toward bourgeois values, his social indifference, and his willingness to buck convention (Polizzotti, 1998). Vaché and Breton's counter-conduct famously included setting out a picnic dinner in the orchestra at the Théâtre des Folies-Dramatique and engaging in lively dinner conversation to the theatre spectators' amazement (ibid.). And such disruptive efforts were taken up again two generations later by Chilean writer Roberto Balaño and his peers in Infrarrealismo who would crash literary events and undermine the proceedings with boisterous, animated conversations (ibid.). Other than these acts of social disruption, the efforts of Surrealism were predicated upon a pseudo-Freudian assumption that the real movements of the modern mind had been clouded by social conventions and that an effort at "psychic automatism," through verbal, written, "or in any other manner," could express the real, hidden "functioning of thought" unmediated by the conducting force of social propriety (Breton, 1924). Such an effort is not, prima facie, a particularly threatening act of social dissention against a society that had quickly absorbed the implications of Freud and the subconscious. However, when set against the backdrop of a political/economic system that had just undertaken the greatest, deadliest war in history and was on the edge of the precipice of the Great Depression, the Surrealist modus operandi began as a significant cognitive challenge to the prevailing ideological hegemony. Surrealism posed such a significant threat to emerging modern social hierarchy that its leaders were condemned, in the end, as vocally by the left as they were by the right (Polizzotti, 1998). The idea that one can, through methods of automatism, unleash some hidden kernel of authentic thought

which hasn't been disciplined and habituated (or in other words, *conducted*) to the demands of bourgeois society, may, in fact, be a deeply threatening prospect to prevailing structure of power.

The Situationists were the conceptual descendants of Dada and Surrealism. However, this group of dissenters were more explicitly political in the general sense, though ferociously anti-orthodox and anti-party in their approach to the political realm (Hussey, 2002). By the 1950s, when the generation of the Situationists came to the fore, a lot more blood had been spilt in the name of mainstream, orthodox ideologies, and as a result there were more reasons than ever to distrust the accepted methods of revolt and protest. One of the goals of Situationism was to "brutally shatter" the "prevailing sensibilities" and the "great collective illusions" that had generated "thousands of prepackaged ideologies sold by consumer society like so many portable brain-scrambling machines" (Vaneigem, 1967). Set against the backdrop of what Guy Debord (1967) referred to as a "society of spectacle," (a sort of ideologically enveloping version of the consumption ethic), the Situationists imagined forms of activity and protest that would radically upset people's blind, zombie-like obedience toward the social mores that had been established by prevailing ideologies on both the left and the right. Vaneigem and Debord (1967) envisioned breaking through this 'power as conducting' by recalibrating everyday situations in a way that would lead to a "revolution of everyday life."

Guy Debord became famous (and to some degree infamous) for initiating the graffiti slogan "ne travaillez jamais" (Never Work), a slogan that became one of the intellectual symbols of the Situationists' effort (Cunningham, 1970). Obviously opposed to the drives of Capitalism, the Situationists were also reacting strongly to the way in which left ideologies had promoted mindless production and consumption. In Vaneigem's (1967) words, the First International had turned "its back on artists by making workers' demands the sole basis of a project which Marx had nevertheless shown to concern all those who sought, in the refusal to be slaves, a full life and total humanity" (p. 10). The rejection of work was a fundamental protest against one of the primary cognitive certainties of modern life—the idea that we are defined by (in Marxist terms) our methods and relations of production, or (in capitalist terms) we are successful as a society or as individuals by our continual creation of material wealth.

When the '68 student rebellion erupted, the Situationists were a major inspiration for many of the young rebels, and this involvement made the student insurgency particularly disruptive at a cognitive level precisely because of its lack of orthodoxy (Bracken, 1997). Violence seemed to erupt in multiple locations at once, it attached itself to no party or specific kind of political goal, and when the government and the media looked for the movement's leaders they were shadowy and elusive (Hussey, 2002). To add to the decentred nature of the insurrection, the perceived leaders of the Situationist International refused to be interviewed, thrown into the spotlight, or define the rebellion's goals or desires.

Besides the slogan "Never Work," other troublingly unorthodox rallying-cries were appearing such as "Boredom is Counterrevolutionary," "Don't beg for the right to live – take it," "Reform my Ass," "Workers of all countries, enjoy!," "Be realistic, demand the impossible," and "I take my desires for reality because I believe in the reality of my desires" (Hussey, 2002). Such slogans speak of a dissent that refuses to be slotted into the traditions of political or economic protest, and yet has deep political and economic goals. These goals seek nothing less than disrupting not just the so-called 'superstructure' of hegemony but challenging the ways in which the ideological hegemony itself seeps into everyday life and conditions our sense of conformity, regularity, and obedience. The orthodox politicians and citizens of Europe could easily process the customary political battles that usually had clear and understandable goals such as reductions in the workweek, democratic reforms, fairer taxation, etc. However, a rebellion against work itself and the structures that were perceived to maintain order and societal cohesion, was an entirely different, and for many an in-

compressible, matter. It is interesting that one of criticisms that was widely leveled at the recent Occupy Movement was that it lacked a central, organized structure, and its specific goals were largely unclear. Unlike the case for Situationism, these ambiguities of the Occupy Movement were widely perceived to be a fundamental weakness. However, the differences between a movement like Occupy and Situationism, are significant. Even if the specific policy goals of Occupy were not necessarily clear or widely understood, the general thrust of its efforts were: a society of greater economic equality and political fairness. These are demands that are easily processed even by the most recalcitrant capitalist or right-winger. Situationism, on the other hand, had elusive goals, but the movement was simultaneously violent and its demands very far reaching. Instead of simply offering a critique of capitalism or the established political parties, the Situationists, with Molotov cocktails and slogans like "Never Work," were presenting a destabilizing, and some might say existentialist, threat to the system as it was.

While Foucault (1978) explored forms of resistance to conduct within the Catholic and Christian pastorate, from the Middle Ages through the sixteenth century, Vaneigem similarly looked to the history of the Church as a place of behavioural contestations. In *The Movement of the Free Spirit*, Raoul Vaneigem (1986) briefly charts the path of a number of heretical movements such as the Brethren of the Free Spirit, the Cathars, and the Waldensians. These potentially counter-conductive movements were seeking a space beyond that which is "governed by the spirit of power and profit," the essential guides of the Church and its host of aristocratic supporters. For Vaneigem (1986), these movements were an important inspiration for a time when the hegemony of the medieval church had essentially morphed into a like-minded, and apparently all-encompassing, ideology of control. Foucault (1978) argued that "the greatest revolt of conduct the Christian West has known was that of Luther, and we know that at the outset it was neither economic nor political, notwithstanding the connections that were immediately established with economic and political problems" (p. 260). Vaneigem (1986) believed that the spiritually-inspired counter-conduct of heretical sects was a model for situational rebellion against a late-capitalism that demands the subsumption of human freedom and expression into the spectacle of commodity relations. While Foucault (1968) raises Luther's protestant rebellion to the apex of Christian conductive-dissent, the groups that Vaneigem (1986) focused on seem to offer significantly more counter-conductive disruptive protests to the hegemony of the Church. Other than a belief that God is immanent, a doctrine that specifically denies the power of any church to rule over an individual's relationship with the deity, many practitioners of Free Spirit doctrines believed that a direct experience of God could allow people to transcend sin, leading to rejections of dualism, and practices such as mysticism and even free love (Vaneigem, 1986). Such ideas were significantly more radical and cognitively disruptive than those offered by Luther in as much as this was a brand of heresy that not only rejected the established church but rejected the very idea of a church altogether.

There are elements of nostalgia and hedonism in Vaneigem's Situationalist advocacy that now might seem to some like a reflection of late twentieth-century inspired hippie culture, particularly in its call for immediacy and exuberance. But what is important here is the rejection of a Christian/capital ethic which alienates people from their own experiential lives for the sake of distant material rewards or post-mortem spiritual dividend. This kind of dissent is perhaps precisely the kind that Foucault (1978) was searching for when he talked about "forms of resistance to power as conducting." If the power of prevailing hegemony is akin to a border collie herding sheep in particular directions at the various whistles of the shepherd, the effort of Situationism is not unlike firing a gun at the entrance to the paddock in order to viscerally grip the emotions of the sheep and send them hurtling in the opposite direction.

One of the things that makes this Situationist protest cognitively disruptive is that it attacks both the capitalist ethic as well as capitalism's oppositional ideologies of Marxism and socialism (or what the Situationists often referred to as the ideology of bureaucracy) (Debord, 1967). One of the central themes of this protest is its rejection of the conceptual reduction of human beings to the status of producers and/or consumers. The Situationists were inspired in their conceptual challenge to the degradation of human diversity by the work of Dutch theorist Johan Huizinga, whose 1938 book *Homo Ludens* shifted the defining aspect of human consciousness and spirit away from work and onto play (Hussey, 2002). A similar idea was taken up by Georges Bataille (1949) in *La Part Maudite,* which contends that it is our leisure choices, those things that we do with our "left-over" time and energy, rather than our labour, that defines who we are. While we are continually conducted toward work and consumption by both right- and left-wing ideologies, the Situationists looked to disrupt our thoughtless acceptance of this conductive hegemony of the essential human labourer through moments of incongruent behaviour which, precisely through their apparent nonsensicality, raised the questions of '*By whom do we consent to be directed or conducted? How do we want to be conducted? Towards what do we want to be led?'* And perhaps through this break in continuity, conducting us back toward what they perceived as some more authentic human expression.

It is difficult, if not impossible, to truly comprehend the degree to which the Situationists contributed to the movements of counter-conduct in which they took part and for which they were, to some degree at least, an inspiration. It is also difficult to say where the Situationist movement (and its progenitors) were on the conductivity spectrum. Were they only an anarchistic and chaotic disruptive force, or were they ultimately pointing people in a specific (or even general) direction, conducting them *toward* a certain kind of vision?

If we are to take the work of Guy Debord seriously, these questions can't be adequately answered because they are too quickly absorbed into the Spectacular society, which is "the world that cannot be verified" (Debord in Hussey, 2002). One can make a coherent argument that the central operating principle of Situationism is difficult to characterize as conductive at all, since Guy Debord (if not the other primary Situationists) abhorred what he saw as reformism ("Reform my Ass"), a principle that he thought even radicals like Sartre and Foucault embodied (Hussey, 2002). The fact that Debord is now fodder for academic discourse within a continuing spectacle is, arguably, proof positive that the Situationist effort to take society in a new direction was, finally, a failure. However, we can also look at the problem of counter-conduct and radical twentieth century dissent differently. It is logocentric and indicative of the prevailing hegemony to only see dissent in terms of tangible, or measureable results. If Dada, Surrealism, or Situationism teach us anything, it might be that the spirit of cognitive disruption must be continually reborn.

This notion of counter-conduct, in relation to the Situationists and their predecessors, offers a radically different kind of protest against the prevailing hegemony than traditional modes of protest. While the latter tend to focus on specific issues of perceived injustice and offer up bracketed critiques of socioeconomic relations, the Situationists communicated a critique through their actions themselves. This is not to say that the Situationists, Surrealists, or Dadaists didn't communicate sophisticated and important critiques of the structures of power in their books and pamphlets, but their acts of counter-conduct were also expressed in what we might call acts of performative communication. By undertaking actions, the intention of which were to disrupt people's comfortable or uncritical (one might even say automatonic) every-day experiences, the Situationists were communicating, through their own unconventional responses to experience, a critique of what was, thereby setting the stage for imagining what might be. The community around the activists of Dadaism, Surrealism, and Situationism, were entirely prepared, both culturally and intellectually, to understand and process traditional critiques of the injustices and inequalities of European society.

However, by communicating their critiques through apparently irrational and radically disruptive behaviour, the Situationists in particular were offering a kind of counter-conduct that threatened to be un-processable, that couldn't be neatly expressed and easily countered with arguments about tradition and order. The notion of radical performative communication has been repeated only minimally in contemporary society (with the Occupy Movement as, arguably, the best example), but it has the potential to articulate critiques of capitalist hegemony that so far have fallen on deaf ears, or more properly have simply been boxed up, processed, and explained away.

Notes

1. Foucault's notion of counter-conduct faces some theoretical problems. The idea of re-evaluating acts of dissent or rebellion in terms of the form of power they are reacting against necessarily presents some conceptual challenges. Whether it is through acts of coercion, organic authority, or simple administration, it is easy to see the manner in which "conducting" people might involve the exercise of power. However, though it is meant to imply dissent against some existing structure of power, the idea of "counter-conduct" might equally connote the exercise of power, even if it is directed away from some existing hegemony. The way in which we might envision the least exercise of coercive power in this regard is through the presentation of alternatives manifested in dissenting actions. This idea forms a major part of this essays conceptual thread.
2. This idea resembles Foucault's (1966) notion of 'episteme' as described in *Les mot et les choses: Une archéologie des sciences humaines* (The Order of Things), as well as the notion of paradigms in Thomas Kuhn's (1962) *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*.

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Appendix A: Alternative Abstract

Foucault's notion of counter-conduct offers an interesting and challenging way to reimagine dissent. This essay briefly examines how certain kinds of dissent are uniquely challenging to systems and institutions because they are not easily subsumed by the system or its perceived (or traditional) contraries. An important example of this kind of dissent was, in the twentieth century, the Dada, Surrealist, and Situationist movements, which don't simply point (or conduct) people to a standard and easily imagined alternative to the prevailing hegemony, but seek to radically disrupt the way people see the world through different kinds of conduct which are fundamentally contrary to the prevailing order.